

AURAL BY ROBERT BAIRD ROBERT

"Everybody loves soundtracks. And for some reason opera has gotten really big in the last year. Metal as well. Opera and metal I've had a hard time keeping in stock."

—KATE KOEPPEL

Organizational Genus

Today's vinyl revolution has begun to spin off ancillary businesses. As I wrote in the August issue, shelving for LPs is blossoming into big business. Small blocks of wood with a metal loop attached, to prop up the jacket of the LP currently playing, are offered by Wax Rax and Koeppel Design. Tote and shoulder bags for LPs and 45s, specially designed not just for deejays but for crate diggers and a more genteel breed of collector, are being offered for sale by Airbag, Dusty Groove, Koeppel, Technics, Tucker & Bloom, Turntable Lab... and the list goes on.

Recently, I received a sample of a Flipbin (\$75): a tabletop LP holder that's a deluxe extension of the currently-playing LP jacket holder (www.flipbin.com). Using a Flipbin at home for a Saturday-night listening session with friends, I found that it quickly filled. The next day, it was an amusing, um... record of where whim and possibly red wine had taken us. Sleek, and well made of aluminum, the Flipbin is a convenient next-to-the-turntable accessory, but beyond that, I can't see how it's useful as any kind of long-term storage solution.

Another hot LP accessory these days is the record divider. At the moment, that submarket segment is dominated by San Francisco-based designer Kate Koeppel and her laser-cut European white birch record dividers (www.koeppeledesign.com). On a recent trip to San Francisco, I met Koeppel downtown at Trou Normand, a chic bar/bistro whose unsettling Google tagline reads, in part, "specializing in whole-animal butchery." Fortunately, I was only there for a drink—they had one obscure rye vodka and that was poured over an oblong ice spear—and to chat with Koeppel about her products. A Seattle native who moved south to attend grad school, Koeppel and her husband, Saif, are LP collectors; as it does for many entrepreneurs, a personal passion led to a business opportunity.

"We have a lot of social events at our house, and I found that a lot of our friends were nervous about digging through our records. I wanted something that would help give people an entry point into our collection, because there's nothing more fun than being, like, 'Oh, you haven't heard Serge Gainsbourg? Then you have to



hear Beck next."

Launched in 2013, Koeppel Design's Record Dividers are the height and width of an LP, with a protruding label tab and are available only in unstained, unvarnished birch. Koeppel refuses to use any inks, oils, or paints, because there are so many unknowns about how they might degrade and break down over time. Category names as long as 14–20 characters can fit on the standard tab at the top or side of each Divider, but the tabs can be made to accommodate more. Koeppel says she can reproduce any typeface the cus-

tomers wish, but tries to steer clients toward more legible fonts. The more complex the letter forms, the more expensive they are to reproduce. Sets of 26 Dividers, one per letter, are \$320 (horizontal) or \$350 (vertical). Her premade standard collection, which condenses the entire alphabet into six panels, costs \$150.

"The majority of conversation is about how my products are too expensive. I have worked extremely hard to get our prices as low as possible without shorting my employees. I pay above living minimal wage: \$18 an hour. It's expensive to live here. It's expensive to work here, but I want to work in a local economy."

Besides the alphabet, Koeppel's dividers can be custom-cut with labels of any genre or subgenre, or the uniquely eccentric organizational system of any fevered LP collector. "There are a lot that I have to Google. I recently received a request to do Ozma Records, which is the company that's rereleased the gold albums from NASA's *Voyager*. I have a customer in Iceland who has a massive metal collection, and there are so many subgenres of metal, every time he sends me something, I have no idea what it is. And deejays have titles for things that are clearly coming from their own brain catalog."

On the subject of brains, I discovered that, among her other talents, Koeppel, who is making inroads into *Stereophile's* readership, also has a gift for understatement.

"If it was just about music and selling things, I wouldn't stay. There's a big piece of my personality that's very interested in the brains of other people. Exploring record collections is a fascinating peek into their worlds and their lives, because music, collecting—and then this really specific, very trained world of audiophiles—brings together a really interesting subset of people that have similar tendencies. A lot of it tends to be kind of obsessive." ■

Music Editor Robert Baird (RBaird@enthusiastnetwork.com) finds all this talk of having too many records patently absurd.