

2022

Dispatch From Flipping A Record

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Recommended Citation

Howard, Nicholas (2022) Dispatch From Flipping A Record. *The Graduate Review*, 7, 104-105.

Available at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/grad_rev/vol7/iss1/13

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Dispatch From Flipping A Record

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Like an oversized quarter paused in the air, a vinyl record rests between my fingers. Specifically, my left and right pointer fingers are roughly 180° apart from one another as they press with a firm tenderness into the disc's side. It is mid-flip and mid-album. A pause designated within the songs. A tradition almost as old as recorded music itself. Something of a sacrament perhaps. A chance for the listener to play a role in the arrangement. To stop after Side A or to repeat it. To author a remix and begin with Side B to start with. Nevertheless, there is space to step into between record sides.

Tom Petty immortalized his respect for this moment on the original CD pressing of his 1989 release *Full Moon Fever*. Before track six plays, Petty announces "Hello, CD listeners. We've come to the point in this album where those listening on cassette, or record, will have to stand up, or sit down, and turn over the record, or tape. In fairness to those listeners, we'll now take a few seconds before we begin side two. Thank you. Here's side two." It is pre-determined that Petty's songs should not be rushed. It is proper to welcome and embrace a gap.

For me, I am in a gap between drafts of a poem.

Back on the page on my desk, my progress can be more properly tracked in eraser shavings, eye lashes, and coffee stains. More subtle is the dullness of my pencil as lines smudge and run together. Perhaps it is my fortune that this blurs both mistake and flourish alike.

My eyes glance down to scan the record's grooves precisely carved so as to play as intended and forge a space accessible the same and same again at the drop of a needle. Each song allotted space within the vinyl. One can never run long and spill into the next. Each has its turn to be all that is present.

There is comfort in this in its contrast to my poem in progress. No line tonight on my page is locked in.

Perhaps, there is a revising and reforming at work within the record's grooves. That each time the needle runs through, it alters both form and shape. I can accept this as it works with a different perspective of time.

However, we are both working with the remaining side of songs. Turning over to see them, they preview what is possible for my poem's lines. They too can be brought to life in intervals. A reader can repeat them fast or slow, in succession, or strung together anew.

So maybe, my lines will cut in on one another. Or linger so as to halt others from having their moment. Still, they will have their slot among each other and travel together.

And much like the sight of a finished vinyl side, they could be gazed upon as refuge. They too could be spaces stepped into again and again.

About the Author

Nicholas J. Howard is a 2022 Graduate of the Master of Arts in English program at Bridgewater State University. Under the advisement of Dr. Sarah Fawn Montgomery, he composed this piece as part of his creative writing thesis “Take A Moment.” Comprised of poetry and creative nonfiction, his thesis focused on pausing and being present. He is an English teacher who aims to say, “could you kindly please” at least twenty-five times a day. His work has appeared in *The Citron Review*, *Wild Roof Journal*, and *The Normal School*.