

## An Analog Stereo Revival Part Four

By Paul DiComo

In [Part Three](#) of this story we took a look at the different varieties of records and where to buy them. In the concluding part of our analog epic we'll review how to care for your vinyl with record cleaning gadgets and some other accessories of value.

### Record Cleaning

Clean records are essential to getting the most enjoyment from your analog system. At very least you need a dry carbon fiber brush like the AudioQuest (\$20) and Decca (\$19) carbon brushes that are very adept at removing surface dust and debris. I recommend a wet system for more thorough cleaning of old, poorly cared for records. To remove oils, smoke residue and other pollutants the [Discwasher](#) wet system (\$20) is the least expensive means. There are hundreds of competing wet cleaning systems out there running from \$20 through several thousand smackeroots.



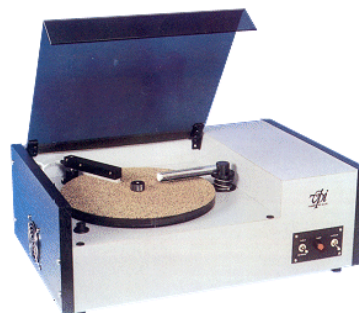
*The  
Discwasher*



*A carbon fiber record brush is a  
must-have accessory*

Besides the Discwasher system, a well regarded manual wet cleaning system is offered by [The Disc Doctor](#). I use the Disc Doctor wet application brushes and Miracle Record Cleaning fluid along with a VPI cleaning machine and have been happy with the results but I'd be the first to admit I have no reliable way of objectively testing all the fluids and brushes out there to see which is best. There just aren't enough hours in the day. I had been tempted to try enzyme based cleaning fluids but those are often three-part processes and again there just aren't enough hours... I recently noticed that Mobile Fidelity has a one-step enzyme cleaner and I'll have to give that a try some day. Do not use any type of alcohol to clean your records. Alcohol is bad for your records as well as your liver.

If you have an extensive collection of records and especially if you buy used LPs, it may be worth your while to purchase a record cleaning machine such as those made by [VPI](#) and [Nitty Gritty](#). Cleaning records can be a time consuming chore so for you time-challenged record collectors the more automation the better. Basic wet cleaning machines require you to manually apply the cleaning fluid and manually spin the LP while the cleaning liquid is vacuumed off (record cleaning machines are basically purpose-designed wet vacs). As you move up the price scale more of the functions are automated up to the point that some machines will automatically apply the cleaning liquid, spin the disc and vacuum both sides of the disc simultaneously.



*VPI's HW-17 is a professional  
workhorse record cleaning  
machine*

An accessory I find to be essential is the Zerostat, a gun-like device that removes static charge from the record surface, making it easier to get dust off and keep it off. Despite its high cost of \$100 I recommend it as I have found the Zerostat to be extremely effective in getting rid of the static cling that holds dust to the record surface. Once static has



*You should clean your stylus too. The ZeroDust is pictured here*

been removed you'll find it much easier to get off dust and debris with a dry carbon brush. Lest we forget the tip of the stylus needs periodic cleaning in order to provide the best possible sound and extend its life. Look to companies like LAST, Mobile Fidelity and ZeroDust for a variety of stylus cleaning options.



The Zerostat is a useful tool for record care

Another worthwhile accessory is [LAST record preservative](#) that its maker claims reduces record wear. I have no means of verifying the claims but I can say that I find LAST treated records seem to resist static charge build-up and are easier to dry clean than untreated records. Two lousy ounces of the stuff will set you back \$40 but a miniscule amount treats an LP so the cost is not quite as outrageous as it sounds at first blush...but still...\$40. I always apply LAST to records that I think are going to get the heaviest use.

If you're thinking that this all sounds like a lot of work, it isn't all that bad. Once a record has been wet cleaned you'll probably never have to do it again as long as you dry brush it every time you play it and take care not to get fingerprints on it. Fingerprints and other organic contaminants are the worst things for records. Bacteria, mold and other critters eat the oils and organic material and cause permanent damage to the vinyl that no amount of cleaning will reverse. If you get fingerprints or beer or peanut butter on a record, wet clean it right away or suffer the consequences of a noisy record.

### **Other (good) ways to spend your money**

Many record collectors replace the paper sleeves with [vinyl-lined inner sleeves](#) or [acid-free paper](#) inner sleeves. Bought in bulk upgraded inner sleeves are not expensive and will protect your records better than the original cheap paper sleeves. I also use heavy plastic outer sleeves both to protect the jackets from wear and also to make it much easier to slide LPs in and out of the tightly packed row of records on the shelf.

Last but not least and probably something I should have mentioned in [Part One](#) of this series is Michael Fremer's [21<sup>st</sup> Century Vinyl turntable set up DVD](#). It's only \$30 and is worth every penny even if you *think* you know how to set up a turntable.

### **Parting words**

I hope I've inspired you to rediscover the joys of vinyl and get more enjoyment out of your audio system. Just remember that the audio gear is just a means to the end of enjoying the music. If you get to the point where you're listening to the audio system and missing the enjoyment of the music, you have lost your way. It's all about the music. As

Sandy Gross, my beloved boss and founder of Definitive Technology, is fond of saying “Happy Listening!”

*Paul DiComo is Definitive’s VP of Marketing who listens to his vinyl with the incomparable Mythos ST loudspeaker. Feel free to contact Paul with questions and comments by emailing [info@definitivetech.com](mailto:info@definitivetech.com) with “Attention Paul” in the subject line.*