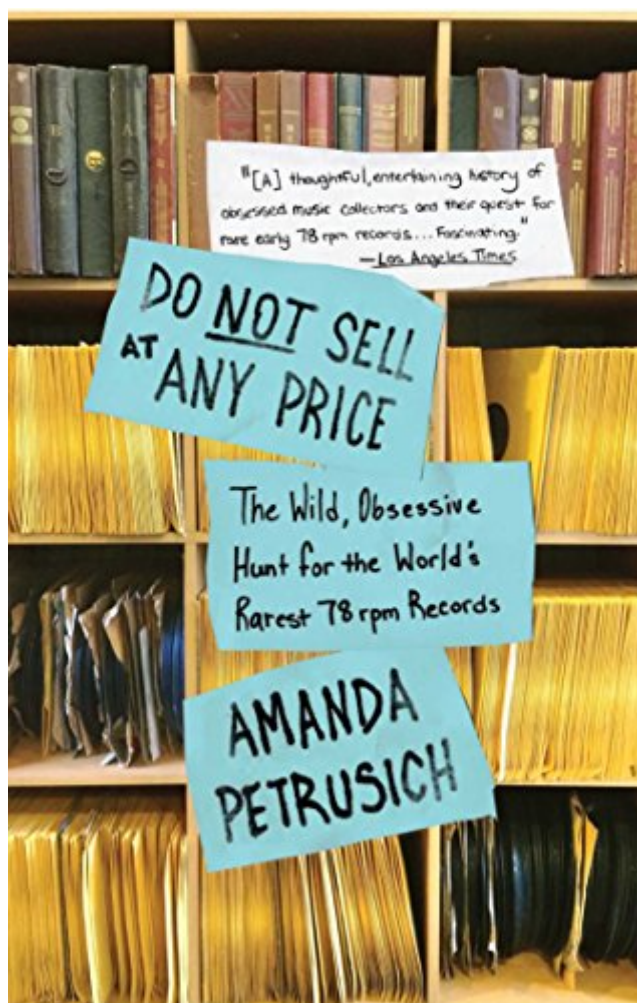


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# Do Not Sell At Any Price: The Wild, Obsessive Hunt For The World's Rarest 78rpm Records



## Synopsis

“A thoughtful, entertaining history of obsessed music collectors and their quest for rare early 78 rpm records” (Los Angeles Times), *Do Not Sell at Any Price* is a fascinating, complex story of preservation, loss, obsession, and art. Before MP3s, CDs, and cassette tapes, even before LPs or 45s, the world listened to music on fragile, 10-inch shellac discs that spun at 78 revolutions per minute. While vinyl has enjoyed a renaissance in recent years, rare and noteworthy 78rpm records are exponentially harder to come by. The most sought-after sides now command tens of thousands of dollars, when they’re found at all. *Do Not Sell at Any Price* is the untold story of a fixated coterie of record collectors working to ensure those songs aren’t lost forever. Music critic and author Amanda Petrusich considers the particular world of the 78 from its heyday to its near extinction and examines how a cabal of competitive, quirky individuals have been frantically lining their shelves with some of the rarest records in the world. Besides the mania of collecting, Petrusich also explores the history of the lost backwoods blues artists from the 1920s and 30s whose work has barely survived and introduces the oddball fraternity of men—including Joe Bussard, Chris King, John Tefteller, and others—who are helping to save and digitize the blues, country, jazz, and gospel records that ultimately gave seed to the rock, pop, and hip-hop we hear today. From Thomas Edison to Jack White, *Do Not Sell at Any Price* is an untold, intriguing story of the evolution of the recording formats that have changed the ways we listen to (and create) music. “Whether you’re already a 78 aficionado, a casual record collector, a crate-digger, or just someone who enjoys listening to music, you’re going to love this book” (Slate).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a good book, and for the most part an interesting read. I agree with other reviewers who say it is good to have a computer nearby to go to YouTube and actually listen to the songs discussed in the text. The book tells the story of a number of men - and briefly one woman - who are obsessed with collecting 78 rpm records and how the eccentricities of their personalities add to the overall adventure. I do wish the writer had given more attention to the issue of collecting in the context of whether a rare record is some sort of sign of cultural importance, or if it's rare because it wasn't worth buying in the first place. In other words, who determines what is culturally important? The general public? Record companies? Obsessed people at garage sales? To me that sort of critical discussion would have been more interesting than a lot of the personal blog/travelog episodes in the book. Giving a lot of time discussing scuba lessons and an unsuccessful dive into a river to find lost records tended to distract from the book rather than enhance the text. Still, this is a book about something within our culture that has a lot of musical treasure and I'm glad it is being brought to light. You'll enjoy it.

I love records, so that's why I wanted to read this book. I discovered so much more. It offers a great insight into early American blues music and delved into the minds of collectors. Anyone willing to learn to scuba dive to search a merky cold river in search of old 78's is both a lover of rare records and a little nuts! A great read!

A wonderful description of the human condition (or at least a part of it). Both funny and well written/presented. Author did a lot of research that was fascinating to read. I would highly recommend this book to anyone, both collector and non-collector alike.

If you like the "old, weird" music from an America now long gone--like Harry Smith's "The Anthology

of American Folk Music", "The Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of" (plus the sequel "The Return Of..."), and all the various box sets collecting early country blues and other then contemporary music--you will find this book of interest. It's simply one person's attempt to search out and begin to understand why (and who are) these people who collect old 78 RPM records with a detective's zeal and sometimes deep pockets. You'll come across collectors who are pure collectors--never paying much for a dirty, dusty, easily breakable shellac covered piece of history. Or others who buy low and sell high. But they all have one thing in common, to find these records before they disappear forever. What information the author gleans from her subjects is told in a witty, easy to read style. The book isn't perfect. The portion where the author, Amanda Petrusich, learns to scuba dive in order to search a river for old metal stampers or records themselves takes up too much space. But it's when she talks about going on a hunt with a longtime collector to a dirty, greasy swap meet in search of 78 RPM treasures where the book becomes interesting. Or her descriptions of some of the more (relatively) notable collectors (a difficult feat), the artists, the record labels, and her descriptions of hearing some of these long lost recordings for the first time that makes this book eminently readable. Some of these collectors are very private, "quirky", and sometimes suspicious of other collectors or anyone interested in what they collect. But Petrusich goes behind the surface and gives the reader at least some idea of why these people do what they do with such a fervent passion. Another interesting chapter is when Petrusich goes in search of original 78 RPM records from Harry Smith's collection. Smith put together "The Anthology of American Folk Music" set (now reissued by the Smithsonian) and if you've never heard this collection of music from the years 1927-1932 you need to. If you like "American music", this is it. It's revered by many well known musicians for giving them insight into different musical forms. Smith's choice of, and the recordings themselves, have a strange kind of wild magic about them. It's haphazard in contents--certainly not all-encompassing--but what's there you need to hear. And it's a sometimes strange listening experience, because I too had this happen to me, as related in the book--"...it's the weirdest thing, every time you listen to it...you think, 'Wait, was that song there before?'". It has that kind of an effect. But if you don't own this collection your music library has a hole in it. Check it out. I found myself liking this book the more I got into it. If you're a music collector or a deep music lover (like me) you'll recognize the feelings generated by the collectors in the book. The thrill of finding a long lost 78 RPM treasure, and the agony of your hopes dashed when your search is in vain and you come away empty handed. So if you find something special in hearing some old scratchy Paramount recordings (now issued on CD) or anything else that (usually) sounds like it was dragged over rocks and through the dirt, this book will give you a pretty good look into what it's all about.

Interesting book which explores both the world of the obsessive record collector and the psychology behind collecting. Well written and funny.

As a longtime dealer and collector(not of 78's), I found this book an absolutely compelling read. If you love music, you will love the story of the author, who at first sets out to document the strange, obsessive world of 78 collecting and the characters in that world, and rather quickly gets sucked in by the beauty of the music and quickly becomes one of the obsessed herself. A fantastic read, highest recommendation!

Maybe the best book about music, collecting music, listening to music I've read. (and I've read a few). I was constantly linked up with YouTube while reading. One of those books you hope never ends.

An interesting look at 78 rpm record collecting.

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