

IRA KANTOR

A PASSION FOR MUSIC, ESPECIALLY VINYL

By Alice Riehl

Photos by Nicole Shilliday,
Nicole Shilliday Photography

When Ira Kantor was a teen growing up in Queens, New York, like a lot of his buddies he was really into music. He couldn't play an instrument, so he found another way to get involved. Using his quick intelligence and great memory, he became a trivia expert on music and musicians, both current and vintage. Eventually, he wrote about music for his high school newspaper and started a collection that today includes nearly 1,900 albums on vinyl and over a thousand CDs. Music has turned into an avocation that brings him a lot of joy, has made him many friends, and even helps him connect with his young son.

After he graduated from high school, Ira enrolled in the State University of New York (SUNY) Binghamton, majoring in English, General Literature, and Rhetoric. He received his master's degree from Boston University in Journalism. Shortly after graduation, he joined the staff of the Boston Herald as an editorial assistant. Over the next five years, Ira became a contributor on the news desk, and then a business writer. Ira was working for the Herald when the bomb went off during the Boston Marathon in 2013, an event he would subsequently cover for the paper with its collective roster of reporters.





Ira's master's thesis at Boston University reflected his passion for music. He wrote about James Taylor's extended musical family. The final 5,000-word article stemmed from interviewing many people who knew him best, including his younger siblings Kate Taylor and Livingston Taylor, both of whom remain friends. In realizing how the quotes from Taylor's family members could be organized to form a cohesive narrative, Ira eventually applied this technique to an oral biography he would write about Harry Chapin, a charismatic musician and humanitarian who unfortunately died at age 38. That book, "Hello, Honey, It's Me": The Story of Harry Chapin, includes quotes from over 70 people—family members, musicians, and politicians included—who touched Harry's life and spoke to Ira about him. (The book is available on Amazon and HarryChapinMusic.com.) Once again, the process earned Ira many friends, including two of Chapin's sons who keep in touch and have provided him with signed memorabilia that he hangs on the wall of his home office. The multiyear experience was so rewarding that as the book was being written, Ira actually named his dog Chapin.

Eventually, Ira shifted from journalism over to public relations, working for several

Boston-based PR agencies specializing in such sectors as construction, insurance, technology, and healthcare. Four and a half years ago he joined Forrester Research, where he is now the research and consulting firm's Senior Public Relations Manager.

Shortly before leaving the Boston Herald, he met his wife-to-be, Jen, in a very modern way—online. She also graduated from Boston University, but they never met there. They have been together for 11 years and have a six-year-old son, Freddie, who is in kindergarten. (Freddie's full name is Frederic, but his nickname just happens to be the same as one of Ira's favorite musicians—Queen frontman Freddie Mercury.) The family moved to Cherry Hill last year to be closer to Jen's parents who live here, and also Ira's family, who are based in Queens and Long Island. Both Jen, a human relations manager, and Ira work from home, giving them the flexibility to choose anywhere to live. They chose Cherry Hill.

Apart from his day jobs, Ira has freelanced music articles for several print and online publications. For example, he has contributed articles about music to the New York Daily News and the Village Voice. For more than 10 years, he was a music writer with

Elmore Magazine, where he wrote about several genres, including progressive rock. Ira would go on to create a column called "Ira Kantor's Vinyl Confessions" for the music website VintageRock.com; he still writes for this outlet (vintagerock.com/category/vinyl-confessions). The column began as a monthly exercise but as life, family, and other projects have taken more of his time, it now appears approximately four times a year.

Ira and Jen both agree that their Cherry Hill house is great for a number of reasons but especially because it's larger than their previous home. Additionally, all of Ira's collections can be displayed in one room, his office. Most of one wall is taken up with his vinyl album collection (28 shelves), Ira's musical pride and joy.

It has taken a long time and a lot of excursions to music stores, flea markets, antique stores, and people's homes, as well as on eBay to get Ira's collection to where it is today. He's not a snob about music; he likes and collects it all, from show tunes to pop, from rock to hip hop. He and Jen enjoy tracking down the rare and unusual records that make his collection so interesting and valuable.

Asked about his favorite finds, he mentions the album Ocean, recorded by a relatively

obscure German band called Eloy. He's also a big fan of Greek musician Vangelis, who is mostly known for his solo work but once was part of a trio called Aphrodite's Child. Their album, 666, which Ira and Jen found in a record shop in Burlington, Vermont, remains one of Ira's most prized finds.

Another favorite band is Saga, a Canadian pop band, whose "Heads or Tales" album they found at "Kentucky's largest flea market" in Bowling Green, sold by a very friendly 82-year-old woman named Joyce. As you can tell, the stories of how these records were acquired add to their enjoyment for the Kantors—Ira especially.

Freddie is a bit too young to start his own collection, but his dad is introducing him to the classics. During the pandemic, the

toddler Freddie would often find it hard to take a nap during the day with his parents around. So, Ira would take him on hours-long rides with the CD player soothing him with some vintage tunes. Freddie loves to dance to his dad's records.

Ira and his family have settled in very comfortably here. He says he loves that anything you need is so close by, his neighborhood is dog-friendly, and he is able to see both sets of parents much more frequently. His office serves as his own mancave with all of his collections, including some sports memorabilia, in one place, though the "cave" is actually on the second floor. Right by his desk chair is his dream guitar, an electric Rickenbacker bass. He still can't play an instrument, but he's learning.



FIVE QUESTIONS

Favorite local restaurant:

Ira: Amici for dinner, Olga's Diner for breakfast, Ponzio's for lunch.

Jen: Amici

Favorite Leisure Activity:

Ira: Listening to music, reading, and going to Phillies games with family and friends.

Jen: hanging out with Freddie and family.

Favorite Beach Town:

Both: Ocean City

Favorite TV Show:

Ira: Bluey, a kids' show he watches with Freddie.

Jen: Not Dead Yet.

Favorite Local Sports Team:

Ira: Phillies.

Jen: Eagles.

Freddie: Phillies, 76ers, Eagles and Flyers.