

# Ohioan puts spin on old vinyl Christmas records

By Rich Heldenfels

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Old vinyl records, their covers decorated like Christmas packages, now sit in thrift-shop bins, waiting for people to buy them with pocket change. Or they're in a cabinet in your parents' and grandparents' homes, ready to be played again — which may never happen because CDs have supplanted them.

While some companies still issue holiday-themed CDs as marketing tools, most of the vintage ones are now just round, black ghosts of Christmas past. Issued for decades, they came from Firestone and Goodyear and Goodrich, J.C. Penney and W.T. Grant, True Value hardware and A&P grocery stores and Beneficial Financial.

Some of their content has made it to the CD and download age, but not in the same form. A Julie Andrews Firestone LP, for example, has been folded into an Andrews Christmas CD. Other material, licensed from record companies for the holiday releases, has mostly reverted to the original labels.

With classic hi-fis no longer holding an honored place in the living room, most families no longer have a place to play the records even if they have held and cherished them. Which is where David Lee Feinauer comes in.

Operating from his home in Lebanon, Ohio, the former elementary-school teacher and his wife, Cathy Sue, run the Web site Transfer LP To CD (<http://www.dlfmusic.com>) and a companion site, Christmas LPs on CD (<http://www.christmaslptocd.com>).

Through his site, the company offers to transfer old long-playing records, 45s, 78s, cassette and 8-track tapes and other material to CD and, in some cases, digital downloads.

In Feinauer's view, this is not bootlegging because he will only transfer material that you already own, and only one copy for your personal use. He will not make multiple copies of a single LP. And the buyer has to either verify owning the LP in question or purchase the record from Feinauer (who then includes a CD copy with the sale).

He has tried to be careful with the law, he said during an interview that included a telephone conversation and two e-mails.

"I did talk with a copyright attorney who said as long as I follow the methods I set out, I would be following the law regarding music copyrights," Feinauer said. "I have had two requests to stop certain things in regards to an artist they represent. Out of respect to anyone actively trying to use the copyright which they own, I did as they asked, even though I was under no legal necessity to do so. We abide by the law and spirit of the copyright legislation."

Feinauer started the basic Web site about 5-1/2 years ago.

"After a couple of years, I noticed I was getting a lot of Christmas records," he said. "After you start getting the same record in a number of times, you start thinking."

His thinking led him to offer vintage Christmas LPs both through his original site and the newer one. If you want one or all of 17 different Goodyear LPs, he's your guy. He has more than a dozen from Firestone (including the series of seven '60s volumes), eight from Grant's, four from A&P, six from Beneficial and more besides.

He also decided that, given the interest, he needed to make an especially good CD transfer. While many of his sales involve direct transfers of an LP to a CD, for the Christmas discs he began building the best possible CDs he could to sell as copies of the LPs.

He has haunted eBay and thrift shops for the old albums. Though a music buff himself — with a 700-item collection including country, rock and jazz — he said, "The only place I shop for records is the thrift shops."

Once he gets the old records, he searches them for the best-sounding, least-scratched individual tracks — and, in some cases, the best parts of a single track.

"Almost every one of these [Christmas CDs] has at least half a dozen records put together," he said. "Some tracks are from three or four albums, with the best part of each album spliced together." At peak, a dozen LPs have gone into a single CD.

Feinauer said the labor involved was "tremendous" — and, at times, frustrating.

"There was one Firestone record where I was having the dickens of a time getting rid of a pop," he said. "Every record I found had it. . . . Finally, I figured out it was somebody in the background clapping — it was part of the master recording."

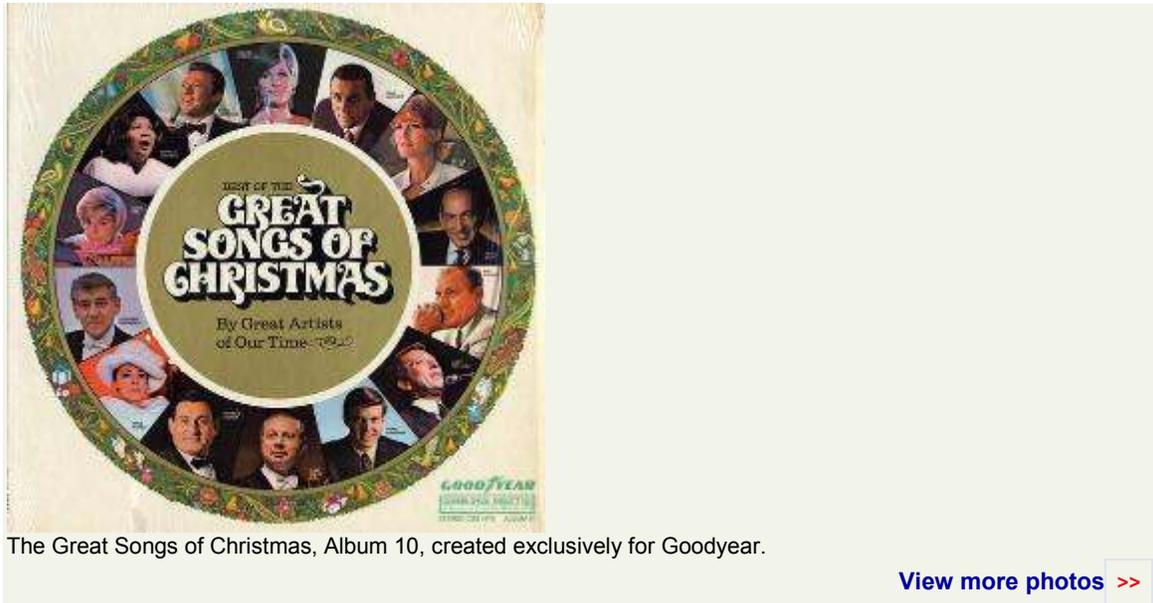
But the effort has paid off. He is very pleased with his CDs, although he will transfer a customer's own record if it sounds better than what he has put together. And the Christmas LPs, especially the old Firestone and Goodyear ones, were the bulk of his sales of 2,000 to 3,000 CDs last year.

On the other hand, he has spent more time listening to Christmas songs — in some cases, the same Christmas songs — than most folks.

"I wind up listening to Christmas music most days of the year," he said. "At times I don't care if I hear *Jingle Bells* one more time."

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The Great Songs of Christmas, Album 10, created exclusively for Goodyear.

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