

An up-to-date look at free software and its makers

PROJECTS ON THE MOVE

The new Debian Sarge version is finally released after months of anticipation and years of effort. You'll learn more about Sarge and also hear about some promising Linux music tools.

BY MARTIN LOSCHWITZ

Linus Torvalds recently made the first move towards a new, free version control system entitled Git [1]. See last month's Kernel News for more on Linus's Git version control initiative. The Git system was developed very soon after the software company BitMover revoked an arrangement that let Linux kernel developers use a scaled-down version of the BitMover's BitKeeper version control tool. Git is designed explicitly for Linux kernel development and is not intended as a generic replacement for other version control systems such as CVS or Subversion. The current Git version is already stable and looks likely to completely replace Bitkeeper in kernel 2.6.12.

Sarge Released

Good things come to those who wait, assuming you are patient enough. On June 6, 2005, long after many had given up hope, the Debian project finally announced the release of Debian GNU/Linux 3.1 Sarge. Many believe it is high time that Sarge has finally reached the public. Version 3.0 of Debian Linux, alias Woody, is about to celebrate its

third birthday and can hardly be called state-of-the-art.

Of course, test versions of Sarge have been available for some time, and for the last weeks leading to the release, Sarge was in a state known as *frozen*. The major difference between *testing* and *frozen* is that packages from the unstable branch no longer automatically enter a branch that is designated as frozen. The release managers manually insert any programs that need to be added to the frozen branch. Anthony Towns, who was the release manager until just a few months ago, adopted a restrictive policy for making changes at this late state of production, and the current team has followed a similar course. In other words, few changes occurred between the frozen version and the final Sarge release.

The Debian release team recently stated that one thing delaying the final release of Sarge was the fact that the security infrastructure was being set up, and immediate bugfixes could not be guaranteed. Once Martin Schulte, a member of the security team, gave the go-ahead, developers could proceed with

fixing the remaining bugs that held up the final release.

Meeting in July

The preparations for Debconf 5 [2], the sixth official Debian Developer Conference, are in full swing. The meeting is planned for July 10 through 17 in Helsinki, under the slogan of "See You In Hel." The organizers selected a venue that should mean a lot to the Linux community, with Helsinki being Linus Torvalds's place of birth. At the same time, the decision to stage the conference in Helsinki is in line with the tradition of alternately taking Debconf to venues inside and outside of Europe.

Andreas Schuldei will be playing a major role in organizing this year's event, and he has already put in a lot of work up front. The conference has companies such as HP, Nokia, and IBM signed up as sponsors, and thanks to their financial support, some developers who would not have been able to afford the trip under normal circumstances will now be in attendance.

The conference homepage has a multi-page list of talks; for example, members

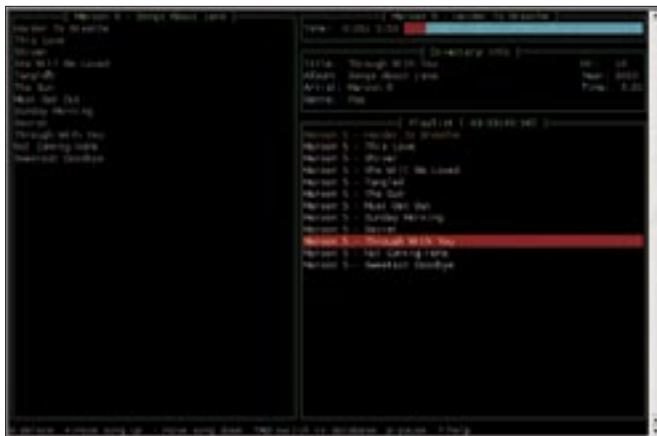


Figure 1: Pytone can handle playlists, keep track of your favorite songs, and read the meta info from MP3 files.

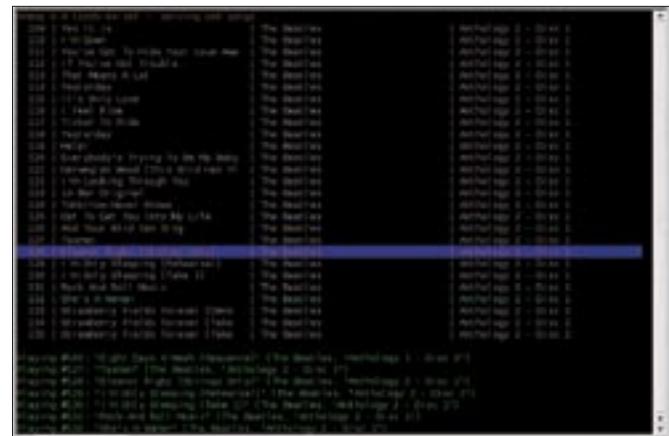


Figure 2: NMeep is a text-based client for the Meep music tool with a Curses interface.

of the release team will be talking about their work, and Joey Hess will be talking about his idea of adding security updates to the testing branch in the future.

Jukebox

There are MP3 players for any taste: no matter whether you like them lean and mean or prefer a full-featured all-rounder. But there is one requirement common to most players: a resource-devouring X server. This requirement is hardly likely to faze your average desktop, and servers are not typically asked to play music. But now Linux PCs are becoming more common in living rooms, and Linux-based multimedia terminals continue to oust legacy hi-fi systems.

Interior designers are unlikely to take warmly to the sight of a keyboard and a screen in the living room, and this has led to people resorting to SSL-based solutions located in adjacent rooms or infrared remote controls. This type of solution makes GUI-based players more difficult to control, and it does not make a lot of sense to install a GUI and waste all those resources just to control a player. But help is at hand in the form of a text-based MP3 player that provides all the convenience you would expect from a GUI-based player.

Console users have a choice of several players. The best-known programs are titled MPG 123 and MPG 321. The main difference between these text-based players is their licenses. The MPG 123 license does not allow the program to be sold and restricts its use in other applications. In contrast to this, MPG 321 is GPL'd. But if you simply want to play a

few tracks and do not need playlists or other conveniences, you should be fine with either program.

Snake Fodder

Pytone [3] gives you a lot more (Figure 1.) As the name suggests, Pytone is a Python program. Pytone comes with a Curses interface and is amazingly feature-rich. The main window is divided into four sections. The file browser on the left displays a list of tracks sorted by genre, artist, or album. The right-hand side shows you the current track and gives you a progress indicator. The box below these panels provides additional information about the track, such as the genre and the album title. And finally, at the bottom of the screen, there is the playlist which shows you the songs up next.

Before launching Pytone, users will need to create a `~/.pytone/pytonerc` configuration file, and they will at least need to add the path to their MP3 collection on disk:

```
[database.main]
musicbasedir=~/mp3
```

Users can select an entry in the file browser to add that entry to the playlist. You can store the playlist in the M3U standard format, which most audio players support. Pytone does not give you remote controls, and this makes a display indispensable.

Meep, Meep

In contrast to Pytone, the Meep [4] project, which is still under heavy development, can be controlled from anywhere

on your network. The Meep design uses a daemon to play tracks, with either a client running on the network or the same machine providing controls. This means you can control a jukebox-only PC from any device on your network. Besides the daemon, there are only two text-based Meep clients available at this time of writing: a simple command line program and a client based on the Curses interface titled NMeep (see Figure 2), which gives you basic functionality.

The fact that Meep provides the ability to develop more clients makes it an ideal choice for many situations. A GUI-based and full-featured front-end could allow users to control the player locally or from any machine on the network; another client tailored for wireless settings could then talk to an infrared remote control, giving users a screen and keyboard-less hi-fi system.

That's all folks...

... for this month at least, but we do have one request before we go: if you can recommend a program that you would like to see featured in *Projects on the Move*, why not mail me with your suggestion [5]? I look forward to your comments! ■

INFO

- [1] Git: <http://kernel.org/git>
- [2] Debconf 5: <http://www.debconf.org/debconf5>
- [3] Pytone: <http://www.luga.de/pytone/>
- [4] Meep: <http://neveragain.de/meep>
- [5] Tips and suggestions: projects@linux-magazine.com