

# Is The Vinyl Industry A Con?

Did you know that most vinyl reissues, these days, feature a digital source file?

It's absolutely true. Yet magazines, internet forums, audiophiles and journalists like myself drone on about master tapes this and analogue that. And then we all denigrate CDs with our next breath. Are we all hypocrites and is the vinyl industry a con in which everyone knows what's going on but no-one is telling? Well, it's not quite that simple or as black and white.

Vermeulen accepted the accusing finger, on behalf of the industry and began with, "OK, 95% of all human beings on this earth, who are listening to music, are happy with an MP3. Anything else sounds better to them." And for the audiophiles out there? "There won't be a lot of people who can tell the difference between a complete analogue master cut and a new record cut from one of our recent digital mediums because the difference is so small. You need to have golden ears and then you also need to know how to listen to it."

Shocked? Let me quickly add that there are many audiophile companies out there who use analogue master tapes and employ a completely analogue chain. Music On Vinyl is one of those, actually. There are others including Speakers Corner, Pure Pleasure, Mobile Fidelity, Sundazed and more. Yet, there are a hundred different reasons why original analogue master tapes cannot be used: the original master was thrown in the nearest skip, destroyed in a fire, are present but in too poor quality to be useable or were never available on analogue master tape in the first place (much of the late eighties and nineties output was recorded to DAT).

"If it can be supplied with tapes then we will always use them. As MOV, the labels know that we want the best audio they have. If they send a digital file, if we think that it sounds good then we go for it. If we have doubts then we will request a different master."

But doesn't MOV request master tapes to begin with? Shouldn't MOV be demanding master tapes as a first option? Or do the major labels take the easy way out and supply digital files. Well, searching through tape archives takes time. And time is money, so the suits tell us.

"They know that we want analogue masters," confirmed Vermeulen "and I can't believe that they would hold an analogue master back from us because of laziness. They are in this deal, they want to succeed, everyone wants high sales and the better the quality of the product the better for all. When I took over this plant there was still a lot of old archive. Sony had a good organisation. I really don't know what Sony did with their old masters. I can imagine that they have converted them all to digital files – it's easy for them.

"On a more general point, there are a lot of people after old analogue music and want top quality recordings – the readers of your magazine, for example. Yet, I would say that 99% of people who buy records really don't care. They are just after this nice product, with this nice, big sleeve, a booklet and pictures to fill up their collection. They even look for the odd crackle during playback because, without the odd crackle, 'it can't be a record, it must be a CD', they say. There is a minority who spend a lot of money on expensive hi-fi but I still think that if we did an A-B comparison between one of our digital and analogue recorded vinyl

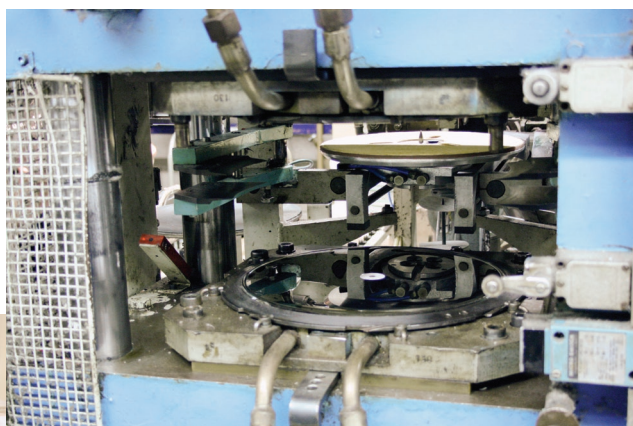
records, not many would be able to hear the difference."

Why is that? It's partly because the company uses high quality digital transfers but Vermeulen is also adamant that, with the standard of the equipment that MOV owns, they can actually improve the sound over and above the original, "We can do things with digital recordings that you could not do with the original analogue. That's also partly to do with a amount of time and application that we can apply to each reissue."

Something that was sometimes lacking in the original recording because, at that time, vinyl was a mass market medium that was subjected to deadlines and time constraints that sometimes resulted in short cuts in terms of quality, "We spend more time to make the actual cut than they did in the past. To give you one simple example, we had metal parts relating to one particular album which I will not name, but was produced in the eighties. Sony had produced thousands and thousands of albums from these parts and we found out, recently, that there was a drop-out in the audio. I don't know what happened but no-one spotted it at that time. So, on that album, our reissue was a definite improvement."



*Vinyl in its original pellet form.*



*Standard black and multi-coloured vinyl is pressed here.*



*The vinyl press in action.*

*After the vinyl is pressed, it is dropped into an inner sleeve.*

