

CONVERTING OLD MUSIC RECORDINGS TO CD

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I want to record old long play vinyl record albums and burn them onto cd's. The cd should be able to be played on all players, and each song or cut of the album should be available for play separately.

What's the best method?

Be sure to CLEAN the records first. I recommend cleaning GENTLY with a *slightly* damp cloth, this makes it a simple one-step cleaning process. If the disk is VERY dirty, use a little dish detergent, and rinse well after.

For ripping to your Hard Drive, use the LINE INPUTs on your PC's soundcard, and play the disk with the best possible cartridge and turntable you can get your hands on ... you're only going to do this once, so being a little bit fanatical about that "initial ripping" operation is time well spent ... once you have got levels all worked out the process will be pretty much automatic, but keep in mind that levels will definitely vary from disk to disk, and typically the really OLD LPs used a lot less compression, which has two effects: (1) larger dynamic range (good) but (2) lower overall average level (bad) for recording or ripping, as compared to NEWer LPs.

Formats to use?

Seems as your main goal here is to create "standard" music CDs to "replace" the LPs, I highly recommend that you rip them to WAV files ... after that, if you want to create "archive" copies as MP3s or WMAs or another format, there are several programs that will allow you to "mass convert" a batch of WAV files to MP3s, etc. The reason for ripping to WAV files is because WAV files, unlike MP3, WMA, AACs etc are *not compressed*, so if you rip to WAV format you will definitely get the best quality, most accurate reproduction ("digitization") of the original disks. The only drawback to ripping to WAV format is that the files will be larger (about 10 times larger than MP3s). Having said that, I also firmly believe that most people (me included) cannot detect (hear) the difference if you play back a WAV file versus play back a reasonably high bit rate encoded MP3 ... personally, I don't think I can tell the difference of 128Kb/s MP3s vs. WAVs.

(But just to leave a little extra "headroom", I usually rip my MP3s at 192Kb/s when ripping from audio CDs :) Keep in mind that a 45 minute LP worth of WAV files may take up about 600MB of disk space ... that is a good reason to keep your "archive" copies in MP3 format or a compressed format of your choice.

Side Note: There is always a raging controversy about formats for digital music, and people sometimes ask me why I rip to MP3 format instead of, say, WMA (Windows Media Audio) format, which only takes about 1/2 the storage space of MP3s. My reason is simple: compatibility ... the MP3 file format is still, by *far*, the most universally "compatible" digital file format for compressed audio files ... Yes, it is true that many of the newer MP3 players will also play WMA files and some others, but practically *everything* plays MP3s, even my phone and my Palm Pilot ... and most all computer programs, utilities, etc, also support MP3 format, many support ONLY that format! [rant completed] It's just a personal decision.

Programs of choice?

My tool of choice for the "recording" process would definitely be the amazing, awesome, and FREE software tool "Audacity" ... I would recommend, again, use the LINE IN inputs on your PC soundcard. First do a test recording, checking 2 or 3 of the albums tracks to find the optimum recording level ... you want to use as high a level as possible without entering into the area where you risk getting distortion on peak levels! Then, I recommend "capturing" the entire album side in a single "take" or recording session. Because most of these older LPs all had a little quiet section between tracks, you will be able to very easily visually see, using the oscillograph-type display of Audacity, the short "quiet" break sections between tracks. Using the Audacity "File / Export Selection as Wave" menu command you can quickly and easily save each individual track from that LP side as an individual track, naming each track accordingly, such as: "09 Penny Lane.wav" (Placing track numbers at the front of the file name makes keeping track sequence for burning the CD easy).

Once you have all the individual tracks for an entire LP ripped and grouped in a folder, you can use Windows Media Player, or practically any burner software to burn the CD, just be sure to select the mode from your burning software to "Burn Audio CD" and then you should end up with a CD that will play on *almost* any CD player. (You *may* find a few *really OLD* cd players that just won't play burned-CDs *at all*, but they are increasingly rare ... if you find one, please *destroy* it! :) CD players that won't play burned CD-RWs - the Eraseable/Re-Writeable CDs - are much more common ... my little OLD Sony boombox is fine with burned CD-Rs, but will not play CD-RWs ... I really should probably consider destroying *it*, too!!