



Fruit of the vinyl

Niall Magennis shows you how to turn your **dusty record collection** into a sparkling stack of CDs.

If you're into music and old enough to realise that most of the current crop of boy bands and girly groups are not much to write home about, then you'll probably remember the joys of heading down to the local record shop during your lunch break on Monday to purchase the latest releases on shiny black vinyl. You'd get it home, pop it on your record deck and sit on your bed listening to the record, while studying the intricate art and lyric sheet on the gatefold sleeve – a miniscule CD inlay card will never be a match for the mighty gatefold.

The problem, of course, is that we've now become used to the superior sound quality, fast track-seek times and general ease of use of CDs. However, if you've got a significant portion of your music

collection on vinyl, you really aren't going to feel like lining the pocket of the big record companies by purchasing something that you already own, just so you can have it on a different format. CD burners are now relatively cheap, however, so the answer is to convert your vinyl collection into CDs this way.

There are a number of CD-burning packages that will automate the process of recording from vinyl or tape onto CD. These will even cut the audio up into individual tracks by finding the silence in between songs. The problem is that if you already have a CD-burning package that came bundled with your CD recorder, you won't take too kindly to shelling out more money for something that essentially does the same job. Nevertheless, if you've got lots and lots of vinyl or tape recordings that need converting, you may want to check these out as they're likely to save you a lot of time. If you're tempted, then you can find those options in the Automating the



Above: When you've finished recording a track, there will be some dead space at the start and end that will need to be deleted; **Left:** CoolEdit's Audio Clean Up plug-in gets rid of unwanted noise from old recordings



Process boxout on the following page. If you're a skinflint like myself then read on.

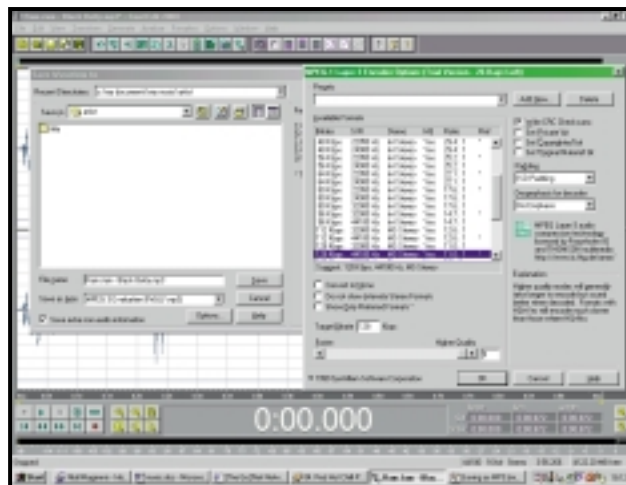
Unless your sound card is an older ISA model, its recording quality is likely to be more than adequate for recording from vinyl, but it's a good idea to mute the mic input in your sound card's mixer applet, as this can add unwanted noise to your recordings.

Also, it's worth bearing in mind, if you are recording from vinyl, that you cannot simply plug a record deck straight into the line-in socket of your sound card. Record decks generally don't have a pre-amp built in, so you have to

amplify the signal in some way before you route it to your sound card. The simplest way to do this is to take a feed from the headphone socket on the amp which you have connected to your record deck. If you don't have an amp, then you are going to have to buy a pre-amp and use this to provide the audio signal for your sound card.

On this month's cover CD is a demo version of CoolEdit 2000, together with the Audio Clean Up plug-in. This is ideal for getting rid of clicks and pops that might have etched themselves

into the grooves of your vinyl over the years. Be warned, though, that when it is used with the demo version of CoolEdit it periodically puts bell noises into the audio. Nevertheless, it will give you a



CoolEdit uses the Fraunhofer MP3 codec so you can configure a number of settings to customise how the MP3 will be compressed



Automating the process: products to do the work for you

For those with a gigantic vinyl catalogue or who are too lazy to go through the process manually, there are several packages which will burn your tunes straight to CD for you.

- Easy CD Creator Deluxe from Adaptec includes the

Spin Doctor software which will record an LP, split it into separate tracks by analysing gaps in the audio, apply noise reduction and burn tracks to CD all for £55.63. It also supports MP3 file saving.

www.adaptec.com

- Based on the GEAR interface and engine, GEAR

Audio has most of the same features as the Spin Doctor software, including automatic pop-and-crackle clean-up of LPs being converted to CD. The package costs £31.22.

www.gearcdr.com/

- Groove Mechanic is a shareware program that will

record and split up an LP into separate audio tracks and then apply noise reduction, but it doesn't have any built-in, CD-burning features. It costs £31.25 to register the program.

www.coyotes.bc.ca/cei/index.htm

good idea of how well you can fix up your noisy records.

Once you've made the audio connections between your record deck and sound card, it's time to start a record playing on the deck and load up CoolEdit 2000. Hit Record and leave it running for a couple of seconds. Try playing back the file. If you don't hear any audio, check your sound card's mixer applet to make sure the Line-in or Aux mixer control is not muted and that recording is enabled for that input.

If the audio is either too faint or too loud, you'll need to change the volume setting accordingly on the mixer control for either Line-in or Aux.

Make sure you set the audio level using a loud section of the album as, if



If you are saving your audio as a .wav file make sure the Save As type box displays Windows PCM .wav file, as the ADPCM formats compress the audio

you set it at a high level on a quiet piece of music, it is likely to distort the recording when it comes to a louder section of the album. Set the recording level so that the meter at the bottom of the main window in CoolEdit is just peaking at about -15 on the louder sections of the album.

Now that we have our recording levels set, it's time to start recording our album.

Hit the red Record button on CoolEdit's transport bar and start playing the first track of your LP. When it's finished playing hit Stop in CoolEdit.

You're likely to have some dead space at the start and end of the audio file. Zoom in to the start using the magnifying glass and then select the bit of audio that you don't need. You can trim it by hitting the delete key.

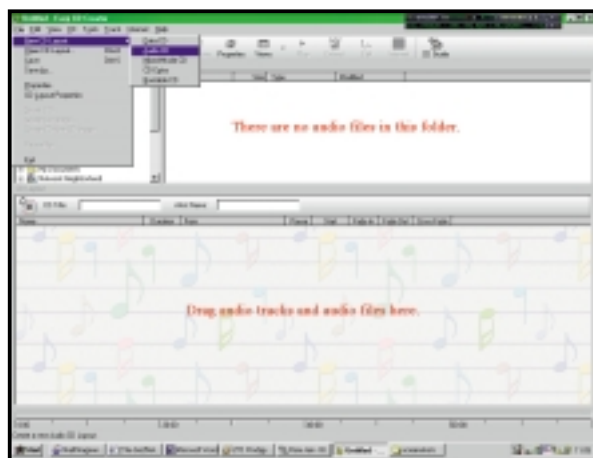
Repeat the process for the extra audio at the end of the file.

If you need to apply noise reduction, click on the transform menu and select noise reduction. Here you have a range of options, including Click/Pop eliminator and hiss reduction. All the options have presets, so you should be able to find something that suits your needs.

Once you've finished editing the audio file, you can save it as a .wav file. Alternatively, and one reason CoolEdit is a good choice of audio editor, you can save the audio as an MP3 file. This uses the Fraunhofer codec which provides excellent sound quality at 128Kbits/sec. You can change the MP3 quality setting by clicking on the Advanced button in the Save As menu, but the default options should be adequate for your needs.

Simply repeat the process for each track on the LP. Once you've got all your files saved, you can quit CoolEdit and start your CD-burning program. If you've saved the audio as .wav files you should select Create Audio CD in your burning package and then load in your .wav files in the correct order. Most burning packages have an option to set the space between tracks. As standard, this is usually set to three seconds. Once you've set this, just hit Write and sit back and wait for your new CD of your old LP.

If you are using MP3 files, you must select the option to create a data CD. Remember, of course, that you can fit seven or eight albums worth of tracks on a single CD if you are using MP3 files, but you won't be able to play back the files on a standard CD player.



If you have saved your files as .wavs, you must select the correct option in your CD-burning package to create an audio CD

CONTACTS

Niall Magennis welcomes your comments on the sound column. Contact him via the PCW editorial office or email: sound@pcw.co.uk