



THE VINYL FRONTIER

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IF YOU WAIT long enough everything comes back into fashion eventually. And so it has proved over the past 10 years with the remarkable resurgence of vinyl as the medium of choice for committed audiophiles. The knock-on effect of people digging out their old LPs, alongside splurging upwards of £30 on the new Chemical Brothers album or a Neil Young reissue, has been an upturn for those providing expert services to accompany the vinyl revival.

Reiner Gläss's record-cleaning company Audiodesksysteme Glass is one such notable specialist. Although the German firm has been around for almost 25 years, Reiner is quick to acknowledge that this recent interest in all things 33 rpm and 45 rpm has been nothing but good news for the production and sale of his high-end, sophisticated vinyl-cleaning machines.

"Demand has increased significantly due to the vinyl boom," he says in the same determined, matter-of-fact style that he applies to the design of his innovative products, in particular his award-winning Vinyl Cleaner and Vinyl Cleaner PRO.

It's this calm and methodical manner that enabled Reiner to bring his first machine to market. Although never, in his words, "a vinyl freak" (when pressed he does admit his favourite single of all-

time is Ultravox's "Passing Strangers"), through his involvement in hi-fi fairs he began to see that among serious record collectors there was a wish for a "fully automatic record-washing machine".

"Over time these requests became louder," he explains. "So this positive encouragement sparked my motivation. One of the most important aspects of the design process was reading customer reviews of existing record-cleaning devices and taking their thoughts, pointers and criticisms on board."

The result was the first iteration of the Vinyl Cleaner, which he presented at the prestigious audio trade show High End in Munich in 2008. According to Reiner the response was fantastic, creating huge demand. "With this feedback," he recalls, "I took heart, started production and brought this patent into series production."

The Vinyl Cleaner, and its PRO upgrade, are the first and only record-cleaning machines that incorporate an ultrasonic cleaning cycle in addition to a more conventional mechanical cleaning. This is achieved via bi-directional rotating microfibre cleaning drums. The result? The cleanest LPs ever.

Reiner explains that, unlike other record cleaners, the ultrasonic Vinyl Cleaner bursts millions of microscopic bubbles from the surface of the record, all

the way to the bottom of the groove where no standard cleaning fibre is fine enough to reach. Experts say that among vinyl cleaners the Audio Desk System Vinyl Cleaner is unique in using filtered air for drying, rather than one of the static-inducing suction systems employed by other vinyl-cleaning products.

Specialist audio website SoundStage! Ultra is certainly impressed, stating that you'd be hard-pressed to find a reviewer who's tried a Vinyl Cleaner and not subsequently bought one. Reviewing the PRO, it says: "The new version offers better, quieter drying; an improved motor; an upgraded pump with ceramic bearings; and several improvements to the electronic control system."

And when it comes to listening to the reviewer's beloved records – surely the only litmus test in these situations – he was rapt. "I couldn't believe what was hidden in the grooves of my records," he wrote. "Previously inaudible musical nuances, blackety-black silences between songs, more detailed and precise images, more of this instrument or that intonation, more microdetail. My cleaned records have dramatically less surface noise. They sound better."

The best compliment, then, and all achieved, according to Reiner, by listening to what his customers want, and experimenting. "I have researched a lot of information by developing the product, as well as talking to many vinyl and high-end freaks, which enabled me to create many articles and interesting results from vinyl experiments," he says. "This information has helped me in my development."

The kit itself also has a distinctive, steampunk allure. Available in black, grey, white or red, it is not only sturdy looking, but aesthetically it's a piece of functional machinery that you'd want to show off. Combined, the Vinyl Cleaner's practicality and irresistible looks have catapulted it to the top of the audiophile hit parade. No mean feat, as they're an incredibly exacting bunch. It has won countless prizes, including the Editor's Choice award from the leading trade magazine *Stereophile* in 2015 and 2017. Customers include one of the last German record-pressing companies, digitization companies and, perhaps most pleasingly, a number of opera singers.

And, according to Reiner, demand continues to increase. To meet this need, he has partnered with importers outside of Germany. While on home soil he works alongside small selected retailers and stores in order to provide "direct and personalized customer support". "Since inception it's been nothing but positive," he says. "There's been steady growth, my staff numbers have increased eightfold and the demand keeps rising."

As for the future, Reiner's rich and fertile mind continues to explore the development of new products. "I have some product ideas in the drawer," he explains, "such as a fragrance lamp that I'll be daring to develop next." Long may his daring, the success of the Vinyl Cleaner and, of course, the rebirth of vinyl, continue.

