

MUSIC ON THE INTERNET

– MUSIC SHARING NETWORKS & THE MUSIC INDUSTRY –

The internet is known to provide vast amounts of songs on pretty much any group, singer or even style you may like. There are two primary ways of accessing this music on the internet, though. You may buy singles or CDs from online shops such as Amazon, or simply download them from sharing networks like *WinMX* or *Bit Torrent* (where you may not have to pay for them, but you may not get the best quality either). The question that arises is how these music sharing networks are affecting the music industry.

To make things a bit simpler, it is a good idea to understand the basics of what it is we are talking about. Music sharing networks are like big music libraries where you can either download songs into your computer, having downloaded a (free) program to do this (for example, from *Kazaa*ⁱ) or pay for the program that will allow you to download as many songs as you want (for instance, from *Napster*ⁱⁱ). From both these types of networks you must download the files to be able to listen to the songs. On the other hand we have got the music industries themselves. These are (as it says on an internet encyclopaediaⁱⁱⁱ) the industries that create, perform, promote and preserve music.

It is easy to assume that everyday people are going to be in favour of music sharing networks and, record companies or singers, absolutely against it. But by checking a fare amount of websites, you realise this is not a simple two-sides-of-a-coin dilemma. Take Wayne Rosso for instance. He has been known for attacking the music industry for many years, but lately he has been said to be the driving force behind *Mashboxx*^{iv}. *Mashboxx* is a computer program that allows you to sample songs online but makes sure, through song-recognition technology, that you will not download them unauthorised. Labels want such a technique to be used by all file-sharing companies but, at present, not many do.

Being optimist about music sharing networks^v

You could consider music sharing networks good for the music industry if you thought of them as promoters of the music these industries are trying to share with the world. Take for instance someone downloading a song and realising he or she likes it, then he or she will make it accessible for the other people connected to the network and will actually encourage family and friends to listen to it. It might evolve into people enjoying it so much they want to buy the CD, this way paying the music industry for its job.

It is actually quite hard to keep track of which ways of music sharing are legal (or ethical rather than legal) and which are not. Who is the one to say where the line lies? It might be true that music sharing networks are jeopardising the music industry, but is it not worse to get hold of an original CD and make hundreds or thousands of pirate copies of it? At least some music sharing networks are playing by the rules and helping out these annoyed music industries.

Another positive aspect of music sharing networks such as the first widely-used sharing service *Napster* is that the music industry has had to realise that a big part of their clients are regular users of internet and music sharing networks is most definitely the way to get through to them. After this, some of the biggest names in music retail came together to offer digital music.

Being pessimist about music sharing networks^{vi}

There is always the choice of considering the music sharing networks the venom in the music industry's world. They are getting to people through the biggest door (taking this to be the internet), offering deals that any person could want (having the one song you like of a singer without having to buy his or her CD with the rest of insufferable songs you are sure you will never listen to) and not giving enough credit to the music industry which is, in theory, the one creating this music that networks are so willing to share (of course, you should read "credit" as the money-related term, rather than the honour-related one, since at the end of the day, what any industry wants, is money).

So the way the music sharing networks are basically affecting the music industry is by not paying artists (and therefore, rights' holders) for their work so, for instance, independent singers will not be able to make a living out of music unless they make a record deal with a major label to reach a larger number of potential fans, which will provide them with cash to pursue their careers.

What is *iTunes* and is this the light at the end of the tunnel?

iTunes^{vii} is a digital media player application that you can download for free from the internet and allows you to listen to music in two different ways¹. You can listen to the songs that people are sharing from their computers (these must be connected at the same time, to the same network, as you), or you can buy the songs so you can have them in your computer even if you are not on the network (and then you may share them with the rest of the people too).

This certainly looks like the best way to go around things. *iTunes* is directly connected with the music industry through the music download store built right in, making it both legal and ethic. It is also easy to use and, once you have imported and downloaded all your music there, it is very manageable as it allows you to manage it any way you like by means of playlists and folders.

But there are also flaws in this program that makes it not be the final step of the journey for music sharing networks and the music industry. To name one of the glitches, *Windows 2000* or *XP* is required to install *iTunes* for *Windows* but, for instance, *Windows ME* will not work. If the program is not available for any type of computer, there will still be people using the networks that do allow it, such as *Kazaa*. Also, ways to get around the technologies used by *iTunes* to avoid unauthorised downloads already exist; how do university students pass from simply sharing the music at halls of residence to having all the songs in their computers when they do not share the network anymore otherwise?

¹ *iTunes* also plays and organises video files, but it is not relevant for this essay.

So until the music industry decides how to let the music sharing networks affect its work, I think it is up to you to consider it a good effect, a bad one or neither. Making it such a subjective topic makes *you* have the last move of the board. Just make sure you are playing by your rules (and if these are not their rules... just don't get caught!).

ⁱ <http://www.kazaa.com>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.napster.com>

ⁱⁱⁱ Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia,
http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/Music_industry, 2001-2005

^{iv} Healey, Jon "The new face of file sharing?",
<http://www.latimes.com/business>, Entertainment Business section, May 2005

I thought this website to be reliable since it is part of *The Times*. It contributed to my essay the fact that it corroborated the idea of this not being a yes or no answer.

^v 1) Forgrave, Raid "File-sharing networks examined",
<http://news.cincinnati.com>, Enquirer section, Feb. 2005

2) Osborne, Brian "Music retailers form consortium to offer digital music"
<http://www.geek.com>, Geek News section, Jan. 2003

I did not think these websites were extremely reliable, but I did think they made fair points about the positive aspects of music sharing networks.

^{vi} 1) Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF),
<http://www.eff.org>, Share section

2) GilmerArdel, "Grokster bad, music industry good",
<http://forums.neworleans.com>, Technology section, Jul. 2005

The first website is signed up as an organisation, so I assumed I could take this as being pretty reliable. The article I read from the second website is not an official news, but someone's opinion. I chose this one to apply on my essay because of the relevance of his comments.

^{vii} <http://www.apple.com/itunes/>