

New Aardvark store marks revival of vinyl records

By Tabitha Wells

If you were fortunate enough to be born while vinyl records were around, you know the difference in sound quality they make. There was nothing quite as incredible as the music you experienced with a sound that could not be matched by even the most high-tech of stereo systems; a sound that holds a sense of nostalgia unlike any other.

Although by the mid-90s, most record players had been upgraded to digital sound, as the compact-disc evolution began, it wasn't too long before vinyl records began to make a comeback ? something now being witnessed in Orangeville.

The comeback was slow ? the odd band here and there began to release new albums on vinyl (Radiohead's *In Rainbows* Album, released in 2008, became highly sought after on vinyl), but now, even HMV carries an entire vinyl section where you can purchase records of everything from classic Beatles and Rush albums, to the latest Taylor Swift, Justin Bieber and pretty much any other new album.

Companies like Universal have even started re-releasing older vinyl records for people to purchase, and in a Toronto Star article in January 2014, Warner Music Canada President Steve Kane commented that to him, ?the real significance of the vinyl market (and its return) is that it has prolonged the life of the record retailer,? in particular, the independent ones. The local record shops are returning as a niche market, and Orangeville has now become a part of that niche.

Local resident Peter Wolter recently opened the town's first store dedicated to the revival of vinyl ? Aardvark Boutique Audio. The shop, at 72 Broadway, specializes in the sale of ?humble? high-end audio equipment ? from record players, to sound systems, adapters ? everything one would need to recreate the perfect vinyl audio experience.

?Orangeville is a rich cultural centre, both musically and in the visual arts,? Wolter stated in a press release. ?But, access to affordable, world-class hi fi ?stereo equipment? was completely missing.

?The opening of Aardvark Boutique Audio gives people from Caledon, Brampton, Guelph, Barrie and even the GTA another good reason to visit Orangeville and surrounding countryside.?

Even if one had no initial interest in a vinyl specialty boutique, it is worth it solely to check out the transformation and experience that Aardvark Boutique Audio offers. Described by Wolter as ?a welcoming, relaxed, but visually stimulating environment,? the rustic features, local artwork and impressive listening room provide the kind of environment that even music's greatest amateur could find relaxing, inspirational and educational.

?I wanted the acoustically treated space to represent a real living room ? free of clutter, visually and acoustically pleasing ? designed to encourage listening to music,? he said.

He added that Aardvark Boutique represents a departure from today's audio stores, including many of the hi-end shops that currently exist. As a boutique, it offers a select line of affordable, name brand components, carefully selected as products that can provide both every day enjoyment, and long-term value.

?All products represent a huge step into the world of hi fi,? Wolter explained. ?That is to say, extremely well-engineered electronics capable of communicating the full emotional and visceral impact of the original recording.?

Aardvark Boutique Audio is also about more than the sale of hi-end products. It's about providing a space where music listeners can come for advice, guidance, and, Wolter hopes, the opportunity to begin a relationship built on trust and the generosity of time.

Although the boutique is not a partner with Aardvark Music and Culture, a music store that has been on Broadway for a number of years, there is a strong collaboration between the two.

The sound of vinyl is about more than just listening to music ? it's about an experience that resonates through one's soul. Although the difference in sound is hard to explain or describe, the word that has most been used in conjunction with vinyl is ?warm sound.? It does not have the same sharpness or edge that a regular stereo, or even the sound off the radio provides. It's also about having the right audio equipment to achieve that beautiful sound.

For Wolter, that experience plays into his decision to open a specialized boutique.

?The boutique is the realization of a life long affair with all things audio,? he said. ?It all started with a Sony 8 transistor portable radio I strapped to my bike's handlebar as I delivered the morning paper. Of course, this was the ?very latest" model and I was in heaven. And I wasn't alone. Music mattered, and as a witness to the ?60s and ?70s, it helped shape our lives, our outlook and culture.?

He added that back then, he and his friends would meet at one of their houses, the latest LP under their arms, as they would sit and listen to the music being played in a silent appreciation.

?And, just as often we would talk about our ?stereo' systems and the differences between this and that cartridge, or component,? he

said. "We were into the music and the gear and we sought out the local hi fi shop just to hang around, listen to stereo equipment we lusted to own Macintosh, Marantz, Fisher, Heathkit, EPI speakers, JBL come to mind."

He said music is returning to what it once was; a listening activity for people to appreciate, to calm their lives and just disappear amid sounds that soothe their souls.

Wolter added in his release that "the recent resurgence of vinyl is part of this revival, and reminds us that quality does matter at least to some."

If music is something that resonates within you, and quality is something you appreciate, then Aardvark Boutique Audio is probably the shop for you. Whether it's to buy new equipment, learn about the products, or just go to chat and appreciate great music, the doors are open.

For more information on Aardvark Boutique Audio, visit their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/aardvarkaudio