'Those two gentlemen changed everything': VinylCentric's new exhibit celebrates duo who created the groundwork for Canadian recording industry

By Eric Volmers — Published October 29, 2026



Ken Murphy, co-founder of VinylCentric Gallery at Bankers Hall in Calgary, shows off the new exhibit titled 'The 6000 Series' which explores how Paul White and Walt Grealis helped lay the foundation for Canada's music industry. Dean Pilling/ Postmedia

In 1962, a British expat named Paul White was in the Toronto offices of Capitol of Canada sorting through records that had been sent to him by EMI in Britain.

A few years earlier, he had established the 6000 Series for vinyl albums and the 72000 Series of rpm singles after realizing a number of fellow expats who had come to Canada after the Second World War still had a taste for music from back home.

By 1962, EMI was sending him 50 records a week from their London offices for consideration.

One week, a single from a then-unknown band from Liverpool stood out. The song was called Love Me Do by The Beatles, and he decided to take a chance and release it as a single in Canada. It bombed, selling only 170 copies. Undeterred, White released a second single by the band called Please Please Me. It sold 280 copies. He issued yet another, From Me To You, and it sold 300 copies.

“None of them sold!” says Ken Murphy, curator of the new exhibit, The 6000 Series, at VinylCentric Gallery and Archive at Bankers Hall in Calgary. “They all tanked.”

Finally, in September of 1963, White tried again and released She Loves You. Finally, the Canadian public heard what White heard. It blew up, selling 100,000 records. The first single, Love Me Do, was rediscovered and eventually sold 170,000 copies.

“That was the birth of Beatlemania in Canada,” Murphy says. “Which happened almost a full year before it happened in the United States, thanks to Paul White. So it’s a great success story. But that’s not really the story we’re telling.”

The 6000 Series tells the stories of two men who helped lay the groundwork for the Canadian recording industry. One is Walt Grealis, a former police officer with a passion for music whose contributions have been relatively well-documented. He founded the magazine RPM, which stood for Records, Promotion, Music, in 1964 and used it to tirelessly advocate for Canadian artists, making him a lone voice at the time. He invented the term CanCon and played a major part in establishing a Canadian star system in the music industry by co-founding with partner Stan Klees the RPM Gold Leaf music awards in 1970, which eventually became the Juno Awards. Klees and Grealis lobbied the federal government for protectionist measures. In 1970, the Canadian Radio- television and Telecommunications Commission imposed a 30 per cent content regulation for AM radio to force stations to fill their airwaves with Canadian-generated content. FM radio fell under the same regulations five years later.

Grealis, who died in 2004, was appointed to the Order of Canada in 1993 for his efforts. Every year, the Canadian Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences hands out The Walt Grealis Special Achievement Award to individuals who help the Canadian music industry grow.

Grealis was good friends with White, who tended to operate under the radar. As a result, his contributions have largely gone unheralded. Creating Beatlemania in Canada a year before it landed in the U.S. is a media-friendly hook. Yet, it’s only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to his story. White, who died in 2018, came to Toronto from England in 1957 at the age of 24 with the hope of becoming a journalist. Instead, he took a job in the warehouse of Capitol Records of Canada. Within a few years, he was put in charge of promotion. After the success of the Beatles, White began signing British Invasion bands to the Canadian label, securing The Dave Clark Five,

Gerry and the Pacemakers, The Hollies, Pink Floyd, The Yardbirds, Freddie and the Dreamers, Manfred Mann and Pink Floyd. Again, he recognized the merit of these acts long before his American counterparts did, and they made the company huge profits.

White quickly turned his attention to homegrown artists, using the profits generated from the British bands to develop Canadian talent.

“He was a recent immigrant, but he was a proud Canadian,” says Murphy. “He was upset that Canadian musical talent couldn’t access Canadian radio. It was a case where most commercial Canadian radio stations would look up what was hitting in the United States on Cashbox, Billboard and Variety and play that. ‘We don’t take risks on Canadian talent that nobody has ever heard of.’ Paul White wouldn’t have any of that, so he started to develop, sign, record and, most importantly, promote Canadian artists. He is a true hero for doing that.”

Under the 6000 Series, White began releasing work by The Esquires, an Ottawa band with a British Invasion sound that would eventually include guitarist Bruce Cockburn; Jack London and the Sparrows, who went on to become Steppenwolf; and The Staccatos, who evolved into the Five Man Electrical Band.

The fascinating stories behind White and Grealis are covered in the exhibit, but the heart of the display is dozens of posters and other collectibles on view. That includes a photo of White with the Beatles and rare Fab Four memorabilia, including those early 45s. There are old posters of the British Invasion acts signed in Canada and posters and album covers of homegrown talents under the 6000 Series. Murphy also displays some of the original RPM magazines, including the 1970 first edition.

Before moving to Calgary in 2012, Murphy was an executive who worked in Canadian specialty television. He is past president of Discovery Channel Canada and was part of the team that launched TSN. For the past 60 years, he has amassed a private collection, including 100,000 pieces of vinyl, posters, photographs, advertising, record players, recording technology and other artifacts related to the Canadian recording industry.

Murphy established VinylCentric Gallery and Archive as the public brand of the Canadian Museum of Recorded Music and Culture, a registered charity. In February 2026, Murphy opened the gallery’s first exhibit, PhonoSphere: A Brief History of the Record Player in Canadian Homes 1948-1978. In May, VinylCentric opened Hot for Harlem Revue, which uses rare photographs, posters and AI-generated videos to chronicle the Black performance culture from Harlem that flourished in Montreal clubs in the 1960s.

The 6000 Series, which is on display alongside artifacts from the first two exhibits, explores the important contributions of White and Grealis in the creation of the modern Canadian music industry.

“These two men were symbiotic in achieving the same outcome, which was, ‘Hey, we have all the talent in the world, but we have a dysfunctional system where emerging talent can’t get exposure, can’t get promotion and distribution in Canada,'” Murphy says. “Those two gentlemen, Paul White and Walt Grealis, changed everything.”

The 6000 Series is on display on the third floor of Bankers Hall.