

Vinyl Makes Big Comeback: El Segundo's Bill Smith Custom Records has been pressing vinyl for 35 years

Michael Hixon | February 3, 2016



Vinyl has seen a renaissance in recent years.

Bill Smith Custom Records, which has been located in El Segundo for 35 years, has benefited from vinyl's rise in popularity.

"Punk rock music, in the slow time, was the thing that kept vinyl around. They stayed true to vinyl," said Kevin Smith, Bill's son who has kept the business running. "About eight years ago we saw an increase in business. Five years ago it was up about a 28 percent increase and it has been on a steady climb of 23 or 28 percent every year since."

But that increase is also "stressing the industry" when there are approximately 22 vinyl pressing plants in North America, Smith said.

"To have that kind of increase in demand, you put everything out of balance, so the turnaround time is longer than we'd like and also the public likes. We're about 18 weeks

(turnaround) so you can kind of gauge by that the industry is stressed,” said Smith, when the turnaround average used to be four to six weeks. “My biggest thing is that I don’t want the labels, the bands—because I deal mainly with the indie side of the industry—to be disappointed in the vinyl industry and go back to another medium or find something else.”

Local singer/songwriter Jeffrey Philip Nelson released his latest album, “Vocal Vibe Radio,” which was recorded in Redondo Beach, digitally and on vinyl only.

“Working with Bill Smith Custom Records was the most authentic, independent music production stage I have ever completed,” Nelson said. “I was so proud of my own musical work because they made it beautiful sonically and visually. Kevin is a great owner and knows a ton about pressing vinyl records that will last a lifetime.”

Bill Smith built pressing plants all over the world, from Hawthorne to Iceland, before he decided to open shop with no partners in El Segundo more than three decades ago. Some of their early clients included Beck and The Knack. But their business plan has always been to stick with the independents.

“Indies come back, they will return,” Smith said. “Without the little guy there will never be a big guy. We’ve always catered to the smaller quantities, the smaller bands, the smaller labels, to let them grow and we’ve been fortunate enough to have great clients that return.”

Bill Smith Custom Records is located at 127 Penn St.

For more information, visit billsmithcustomrecords.com.

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