

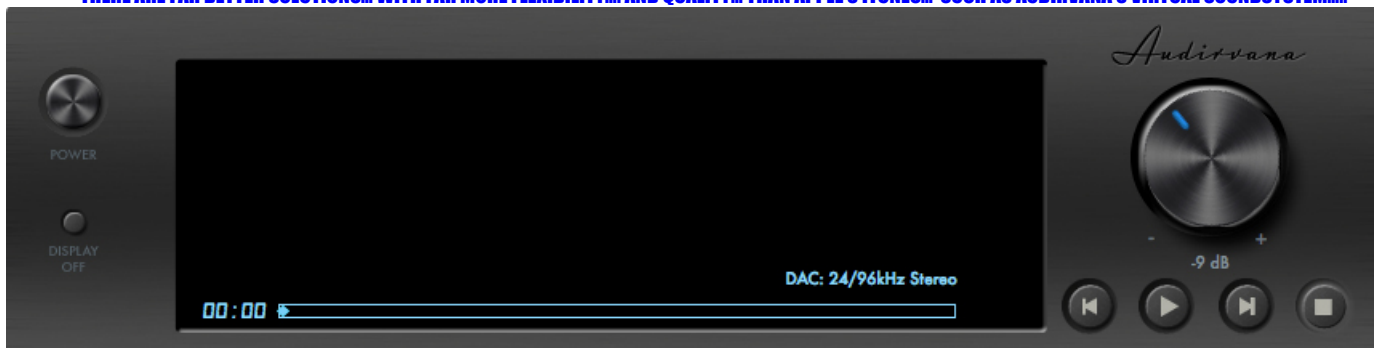
Thoughts and Observations on [Music](#), Nature, and Politics, from the Catskill Mountains

The Grouse House Gazette

ISSUE #114 – AUGUST 31st, 2015 www.GHGAZETTE.com www.GILBERTHETHERWICK.com

HOW I ESCAPED THE APPLE iTunes PRISON!

THERE ARE FAR BETTER SOLUTIONS... WITH FAR MORE FLEXIBILITY... AND QUALITY... THAN APPLE'S ITUNES... SUCH AS AUDIRVANA'S VIRTUAL SOUNDSYSTEM...



I should preface this piece with the point that I am a “mac based” computer person... and some of my recommendations may not apply to “windows based” computer users. But in my traversing the new digital musical landscape... I did discover that there were certainly more “windows only” music software solutions than “mac only” ones. Although as usual... many support both platforms. Also... this article is aimed at people who have LARGE music collections... do a lot of serious listening... and still enjoy the concept of OWNING a carefully sculpted music collection. I have culled my musical collection down to around 14,000 “tracks” (how I HATE that word). But it’s all stuff that I feel I may actually want to listen to. And “Spotify” fans should move right along... GH

When the iPod became a HUGE success in 2002 after Apple’s second generational expansion included the PC/Windows market... Jobs and company began weaving an intricate tapestry of interconnections between their iPods... the iTunes software (found on essentially EVERYONE’S computers)... and the iTunes store where they planned to sell everyone in the world “Apple” music.

Music that... by the way... could ONLY be played back through iTunes software.

Can you imagine a music store thirty years ago insisting that the albums they sold you could only be played on a turntable purchased FROM THEIR STORE? Even if it had crappy quality and inferior sound?

Similar to Thomas Edison’s attempt to “harness” (in more ways than one!) electricity before him... Steve Jobs wanted to own the trains, the track, and the station... in music’s future. The money wouldn’t be so much in the music... it would be in the hardware. Just as Edison planned to make his money in light bulbs, phonographs, and electrical appliances.

I was an early adaptor of the first generation of iPod... And like everyone else... I used iTunes to burn my CDs into cheap little MP3 files as I went through a major spending splurge at the iTunes store... filling out my collection to cover albums I once owned on LP but had never bought on CD. I LOVED the convenience of easily being able to find a specific song.

Having worked in music retail stores for nearly ten years... I NEVER want to FILE another CD or LP on a shelf or in a box again! Been there and DONE THAT!

And with digital EVERYTHING is always where it should be. And who doesn’t like “playing D.J.” every now and then.

The downside to my early adaptation of digital music files over CDs was that I had no idea at the time that eventually hard drive technology would grow to where you didn’t have to “dumb the music down” to low-resolution MP3 files. So thousands of my titles are STILL in low-resolution files.

For all of my favorite artists I have gone back and burned them at full CD 44.1/16 resolution so that they sound the same as the CDs.

Over the last FIFTEEN years of “digital collecting” my music collection has expanded and exploded and the “metadata” (the information about the song... the artist... the composer... Etc.) had become completely out of whack or sometimes it didn’t exist at all. I had been putting off organizing and upgrading my digital collection for years and have been dying to get rid of my physical CDs.

Then recently after upgrading my main office computer (that manages my personal music collection) I ended up with the latest version of Apple’s iTunes. And I HATED the latest version and decided it was time to check out alternate possibilities than Apple for my collection.

In the old days of iTunes... editing the metadata was relatively easy... but this

new version has so many ridiculous bells... whistles... radio stations and photos and shit... that it makes it difficult to work within. I wanted OUT of iTunes!

Plus... I would be listening to something in MY collection and see an ad recommending other stuff for ME to buy at THEIR store! Totally FASCIST!

Through my consulting work with HDTracks (www.HDTracks.com) I had learned that there were better players out there for audio quality than iTunes and also better CD "burning" and file "conversion" software.

After a good bit of reading and research I bought and downloaded a player called an "Audirvana Plus" for around \$70. It's totally "virtual" (the picture on the front of The Gazette is a "screen shot" of the APP).

You can use the program to both organize and play your music... OR... in a mode where it works WITH iTunes... thus letting you get the improved sound of Audirvana but with the graphic interface of your regular iTunes program. I of course OPTED OUT of THAT feature!

<https://audirvana.com>

There is certainly better sound on Audirvana than from iTunes and the ability to edit your metadata is incredible. And there are a lot of short cuts that let you get your information together quickly.

From my years in retail... I have naturally felt that artists should be filed by their LAST NAMES... and I hate that some egghead at Apple decided a long time ago that they should be filed by their FIRST!

Joni Mitchell in the "J"s? WTF!?

Where did these people shop for records?

So I actually go through and change every artist from "Joni Mitchell" to "Mitchell - Joni". It only takes a few seconds once you have all of an artist's tracks assembled alphabetically together.

Also... when you import using iTunes it can do this weird thing of putting an album under a category called "collections" rather than under the artist's name. This took me forever to go through and sort out... but everything is now all where it should be.

And I make special Audirvana "albums" (Or... I suppose "playlists"... if you must).

For example... I only really like THREE songs by the band Badfinger... So in MY

collection they are all on an album called "Three Decent Songs by Badfinger!".

And when it comes to "Jefferson Starship"... I only have ONE album... "Blows Against the Empire". As I should.

But I changed the name to "Jefferson Starship... THE REAL THING!" to differentiate between Paul Kantner's original musical experiment... and the later horrific crap of an abysmal pop band where the session guys took over the show.

I do have their ONE single of "We Built This City" carefully tucked away on a "playlist" called... "THE WORST FUCKING POP SONGS OF ALL TIME!"

Just to amuse myself on long road trips.

I love Grace Slick... But really...

Classical music has been difficult to fit into these metadata "digital pigeon holes" ever since the beginning of music files.

While pop music has an artist... a song... and an album... AN OPERA can have eight singers... a chorus... a conductor... an orchestra... a composer... the opera name... act... scene... or aria!

I put the composer in the "artist" box... then the artist name followed by the work in the "album" box... and then the movement or aria goes in the "song" box.

It's kind of awkward... but it works.

With the metadata downloaded already you never have to type anything. You just move it around the little "squares" so it fits into today's simplistic "pop" world.

When you've burned CDs on your computer I'm sure you've noticed that all of the names... titles... and even the artwork seem to magically materialize.

A lot of people think this info is embedded on the CD... but it is actually downloaded "metadata" from an Internet company called "Grace Notes".

But other programs than iTunes can also pull in this "metadata" information and do a more accurate job of burning to multiple file formats and resolutions.

I have found a nice program that does this very well called "XLD".

<http://sourceforge.net/projects/xld/>

It lets you rip your CDs to a wide variety of file types and resolutions and will pull in the titles and artist info along with album covers from the internet... just like iTunes... but with better burning results.

After loading up Audirvana with what I THOUGHT were all of my music files... I discovered that my old iTunes library was about FOUR THOUSAND songs larger than my new Audirvana one.

Then it hit me... THESE were all of the files that I had BOUGHT from APPLE... and they therefore wouldn't play in my new improved digital music world!

WHAT BULLSHIT!

But on Google I discovered an amazing little program called TuneClone! And it works great! <http://www.tunecclone.com>

First you sort your entire music library in "the finder" by file type. This will let you group ALL of the files that you bought from Apple together (these are M4P files).

Then you drag and drop your entire collection of Apple purchased files into the TuneClone program... and in a few minutes you have fully playable MP3 files!

And for burning CDs there's the excellent "Toast" program that I have used for years. <http://www.roxio.com/enu/products/toast/?gclid=CKCq3pOK0scCFVYTHwod8jgGdw>

And a GREAT program for converting files from one format to another is "Max"! <http://www.macupdate.com/app/mac/19873/max>

All of my music is now also backed up to the Carbonite Cloud (It took about three weeks!)... plus 2 hard drives.

So everything is safe.

There are also multiple places to buy your music downloads today rather than Apple... and without their restrictions.

For "normal" lower resolution files (if disc space and time are a concern) I find the Amazon files sound better than Apple and their latest download manager works great.

But for those looking for the ULTIMATE in sound quality... the download manager at HDTracks (www.hdtracks.com) works terrifically and gives you files FAR exceeding the quality of your now "primitive" CDs! (Insert "plug" for my clients here!)

It feels great to finally organize everything... and now I'm listening to stuff I haven't heard in DECADES!

Gilbert Hetherwick

www.GHGAZETTE.com

Hetherwick@me.com

Latest Album... www.HETHERWICK-MUSIC.com

For a weekend of escape go to... www.GROUSEHOUSE.net