



Gord Sauck with Sony's "flamingo" portable record player at his Innovative Audio shop in Newton. "That player," he said with amazement, "is all strings, rods, motors and gears, and that's tough to emulate today. It's all mechanical, no PC boards. That came out 30 years ago, and it still sounds great."

PHOTO/Brian Howell

now
What's On

Vintage audio creates buzz

Yearly garage sale in Newton a magnet for MP3-loathing crowd

The license plate on Tim Kernighan's yellow pickup truck pretty much says it all: PAC-RAT.

Tom ZILlich
Staff Reporter

With tailgate down, the rig was parked with others in the dock area of a Newton business park Sunday as middle-aged men strolled by, some bending down to take a closer look at the gear being sold by the Coquitlam resident.

"The problem is, I probably buy more stuff at a place like this than I sell," Kernighan said with a laugh.

He surveyed the concrete jungle of previously enjoyed speakers, stereo equipment, vinyl records and other stuff, and smirked. "The trick is getting it back in the house without the wife finding out, you know? It's all taken from the truck, which is backed into the garage, and filtered slowly into the house. That's how it's done."

Kernighan was among vendors at what's

become a yearly must-attend event for him and like-minded people: the Vintage Audio & Record Garage Sale hosted by Gord Sauck, who runs the Innovative Audio store on 78th Avenue, east of 132nd Street.

In recent years, the shop has become something of a community centre for those who prefer record players over iPods. The place is a magnet for analog-loving guys who'd rather haul refrigerator-sized speakers in and out of their rec room than settle for the simplicity of book-shelf models. They all seem to be on a first-name basis with the shopkeeper, too.

Old-school audio equipment fills the shelves of Sauck's store, which he bills as "the largest selection of vintage audio on display anywhere in B.C.," and it's clear he's quite thrilled that his lifelong dream has come true.

"Even as a kid, my dream was to have a stereo shop," he said, smiling.

On Sunday, Sauck wore a flame-licked black shirt as he hustled around his outdoor garage sale, making sure vendors and customers were content. The band Trama, set up in the loading bay of his store, played classic-rock favourites as the sun poked through the clouds.

Vendors aren't charged a cent to take part in the event, which the North Delta first staged three years ago at the rec centre in Tsawwassen. Last year, the sale was moved to Newton and, this time around, was turned into a bit of a picnic, with offerings of hamburgers, drinks and ice cream.

Whatever the setting, Sauck gets a real buzz from talking about vintage audio gear — with fellow enthusiasts, of course, but also with the wide-eyed neophytes who bring repairables/recyclables through the front door of his shop.

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'The thrill is the hunt' for old stereo gear

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The ABCs of the language spoken there involve Amplifier, Bias and Capstan – all defined, along with many other words and phrases, in the “vintage audio glossary” section of the busy and informative Innovative Audio website (www.iavscanada.com).

“Some of this older stuff sounds amazing, and many people just can't understand that,” he said. “MP3 players and all that, those sound files are so compressed that they're offering you noise more than music. The average person might not hear that, but it's because they're so used to that sub-par sound now, because it's everywhere. They've been acclimatized to all that crappy sound. When they put on a record of the same song, it's like they're listening to it for the first time – ‘Wow, I had no idea that instrument was played there!’ Things like that.”

Not-so-sound start for shop

The first time the doors of Innovative Audio were opened, it was in North Delta. In the fall of 2005, Sauck settled on the space above the Sundowner Pub, on 64th Avenue near 120th Street. He and his employees spent months preparing for opening day.

“We hit the light switch on the ‘open’ sign, and we didn't see a customer for almost two weeks,” he said ruefully.

Two years ago, a move was made to the shop's current, larger site in Newton.

“It's more thriving now,” he said, “and it's quite scary. We're getting a lot of attention.”

Sauck's passion for sound equipment began as a kid growing up in Scarborough, Ontario. His mom worked at the Quality Records plant, from which she brought home the odd lump of deformed vinyl – leftover “slag” from the presses. In 1972,



Siblings Jacob and Trinity Spracklin check out the wall of vintage speakers at Innovative Audio's garage sale.

PHOTO/Brian Howell

his dad, a painter/decorator, brought home a new Pioneer system, worth a cool \$1,278, and a copy of the strangest record he'd ever heard: *Everything You Always Wanted to Hear on the Moog* (but were afraid to ask), a celebration of sounds made by the groundbreaking synthesizer.

Today, as owner of two copies of that old vinyl, along with the very Pioneer receiver his dad purchased 38 years ago, Sauck's eyes light up as he plays the album on a portable Sony PSF5 record player (“the flamingo”), wired to some giant speakers in his store.

“That player,” he said with amazement, “is all strings, rods, motors and gears, and that's tough to emulate today. It's all mechanical, no PC boards. That came out 30 years ago, and it still sounds great.

“There are people who feel that this old

stuff does sound better,” he continued, “and, for the most part, it does. That's because of the build quality, the engineering that went into it, the components used. With most of this older gear, you can feel that there's a certain pride that went into it.”

By the 1990s, Sauck was in the business of showing people ways of getting various sound sources through their systems – wiring a VCR through an amplifier, hooking in musical instruments, that kind of thing. These days, people stream into his store seeking his advice and assistance with their dusty old gear. Recycling missions are common.

“Word is out there,” Sauck said, “and part of the recycling effort is out of necessity. We're quite happy to take it off their hands, because if someone brings in something they want repaired, and it's 30 or 40 years old, I can't just phone up or visit the local Radio Shack to get a transformer or a specific capacitor. What we did is, we knew a lot of this stuff was going into the landfill, so we're diverting that to some degree, and we're also able to use some of the parts and make old stuff like new again. It's a win-win situation.”

'It's like a museum'

One day, Donny Underhill walked into Innovative Audio to have his old Pioneer receiver fixed. Sauck had no idea Underhill was Trooper's original bass player, or that he played with the band Trama. No matter, Sauck went that extra mile to make his customer happy by having his tech guy completely refurbish the gear, to nearly-new state.

“That was pretty cool,” Underhill said, recalling the start of his friendship with Sauck.

As he set up for Trama's performance at the audio garage sale, Underhill marveled at all the vintage gear – not only speakers and

stereo-system bits and pieces, but “relics” like reel-to-reel tapes and rotary phones.

“It's so neat coming down here,” Underhill added. “It's like a museum.”

Some of the attraction is rooted in nostalgia, of course, but Sauck gets a kick from seeing teenagers take interest in the vintage stuff.

“I see kids who are 18 and 19 coming down here with their dad's old Marantz stereo, wanting to get it fixed. You know, it's like, ‘My dad told me all about it and I want to hear it,’ that kind of thing. They're finding stuff in their basement or wherever and wonder if it still works. It used to be that if it didn't work, out it went on dump day, but now we're here and that stuff gets revived. That's what we do; we bring back those memories.”

At the garage sale, Kernighan told the story of how a CD-cassette combo player changed hands among vendors four times earlier in the day.

“I bought it from a guy and then sold it to another for 10 CDs,” he said with a smile. “That's the kind of thing that happens.... It's a passion of mine,” said Kernighan, who owns a collection of some 1,500 cameras.

Every weekend, the retired firefighter goes to work as a “picker” – someone with a good eye who goes to garage sales to find and buy quality stuff, mostly for resale to people like Sauck at Innovative Audio.

“I don't care what it is – cameras, records, collectibles of any kind – the thrill is finding it, the hunt,” Kernighan said. “It's a hunting expedition.”

Sauck is glad to play his part. “Every day is like Christmas in here, because people keep bringing in these gifts, either for repair or recycling,” he said, referring to the wall of vintage audio gear stacked floor-to-ceiling in his shop's rear storage room. “It's just a thrill to watch it all come in here, hearing the stories and seeing the passion some people have for this stuff. It puts a smile on your face.”

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