



The Tables Are Turning, Or Are They? By Michael L. Kelly

While most people are getting their music from clouds and using wireless ear buds, the retro world of playing music is undergoing its own business boom. With the resurgence of performers releasing their music on vinyl along with their digital downloads, the turntable industry is growing rapidly once again.

Over the past 30 years—since CDs took over—most of us packed away our turntables. CDs became our new source for music and record collections were sold off at yard sales, or donated to libraries, or given to friends who collected such stuff. Some of us had a burning desire to digitize our LPs so we could still enjoy favorite records that we either couldn't find on CDs, or to avoid buying those same records in another format. I know people who have the same records on 45s, LPs, 8-Tracks, cassettes, CD's and MP3s and Cloud-stored versions. Music lovers spent billions for newer versions of things they already had.

For almost 20 years since the advent of MP3 players, numerous companies have marketed turntables with a USB plug so you could play your music directly into your computer to save some of those great discs for some and eliminate clutter for others. Some of these came with an editing program that may or may not have worked very well and most of these turntables were fairly cheaply made and sold to frugal music lovers.

But these days, it's a whole new world for turntables. They're coming in all shapes and sizes, colors and designs. Most these aren't to help you digitize your old records. These turntables are for enjoying the sound quality of vinyl, just like the "cavemen" used to. No USB cables here. RCA cables and your old-or new-amplifier and speakers are going to get a workout.

So here are a few examples of what's available today.

1) You can still get those sub-\$100 turntables for home playing or to hook into your computer, but quality will vary from pretty good to “You got hosed!” again. I wouldn’t recommend most of them because they aren’t made to last. They’re barely made to be used from the start. Speeds can be off, so the sound is also off.

2) For \$180 to \$460 you can get one of the new elegantly designed turntables from u-turn audio with their new line of Orbital turntables. Besides being an inexpensive technically cool looking player, it’s even cooler because you can order a custom-built model by choosing your color, finish, cartridge, clear acrylic platter and more. It’s a good, solid, cool-looking turntable with a modern-retro look. If you don’t know which cartridge to choose you’ll probably be fine with whatever they send. Until you take the time to learn more about the world of audiophiles, I wouldn’t get into spending thousands of dollars for your equipment.

3) Another cool looking turntable is being made by Gramovox. They have designed a turntable where your LP stands and is spins on its side and is also modern while feeling retro. In the old days when jukeboxes played 45s, many played their discs in the vertical position and would be worn pretty thin as jukeboxes were designed for heavy duty use and the records wore pretty badly. I’ve heard that the Floating Record Vertical Turntable by Gramovox has a much more sensitive tone arm so the concerns of wear are lessened. Gramovox also comes with integrated speakers which many users like so there’s no need for a new amp and speakers, but it comes with RCA jacks so you can play it through your own high end speakers.

Before you buy, Google “vertical turntable” and check out the other vertical turntables from modern to full on retro designs. They even come in “Old Timey” simulated wooden radio cabinets and sold frequently to people who shop on TV networks.

Now the utmost in modern turntables is the Love turntable. This will play your new and old vinyl, but it integrates modern technology to use bluetooth to deliver the audio to your speakers. It can even be controlled by your smartphone. What makes the LOVE turntable so cool is that your LP lays still on the platter and your LOVE player spins around the disc.

It’s really something to see. And hear.

For the ultimate in portability you’ll want the RokBlok made by Pink Donut. It’s literally about the size of a small brick. This player runs around the top of your record while it lays on any flat surface, even the green grass in your back yard. It has integrated speakers that are on the low end, but it can also be connected to your Bluetooth speakers or headphones for a much bigger sound. It is cute as hell, but people with pets will likely find they have to keep them out of reach as the movements can make Spot or Fluffy really curious.

Both LOVE and RokBlok are on Kickstarter with a variety of price options, so give the site a visit and see which one is right for your vinyl needs.

Whichever you choose, enjoy your new vinyl experience and play on.