

Ol' Blues and Rare Soul

By Dr Lee Chung Horn, Editorial Board Member

I recently discovered the joy of music blogs.

For the last nine months, I'd been coming home from work to surf the internet, trawling cyberspace for interesting music. I look for old music and new music, sampling stuff I haven't developed a taste for yet, as well as downloading stuff I know well enough to sing in my sleep.

Music blogs, or more specifically MP3 blogs, if you haven't heard, are all the rage these days. A blog is a web diary, and a music blog is a diary that revolves around music. The music blog creator makes music files, normally using the MP3 format, uploading them for kindred fans to download for free. A good blog attracts up to 4000 visitors per day.

Nobody's sure who came up with the first MP3 blog. I reckon the first one appeared around 2002, but from as recently as a year ago, when there were perhaps two dozen music blogs, the phenomenon has bloomed. Now, there are well over 80 blogs in the blogosphere, with new ones appearing every day from all over the world, specialising in everything from hardcore punk to pre-World War II gospel.

The basic tenet of music blogging is nicely summarised in this blog bio. Says the author: "So I said to myself, looking at my collection of LPs and CDs, why not share some of this, with a slant toward stuff that's hard to find or a bit obscure. If I offend by posting something I shouldn't, let me know, and I'll pull it. I only want this stuff to get out there. And if you like it, and it's available, BUY IT!"

So it's all free, and gratifyingly it's not attracting the kind of hostile reaction that's closed down Napster, and threatening Kazaa. The reason for this is because music blogs aren't about Top 40 music stars. Blogs generally ignore acts like Shakira, Gwen Stefani, Christina Aguilera, Simple Plan, or Sting – they just aren't cool enough.

Yes, there is one blog that publishes an obsessive daily report on Britney Spears. But most blog sites are beehives of discussion that focus on below-the-radar genres and artists.

For example, when the new Daft Punk album came out this year, the blogs came alive with tracks from the record. Writers had a field day, slamming it as a pale comparison to the band's earlier records, or trying to save it from being unfairly savaged.



So, it's not surprising the music industry isn't training its guns on blogs. Not when blogs give radio hits a wide berth, and certainly not when bloggers are weird-uncle types more

into scholarly forums on Joni Mitchell's 1971 album *Blue*, or unearthing unheard of songwriters like Clifford T Ward. (He wrote a song Art Garfunkel recorded.)

Exploring music blogs is great fun. Some great blogs to plug: *Benn Loxo Du Taccu* (African pop), *Cocaine Blunts & Hip Hop Tapes* (obscure hip-hop), *Copy, Right?* (cover versions of every stripe – I found a version of Yazoo's "Don't Go" by James Last), *The Mystical Beast* (long-forgotten rock), *Said the Gramophone* (indie rock), *Soul Sides* (ultra-rare soul), *Spoilt Victorian Child* (indie rock and psychedelia), *The Suburbs Are Killing Us* (reggae), *Vinyl Mine* (old punk rock vinyl), *Honey Where You Been So Long* (pre-war blues), and *Keep The Coffee Coming* (the ramblings of a more than middle-aged woman looking at the world with increasingly blurred eyes and wrinkled features).

Most MP3 blogs have a standard format. They post two or three songs a day, each one accompanied by a paragraph or two about the song or the artist. Some bloggers post photographs, or links to places where their readers can buy the CD on which the songs appear.

It's also standard etiquette to remove each audio file after a few days, and many music blogs state on their front pages that they'll happily remove any song upon the copyright holder's request.

Initially, I was terrified I was breaking the law. If using Kazaa could get you into dangerous trouble, are MP3 blogs safe? The answer is it's a gray area, and all MP3 bloggers tend to work from the principle that it's easier to get forgiveness than permission.

No one's been hauled to court, and nobody's talking about suing bloggers. Record companies have generally been benevolent towards music blogs, even to the point of mailing prominent music bloggers free CDs in the hope that they'll promote them by posting a song or two.

Of course, it's naïve to think that record companies and lawyer types would leave blogs alone forever. But anyone who has a love for music and has been around these sites would see that MP3 blogs are a nascent, grass-roots phenomenon, done only for love. As far as I can see, nobody's figured out how to get anything but a little hipness from curating one. And if there is any way you could make a dollar from posting an obscure track like Minnie Riperton's *Les Fleur*, I'd like to know it.

To my mind, I guess what keeps me coming back night after night to the music blogosphere is they're all filtered through the prism of a single person's aesthetic. It's one man's opinion on music. Quite unlike radio or traditional print media, blogs never second-guess other people's tastes – the door's open if you want to sample the music; but go away if you don't find the menu interesting.

Oh yes, just five nights ago, I found out that country singer Willie Nelson has just made a reggae album. It won't be released for a bit, but it's sitting pretty in my hard disk. ■



About the author:

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