

# SOUNDS

Dear Linux Magazine Reader,



Joe Casad, Editor in Chief

Recently I've been thinking about getting some kind of music playing device. Certainly everyone else in my vicinity has one. It isn't that I need to keep up with the crowd – or that such a device would make me feel like less of a dinosaur around the teenagers and pre-teenagers who inhabit my house. The main advantage I see is avoiding the clutter.

I have never really gotten on well with the technical details of music listening. Even in the old days, when the sounds came on big, flat, fragile hunks of vinyl that everyone knew required dutiful maintenance, I took risks with my collection that would make the audiophiles crackle and sputter. I never could relate to the obsessive steps that record collectors would go to protect their investments – tiny bottles of cleaning fluid, little wooden cleaning tools lined with dust-catching anti-lint fabric. Long lines of alphabetized records. The little tool rested on a little tool holder. Before you played a record, you placed the record on the turntable, started the turntable spinning, lifted the little tool, placed cleaning fluid on the fabric strip attached to the little tool, and gently pressed the fabric to the vinyl of the turning disk, lightly catching any dust that might have fallen in the grooves. We would watch the host enact this ritual as we sat around the stereo, on couches and pillows, waiting for the album to play. It was probably some crude approximation of the act of watching the host prepare a primitive campfire or, more recently, watching the host prepare and serve tea cups at tea time. Then we would all listen together.

The people who took the time for these rituals always had the best record collections – of course, because they cared the most. I respected their energy and commitment to their records, but it wasn't really my thing. I am encouraged by this idea of placing all my music on a single electronic device so I never have to mess with the task of organizing the locations of CDs and CD cases.

And since I'm getting a storage device, why not get something as tiny as possible, so I can bring it with me wherever I go and listen to it through all the phases of my existence? That's actually the part that worries me most about this brave new situation. Of course, I'm not the first old guy to wonder whether all these teenagers will fall down the stairs or cause traffic accidents as they lumber around the sidewalks, walking the iPod zombie walk. But I

wonder whether we really have a replacement for music as a communal act.

My son, who is a music student in college, recently brought home a thought he had heard from one of his teachers: Rather than learning to listen to music, people today must train themselves *not* to listen to music. Music is all around us, in our car, in the elevator, in the restaurant, in the grocery store, and instead of working on listening to it more closely, we work on the habit of listening *less* closely, so that we can still participate in the rest of our lives.

This whole new approach to the primordial human experience of listening to music was brought to us not because there was any particular reason to do it, but because it was thrown in for free with these new technologies – starting with the Sony Walkman back in the 1980s – that made it possible.

I'm sure the naysayers made the same complaints about the radio, the tape deck, and every other technology that has arrived in the past 200 years, so I'm not saying I'm right, but I'm not necessarily wrong about this, either.

Sure, I would love an MP3 player – for the home, maybe a big clunky one that stays in one place and looks like a 1930s era radio. As for this business of riding the bus and boating on the lake, I'm liking silence. I'll stay unplugged for now.

Joe

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