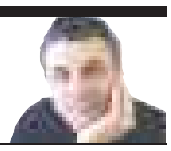
Life & times

Debating piracy of the high Cs

Craig Gamble
FAST LIVING

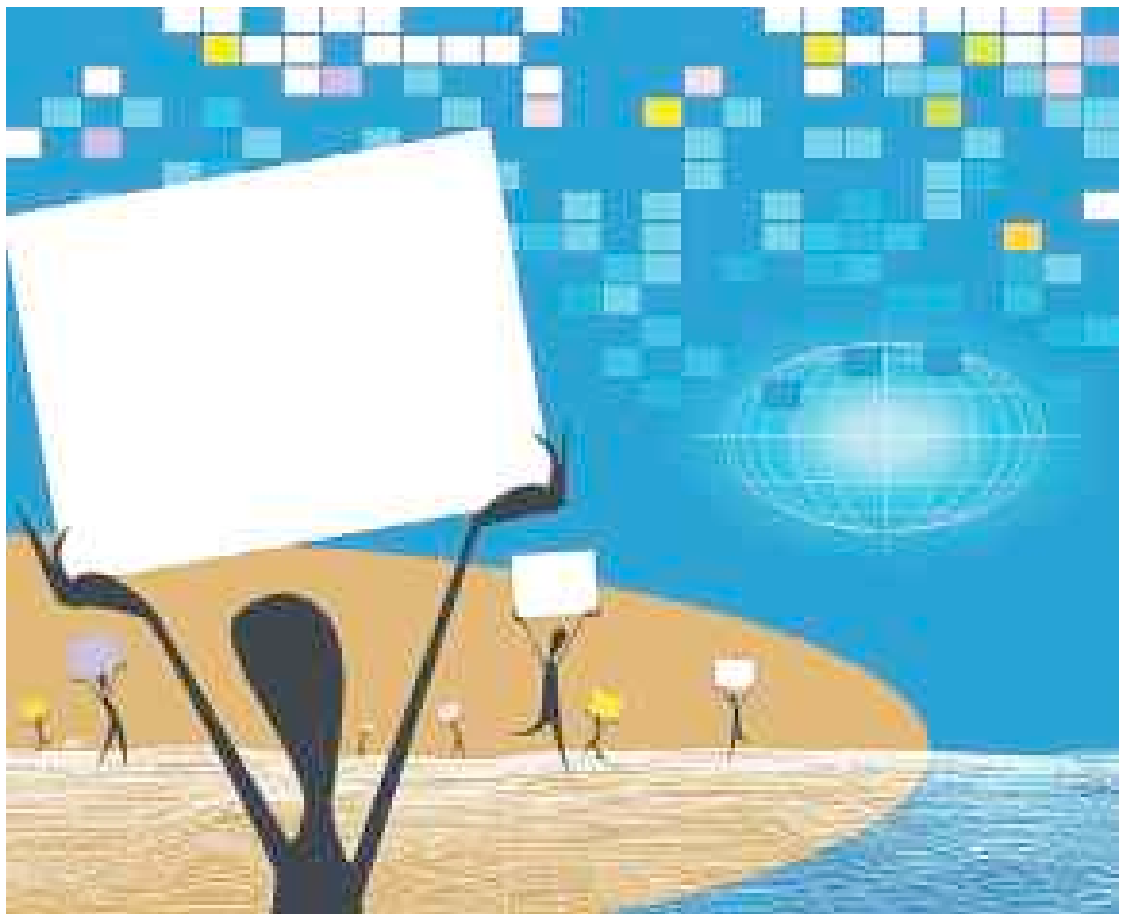


I've spent the last few days in bed with the flu, and have once again given thanks for the invention of the digital music player. A constant stream of music and podcasts helped pass the hours. What a great thing digital music is, and how much a part of our world.

I listened to one podcast detailing the huge success of the recent re-release of the Beatles' complete works on CD in a giant boxed set and individual discs. In the first few weeks of issue sales were over two million copies worldwide. In the current context of steeply declining CD sales, those figures are impressive. But the speculation is all about how big sales might have been had the music been available digitally – the Beatles being arguably the biggest band to have rejected the digital medium, keeping them out of such online retailers as the iTunes store.

Sure, they have a right to be wary, with the debate over illegal file-sharing and pirated music still raging, but it is at best naive to think withholding your music from legitimate online retailers is going to protect you from the pirates. With the arrival last week of the Pirate Party in Australia, file-sharing and downloading music are much in the news again; it's an issue that won't go away anytime soon.

You may remember the court case some months back involving the file-sharing site Pirate Bay, in which, to many people's surprise, the founders of the site were found guilty of promoting the sharing of illegal files over the internet. The case against Pirate Bay was taken by major music and film companies in their continuing – and rather fruitless, it seems to me – struggle against the burgeoning digital-music industry, both legal and illegal. The court case, which some saw as a bigger battle about protecting internet freedoms, gave the associated political party a lot of traction in Sweden, where all this took place. So much, in fact, that the Pirate Party won 7.1 per cent of Swedish votes in the June European elections, allowing its leader to take a seat in the European Parliament. The party there is vehemently opposed to the criminalisation of illegal file-sharing in Sweden and beyond. The Pirate Party is now an internationally popular movement and in Australia it has professed an agenda of bolstering ''democratic conventions'', which translates to a range of anti-copyright, anti-censorship and anti-DRM (digital rights management) legislation. The Pirate Party is of course concerned at the current Government's plans to filter the internet, and to consider introducing a ''three strikes and you're out'' policy here. Under this sort of policy a person found guilty of sharing music or other media obtained illegally can be banned from all internet access after three offences.



It's fascinating to see how this same debate is taking shape in Europe. There the French Parliament has already passed a three strikes law to a great deal of criticism from privacy campaigners, who argue that the law, by its nature, will allow its enforcers unprecedented access into people's homes and private lives. The law is sure to encounter a lot of legal opposition before it can be used, but that hasn't stopped the Government in Britain proposing a similar law. In Britain, though, it's the musicians themselves who've been getting all the press. They've organised themselves into the Featured Artists Coalition (FAC), fronted by musicians such as Radiohead's guitarist Ed O'Brien, to make some concerted submissions to the British Government on what should be done about file-sharing, and how to protect the artists without punishing the fans. The FAC was initially opposed to punishing persistent illegal file-sharers, but several artists, including singer Lily Allen, have come out in support of a three-strikes law. It seems Allen has decided file-sharing has the potential to ruin the industry – which is somewhat ironic, given it was the popularity of her music shared for free on her Facebook page that broke her into the mainstream.

> The Pirate Party won 7.1 per cent of Swedish votes in the June European Parliament elections, giving its leader a seat.

File sharing: MICHAEL WHITEHEAD illustration (2004)

Just in the past week, though, the FAC has reached a consensus, supporting the idea of warnings for persistent illegal file-sharers and, as a last resort, restrictions to their internet access. Effectively their internet access is made so slow that sharing even a small file becomes impossible. It seems that many in the FAC, rather than seeing the sharing of digital music online as a threat to their livelihoods (as it surely is to the big music companies), view it as an invaluable way to help them and emerging artists to spread the word about their music. The better this is done, and the more freely available and fairly priced online music is, the less likely it is that pirates will find an environment in which to prosper.

I think it can safely be said that, had the music industry realised the demand for digital music available online many, many years ago, and acted to be a major player there, we would not even be having this debate today. You can't, I suppose, blame them for not having a reliable crystal ball, but there has been huge evidence of digital music's popularity for many years now, and still they seem to be dragging the chain, letting others such as iTunes take the market away from them. If the artists can organise to decide what they would like the digital landscape to look like for them, then surely it's about time the companies do the same.

gamblecr@gmail.com

The gaining of self-knowledge should not be Greek to us

SLOW LIVING

It took Nietzsche 21 years to come up with a book title – *How One Becomes What One Is*. Interestingly, his deliberations were about how to translate a Greek maxim in order to convey the most relevant message for his particular brand of radical philosophy. But it is not the 21-year-old translation that is slow, it is the 2500-year-old message from the Ancient Greek poet Pindar – to become oneself through learning – that is slow. This injunction seeps through time, and through the human psyche like blood through stone.

We learn how to ''grow into'' ourselves slowly, through those life experiences which dawn on us like snaky thunderbolts when they strike. It may be the negotiation of school-yard dynamics, the break-up of a relationship, the stress of bereavement, the leap of faith, the test of one's mettle, the full belly-laugh at one's own comic existence; these are the things of our emotional intelligence. It is this diversity of challenge that teaches us who we are.

Some people spend a lifetime slowly learning how to care for the self and, by extension, to care for others. Certainly we cannot sit in ivory towers and self-learn through the mind and books alone. Experiencing the ''depths'' of feeling, whether joyful and exquisite or fearful and raw, adds to the complexity of self-ness.

Ordinary people have known for a long time that greed was fuelling global capitalist economics, and since the global financial crisis they have begun to notice that their own micro spending practices feed into the jaws of the macro-economy like krill into large-mouthed fish. How is this connected to the slow learning of self? The ease of consumerism and the notion of comfort-buying and comfort-eating are distractions of illusion. The loss of life savings, or a job, are 'thundercrack messages' that can fundamentally show us who we are. Our resilience and creativity as carers for self can support us only if we've learned where and how to be creative and how to understand our own specks of existence as minute and slowly learned but awesome in their potential. Becoming oneself through learning is an active state of being, not passive and dupe-like. Slowly emerging from the knowledge that the world does not ''do to us'' but we ''do to it'', is ironic given the time that we, ''the privileged'', have had to ruminate over Pindar's message.

> Experiencing the 'depths' of feeling, whether joyful and exquisite or fearful and raw, adds to the complexity of self-ness.

Dr Julia Horncastle is a member of the Centre For Everyday Life at Murdoch University.