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These Amazing Fan-Made Vinyl Sleeves Reveal the Weird Minds of Music Obsessives

A new photo book called *Sleeve Notes* collects devotional DIY vinyl covers made from 1950 to 2000.



By Joseph Zadeh May 13, 2025, 9:47am

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All images supplied by Dominique Russell

Sleeve Notes, a new photo book from the London-based artist and documentarian Dominique Russell, is a beautiful, accidental archive chronicling the passions, fantasies, and daily routines of vinyl heads who've lived in the UK from 1950 to the present day.

Via her father—who works at a second-hand record store in Essex called Crazy Beat—Russell came across a series of inner sleeves that were entirely fan-made, as the owners of the records let their subconsciouses spill out across the blank white paper.



What is drawn on the paper varies. Sometimes, it's a sprawling fresco from a genuinely talented artist. Sometimes, it's a slightly stalker-ish collage of long lost pop pinups, made from magazine and newspaper clippings. Other times, it's a series of inane doodles, a shopping list, a takeaway order, or a love letter scrawled on the blank sleeves that are provided as replacements by shops when the original sleeve has been damaged or gone missing.

She began to photograph them, and a cultural archive gradually took shape, one that now feels incredibly charming yet bittersweet in a 21st century context of instantaneous streaming.



To learn more about how the book came together, and her passion for the quiet cultural power contained in ephemeral objects, VICE caught up with Dominique for a chat.

VICE: Hey Dominique. You must have spent a lot of time in record stores to build this collection?

Dominique: My dad works at a record store called Crazy Beat Records in Essex, so I spent much of my childhood sitting on the floors of record shops while he looked through stuff. I gradually got an interest in music through him.



I LOVE
MANKIND
ITS PEOPLE
CANT
STAND

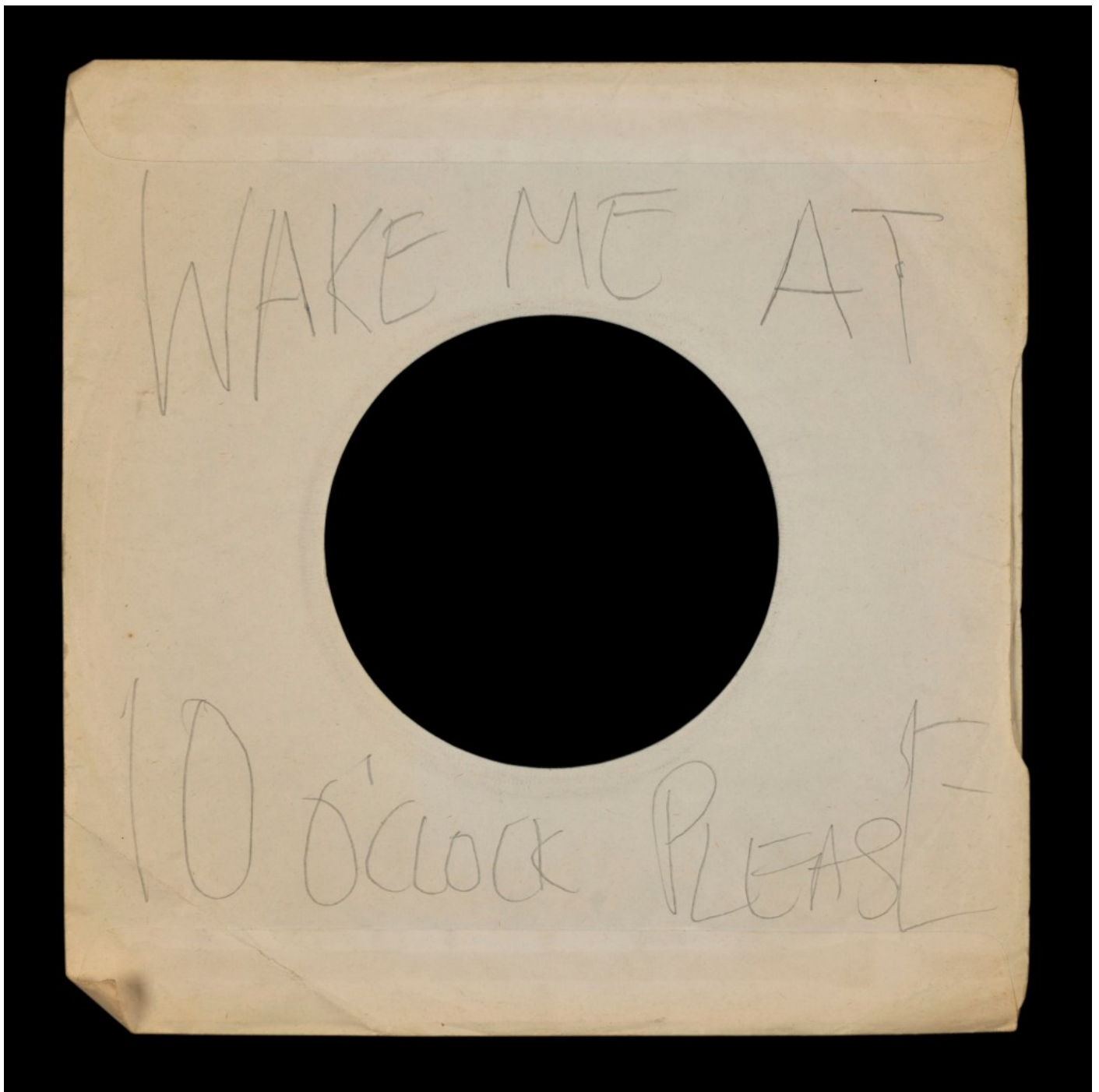
What's special about Crazy Beat Records?

It's one of those record shops that is full of stuff, from floor to ceiling. There's a really fun bunch of people in there, and a jokey atmosphere. Everyone is shouting at each other all the time and the filing system stretches out the back, larger than the shop front.



How did the idea behind this book come about?

It started about three years ago when my dad brought home some hand-drawn Sex Pistols and T-Rex sleeves. I love both of those bands, so straight away I was like: this is a thing that exists. A few weeks later he said: I've got a few more for you. I became a bit obsessed with them.



There was one that had a shopping list written on the cover, and another where someone had written "Wake me at 10 o'clock please." I liked imagining the stories behind them; imagining someone going to sleep with a record on their face and that written on it. Dad started putting post-it notes on them before giving them to me, with little theories about what he thought the story behind them could be.



Yeah, I particularly loved the one where someone had drawn a picture of a person looking at a calendar and it just said, "We'll find our day." I immediately imagined a poignant story of two friends that are struggling to find time to hang out together, and one has sent the other one this record.

Yeah, I also feel like these sleeves speak to a time when people felt a real connection to their music collection and wanted to claim ownership over their records. As well as a time when you would just be sat at home, a little bit bored, and felt like doodling over stuff. It resonates with what I loved doing when I was younger, burning illegal CDs for mates and then drawing artwork myself.



How big is your collection of these sleeves?

It got to the point where I had about 100, and I decided to start a photography project. Once people in the record shop heard about that, they started saving new ones that came in for me. Eventually my collection grew to about 200 sleeves, and I chose 150 for the book.



Am I right in thinking that it's pretty common to find other objects hidden inside second hand records?

Yeah, people would hide various items in record sleeves, including love letters, drugs (very old), drawings, posters, and old money. If people wanted to hide something from someone, then a record sleeve was a good place to go.



What are some of your favorite sleeves in the collection?

The one with four dogs on it. They look like dogs from the 1970s, that is all I can say. And the one with the faces [see lead image]. I feel like people just don't draw like this anymore, whatever this style is.



Have you always collected stuff?

I've always collected lots of bits and bobs. I love souvenirs and ephemeral items. Now I work in heritage, I definitely have a mindset that every item has a purpose regardless of its value.

Thanks, Dominique.

Sleeve Notes is available now through [CentreCentre](#).

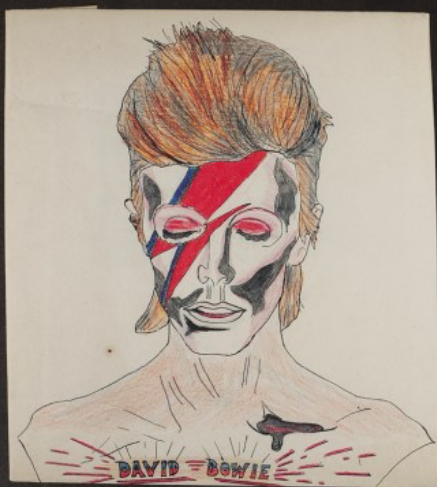
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STEREO

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UP WITH COATS,
PICK UP TOOLS
FROM SITTING ROOM

GREY TROUSERS FROM
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