

World class vinyl plant opens its doors in Burlington

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McGhee is also president of Burlington-based music Isotope Records, a distribution company that works with all of the major labels. It was there that he became aware of the new interest in vinyl.

Vinyl is still a relatively niche market, accounting for only about five per cent of physical album sales, but market research has shown that it increased by almost 58 per cent last year alone.

Vinyl pressing technology, however, had largely disappeared following the switch to CDs in the 1980s and the few remaining presses had trouble keeping up with the resurgent demand for LPs.

McGhee's search brought him to Prague in the Czech Republic where he discovered GZ Media, one of the largest makers of vinyl records in the world. The company was also one of the few making new automated presses.

McGhee, former lead singer for the '80s metal band Brighton Rock, offered to buy some presses, but the Czech company refused. Instead, Isotope entered into a 50-50 partnership with GZ to establish the Precision Pressing plant in Burlington.

The hope is to grab a large chunk of the growing North American market.

The plan seems to be working. The plant began production in January. The first record off the line was a white limited edition version of "Man Machine Poem" by The Tragically Hip.

"Since then, we've done about 60,000 Hip records," McGhee says. "And we just got an order from the United States for 134,000 units of one title, Kendrick Lamar's new album."

McGhee says the average order for a record is 500 to 2,000 for most titles, but the company will accept smaller runs as low as 100.

"We also want to support independent labels and independent bands," McGhee says. "Most plants will shy away from anything under 300. We welcome that business."

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