

## The Curse of the Record Collector

James Brown's band, The J.B.'s, sang of givin' up food for funk. That sentiment was meant in jest, yet it contains a kernel of truth which only those obsessed with music can appreciate. Indeed, a few times I've considered skimping on the essentials to fund the purchase of LPs I believed I couldn't live without. Common sense always prevailed, though, and I chose to give my body sustenance, if only so I'd have enough strength to continue placing records on the turntable.

Most record dealers start out as collectors. Thus, the more unscrupulous ones understand well the plight of someone like me, who long ago had been seduced by the life-giving charms of those black discs spinning on the record player. For they contain not only the music in its unadulterated, analogue glory, but a fragment of the era in which it was performed and recorded. That makes them a tangible as well as an intoxicating part of musical history. Collector and collection are further bound together by the care required when handling these carriers of sonic delights. Anyone who's removed an LP from its sleeve knows it's a curiously tactile experience.

And so, like pirates on the high seas, the less morally inclined record dealers sail into port, hoping to offload their vinyl booty for sums approaching a king's ransom. I'll give an example of such latter-day nautical plunder. While flicking through a box of singles at a recent record fair, my heart leapt into my mouth. There, nestling in the usual pop and rock fodder, was the Michael Garrick Trio's *Blues for the Lonely* EP, a fine example of the sixties vogue for combining poetry with jazz. It had resided at the apex of my wants-list for some time, largely because it features Shake Keane and Joe Harriott, two of my jazz idols. My ardour cooled somewhat on spying the price tag, a staggering £225. I did a double take, just to ensure I hadn't missed a decimal point, but no, my eyes weren't deceiving me – £225 it was. It's a collectable EP, I mused to myself, but surely not *that* collectable.

Mustering courage, I remonstrated with the pirate-dealer over the excessive sum he was demanding. After a minute or two of verbal back and forth, however, I realised I shouldn't have bothered. Clearly, such trifling matters as the cost-of-living crisis didn't figure in this man's thinking.

Numerous institutions and organisations cater to those suffering from alcohol or drug addiction. We're all aware of Alcoholics Anonymous, for instance. But Record Collectors Anonymous? I think not. Perhaps that's because, on some level, we acknowledge that the craving for both music and vinyl can be hopelessly yet beautifully incurable. And so the record-dealing pirates will continue to overprice their wares. And so record collectors like me will continue to consider givin' up food for funk, if not for jazz.