

## ***The Pitch, Kansas City***

[December 20, 2011 News » Feature](#)

# **The year in local vinyl, as told by musicians and artists who made it**

**Spotify be damned, 2011 belonged to vinyl.**

*by David Hudnall, Nick Spacek and Kent Szlauderbach*



The biggest music story of 2011 was the introduction of Spotify, a music-streaming service that allows users to listen to just about any song they desire, whenever they desire, for the price of muting a 30-second advertisement every half-hour. It's user-friendly, it's legal, it's free, and it's the latest and most convincing evidence that bands attempting to make money selling their music are screwed.

A remarkable corollary is the rise of vinyl sales, which are currently the highest they've been since 1991. The mass digitizing of our culture has created, in certain demographics, a premium on tangible objects. Earnest music fans crave more than a cluster of songs to scroll past in their iTunes. They want, and are sometimes willing to pay for, the old-school package: a record crackling on the turntable, full-sized art to hold and look at, decoration for the living room.

This vinyl resurgence will not save the music business. But it offers a niche revenue stream in a dried-up industry and an opportunity for loyal fans to show support. An encouraging number of local acts embraced wax as a release platform in 2011, and we've spent the last few weeks speaking with some of the musicians and designers who played a role in these projects. Look

through and read their thoughts on vinyl and see some dazzling album art. Then go track down these bands and buy some records from them.

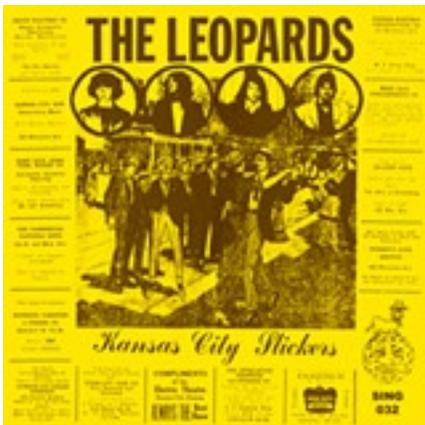


## **Titan Records**

### **Label co-founder Tom Sorells, on the vinyl reissue of the Titan Records boxed set:**

"Numero Group is a Chicago label that has this really great track record of documenting forgotten music scenes, and they released a CD box of our stuff in 2009. But I always really wanted to see it reissued on vinyl. And finally they agreed. So there are four LPs in this big slipcase box, and there's a 24-page booklet that comes with it that kind of tells the Titan story, which we worked on for probably a year. It's nice to see it in big print where everyone can sit down and read it."

**Sorells, on the cover:** "It's the same cover as our 1980 Titan sampler. It's kind of a takeoff of the famous RCA logo of the dog in front of the Victrola. I think we even used the same breed of dog as the RCA dog. We brought it to this high-end stereo store — this was back when you had to buy speakers the size of suburbs to get good sounds — and set the dog in front of these expensive state-of-the-art speakers. We had some other ideas for the reissue cover, but Numero Group always felt that the dog with headphones was an iconic image."



**The Leopards**  
***Kansas City Slickers***  
**(Reissue)**  
**Sing Sing Records**

**Kevin Sanders (bass), on the artwork's inspiration:** "Dennis Pash, the leader and primary songwriter of the Leopards, created the artwork. I think it was the title of the album, *Kansas City Slickers*, that inspired the artwork, rather than the tracks. The cover is from the cover of the original edition of the sheet music for '12th Street Rag,' by Euday Bowman. The back cover of the album is also from a piece of ragtime sheet music, 'Peaceful Henry,' written by E. Harry Kelly and published by Carl Hoffman Music in Kansas City in 1901. Dennis and I are big fans of ragtime music, and you can hear a strong ragtime influence in the Leopards' music."

**Sanders, on how a 30-year-old album, of which fewer than 1,000 copies ever existed, came to be reissued by a label in New York:** "Sing Sing approached us about reissuing the album on vinyl. They said that there is a market for this kind of music on vinyl, especially with young people. We've seen *Kansas City Slickers* sell on eBay for as much as \$200 to \$300, so they may be right."



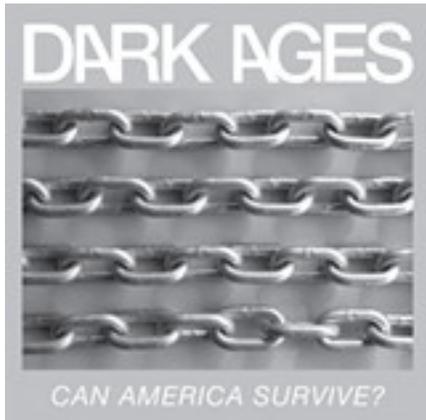
**The Embarrassment**  
**"Patio Set" b/w "Sex Drive"**  
**(Reissue)**  
**Last Laugh Records**

**Bill Goffrier (vocals and guitar):** "We didn't have a lot of experience at the time when we were doing it. I sort of recall sitting around and sketching it out at a rehearsal we had. I think we sort of sat around some table and sketched out what we thought would be a good cover idea and practiced some calligraphy and talked about some photographs. John Nichols, the singer, did the calligraphic lettering, as I recall. We used parts of some photographs, just to be a little bit more mysterious about what was actually being depicted. At first, we kind of wanted a picture of the band, but then we decided that, no, we didn't even want a picture of us to be on there. It ended up being very loose, and it always kind of amazed me that the front cover was so lopsided. Why couldn't we have leaned the photograph, have it cut square, or have actual vertical and horizontal edges, instead of kind of like crooked? But crooked it was, and there's mistakes on the back, and I guess we thought that was kind of punk at the time."

"Last Laugh contacted us about a year before [the release]. I didn't really know anything about them, but they asked about doing it, and ... we happened to have the mixed-down master. It

was just sitting and rotting anyway.

"One of the problems with our [original] pressing is that it was a little off-center, but as you got to the end of both songs, there was always kind of this wow and flutter that people thought was some kind of studio effect, maybe. But it was the fact that the record was off-center and never quite sounded the way it was supposed to. So this one might actually sound better."



## **Dark Ages**

*Can America Survive?*

**Sorry State Records**

*Was the cover influenced by the songs, or did you have an idea in mind beforehand?*

**Justin Betterton (lead guitar):** "The cover artwork for the *Can America Survive?* LP is more thematically related to the songs than literally. A cold image of four tensed chains is what kept coming to mind. The eye has a tendency to want to break things down into thirds. Using four rows of chains is in direct opposition to this. It feels wrong. It makes the viewer hold on to the image longer than he may want to. We all wanted the record to look timeless. We wanted it to look like it could have been released at any time during the existence of punk music. Most of those classic records either have the lyrics or an essay about the band on the back cover. We went with putting lyrics back there. It fits perfectly with the up-front, to-the-point theme."

*Why vinyl?*

**Jordan Carr (vocals):** "When a record comes out on vinyl, it becomes a piece of visual — not just audible — art. Holding an LP is a very tactile experience. It feels more real, more legit. From a band standpoint, putting something out on vinyl is much more of an accomplishment. It takes a lot more effort. When you see a punk band, local or touring, in a basement or at a DIY venue and they have a 7-inch, you instantly know that they care about what they're doing. They care enough to find a pressing plant, make test presses, figure out how to make covers, inserts, etc. Putting a punk record out on vinyl makes you feel like part of a bigger thing. It makes you feel like you really, actually do have a lot in common with the bands you love. The greatest punk bands were just collections of weird kids who got together and put out a record. It's cool to think that you and three of your similarly odd friends can write some songs and press a

record, and that you'd be following the same path as the Minutemen.

"I've always just liked holding a record in my hands, reading the inserts, seeing the art printed and in a larger size than you get with a CD or art that comes with MP3s. But more than anything, vinyl is just the best way to listen to punk. Records just have a more powerful and real sound than any digital format. Besides, who listens to CDs anyway?"



**Ad Astra Arkestra**  
***Reverse Fishing***  
**The Record Machine**

*Why the big heads in the art?*

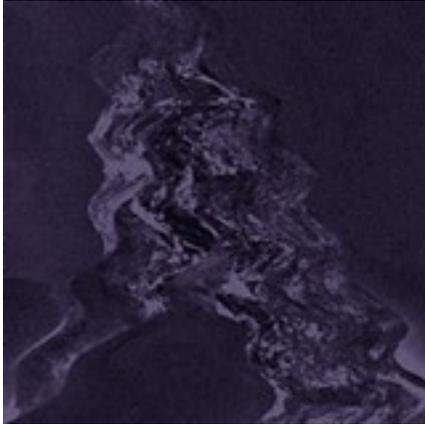
**Brooke Tuley (multi-instrumentalist and layout):** "Big heads beckon you to stare at them. And paint accentuates the deep down — the confusion, confidence, joy and sorrow of it all. Beauty and Tragedy. Destruction and Hope. Wild and Alone. Quiet and Together. They had to sit still for hours."

*How was the face paint done?*

**Danielle Parelman (artist):** "The face paint was Mike Tuley's idea. He had seen some prints that I'd had in a show recently that had a heavy use of pattern and texture, so he proposed the idea of me painting Megan [Williams] and Jimmy [Fitzner]'s faces and then having them photographed as the cover for the record. I did paint directly on their faces with water-based paints, and big props to them for being extremely patient, as it took about three hours to do each one. I just had them lie down on a table, and I stood over them to work. Our friends Libby Zanders and Anna St. Louis then arranged lighting and photographed their faces.

"I wasn't playing off the tribal elements of the band specifically. Mike gave me a CD of the album and prompted me to work based off what the record sounded like to me. So I just kind of went from there. I've been friends with members of the Arkestra for many years, so in a way I already had a sense of what they were going for with this project. The band definitely does incorporate a tribal sound into this album as a whole, but they also have an overall psychedelic feel, and I think that's probably more of the direction I took when I was working on this

project."



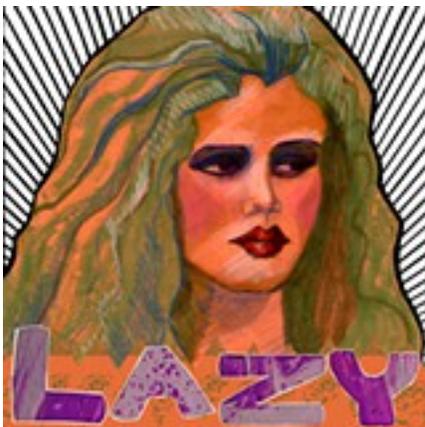
**CVLTS/Umberto**  
**Split 7-inch**  
**Collective Crowd Records**

*How did you come to provide the artwork for this split?*

**Christian Oldham (artist):** "I was friends with Gaurav [Bashyakarla, CVLTS] for quite a bit beforehand but wasn't familiar with their music. I was familiar with Umberto, having heard their 12-inch on Not Not Fun, *Prophecy of the Black Widow*. Gaurav sent the songs for the split on CD-R, but it was pretty easy, as he wanted an image I had already done. It was part of another piece — actually, if you look, it's the background image on Twitter. Gaurav was like, 'I really like this part of the image. Could I have this as the cover, but darker?' "

*What's the advantage of releasing something on vinyl, as opposed to CDs or MP3?*

**Matt Hill (Umberto):** "The advantage of releasing something on vinyl is that records are larger than CDs and cost more, so they make a bigger impact on the buyer's life, and if the record sucks, they can resell it. Also, it's fun to watch them spin around!"



**Lazy**  
**Lazy EP**  
**The Record Machine**

*So was it you who designed the cover?*

**Brock Potucek (vocals and guitar):** "No, it was actually Sarica Douglas [vocals, guitar]. We went through, like, four different designs. We never actually got all the records from the record label. I don't think they ever actually followed through and gave all of them to us. They were supposed to do 300, but we only got 25. So with that set, we made a really fast preliminary, really fast cover, just for the 25 that we got. Then when we got the rest of 275, we were going to redesign it and have, like, a back sleeve and an insert and all this stuff. So the cover of that, everyone knows, is actually just a predecessor, or for something that never came to be, which is a weird side note, but yeah, Sarica designed it. It's based off a portrait of Drew Barrymore, and it's kind of akin to Roxy Music album covers."

*There's another 7-inch coming. Does that mean you guys like doing that the best?*

"Yeah, we do. I think we'll do one EP release every year, along with, like, two cassettes and live stuff and other compilations. So we're going to stick to, like, the four-song, six-song EP format. ... But financially it's kind of hard for an independent band, unless someone picks us up."

*What does the aesthetic of the vinyl record do for the music?*

"I think, in general, album art is wonderful. It's one of my favorite aspects of music — album art and kind of looking through stacks of albums. I think it's just as important, if not more important, than the music itself, because sometimes the album art has struck me more than the music."



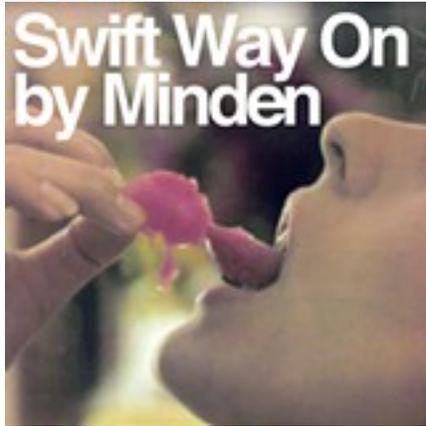
**Various Artists**  
**Cheap Beer**  
**Replay Records**

*How did you determine the concept for the cover?*

**Kenneth Kupfer (artist):** "Brad [Shanks] told me pretty much exactly what he wanted for the concept: people walking into the Replay and walking out as monsters, and then going to kick it at the Jackpot. When I drew it, I added lots of little details of my own. I think the monster

theme is about being seduced by booze and rock and roll.

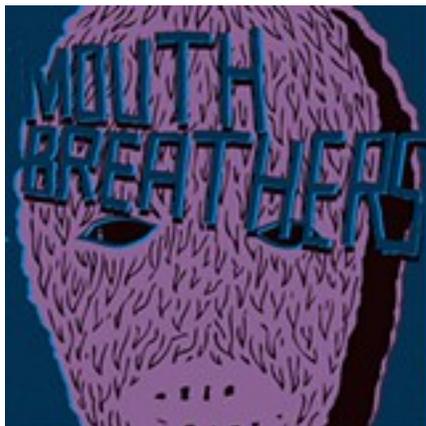
"Depending on what the piece is for, I will either paint it by hand or do a drawing, and then trace out all the different color layers with a brush pen. Then I just scan that shit into Photoshop and colorize it and put it together. I approach it sort of like screen-printing."



**Minden**  
*Swift Way On* 7-Inch  
**The Record Machine**

*How did you get into designing albums?*

**Andrew Heubeck (cover designer):** "I run a small music label from home. As an armchair design enthusiast without a real budget for art, the logical solution was to design many releases myself. I think my real strength as a 'designer' isn't in the choices I make but rather the ones I avoid. I'm an amateur — really a phony when it comes down to it — and I don't kid myself about my worth as a designer. I get ideas and I do my best to realize them. The only concern I have is creating the right visual context."



**Mouthbreathers**  
"Anxiety" b/w "The Creeper"

## **In the Red Records**

**Zach Campbell (drums):** "Everything sounds better on record. It's warmer. MP3s are fine in a pinch, but CDs are pretty much useless, in my opinion. I don't think I'm the only one who can say they are still sitting on top of boxes and boxes of their old band's CDs."