I'm about halfway through transferring the music from my nearly 1,000 vinyl albums ... to compact disc. How's that for old-fashioned?

The setup is basic and sweet: I take the vinyl ("Whipped Cream & Other Delights" by Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass, for example) and run the sound through the amplifier and out to my CD burner. It's not a computer component; it's an actual piece of hardware that connects to the rest of my stereo system with RCA jacks. I've destroyed two of them so far in my quest to digitize Gustav Mahler and John Lennon not to mention Louis Armstrong & the All-Stars performing the hits of Fats Waller.

I've read many guides on the Internet and the nation's newspapers about how to skip this tedious process by transferring my tracks directly to the computer, but so far, none has proven sufficient to my non-geek needs. Not only that, I suspect that my computer doesn't have enough processing power to handle so much music, so I burn like "Fire in Cairo."

It turns out that I'm not the only music fan going nuts with the CDs. Mitch Bainwol, head of the Recording Industry Association of America, told the Associated Press that CD burning still beats file sharing on the list of top affronts to the major record labels:

"'Burned' CDs accounted for 29 percent of all recorded music obtained by fans in 2004, compared to 16 percent attributed to downloads from online file-sharing networks," the AP wrote. "The data, compiled by the market research firm NPD Group, suggested that about half of all recordings obtained by music fans in 2004 came from authorized CD sales and about 4 percent from paid music downloads. ... 'CD burning is a problem that is really undermining sales,' Bainwol said in a phone interview before addressing about 750 members of the National Association of Recording Merchandisers in San Diego on Friday. '(Copy protection technology) is an answer to the problem that clearly the marketplace is going to see more of,' he added."

I don't think the recording industry is feeling the sting from legions of people like me who want their Werner Mueller albums on a CD transfer. (I can't imagine those Phase 4 beauties are even on CD, let alone iTunes, but I've been wrong before.) While I might be a small part of the problem, the RIAA and record store retailers are feeling the heat from the thriving CD-to-CD burn.

"With all the attention the RIAA has placed on online file-sharing in recent years, the focus on CD burning Friday was welcomed by music retailers like Alayna Hill-Alderman, who said she's seen music CD sales slide in recent years while sales of blank recordable CDs have soared," the AP reported. "'We are feeling the decline in our store sales, especially with regard to R&B and the hip-hop world,' said Hill-Alderman, co-owner of Record Archive, a two-store company operating in Rochester, N.Y. 'It's all due to burning."
We've lost tremendous amounts of those sales to flea markets and bodegas."

None of this means that file sharing isn't a problem for people trying to make a living in the music business. Instead, it shows that traditional methods of violating copyright law are -- if less futuristic and headline-grabbing -- very alive and very well. And the music industry's response is to work on a way to allow a limited number of times that you can burn a CD before it locks itself up.

Here's the AP on that angle: "The CDs typically allow users to burn no more than a handful of copies. Velvet Revolver's 'Contraband,' released last year, was equipped with such copy-protection technology and grabbed the top sales spot in its debut week. Some saw that as a sign music fans didn't mind CDs with copy restrictions. But other releases since, such as the latest Foo Fighters album, have sometimes spawned fan complaints that the restrictions go too far or create technology conflicts with portable audio devices."

I understand that CDs still account for so much of the music business's revenues, from the retailer in Rochester to the lawyers in Los Angeles, but this kind of action seems a tad on the late side. CDs are tangible, unlike the ethereal digital bytes of the Internet, but the content on those discs will continue to flow illegally unless the recording industry completely locks them up.

That seems unlikely to happen. Instead, the industry should take a cue from the success of iTunes and other legal music outlets: Give us something that we can't get from burning. For many, those are the accoutrements from album art to liner notes to all kinds of gussied-up editions of our favorite albums. To some extent this is happening -- from the Velvet Underground catalog to Marvin Gaye to Stevie Wonder. But I must add one small note: Ratcheting up the CD price is not a way to make that work.

P.S. to the RIAA: My vinyl-to-disc project is on long-term hiatus. Please don't sue me.

**Shake That Moneymaker... for a Song**

The music business is full of legends about artists who failed to get decent contracts out of the record labels, only to produce smash hits that filled everyone's pockets but their own. The New York Post today reported that a similar episode might have happened to one of the models whose body Apple uses to hawk the iPod: "Her silhouette has sold millions of iPods -- but the girl behind one of the most recognizable ads in the world says she can't even afford one of the pricey gizmos. This is the first time that Mandy Coulton, a 26-year-old dancer from Los Angeles, has been revealed as the body behind the hugely successful ad campaign for Apple's iPod music players. More than 20 million iPods have been sold since it was introduced in 2001. She was paid a flat fee of $1,500 for the shoot -- a tiny fraction of the billions Apple has reaped from the sale of its sleek portable player. But Coulton ... says it still wasn't enough to buy one of the must-have gadgets."

Coulton told the Post that she's "not bitter." I don't see how she could be, or even that she has trouble making the rent -- her husband is a venture capitalist.

**A Phone for Phogeys**

Vodafone Group -- a co-parent of Verizon Wireless -- is selling a new kind of cell phone that sounds a lot like the one that I use. It doesn't have a camera, and doesn't double as an all-in-one media center. It lets you make and receive phone calls -- and that's it.
What I find funny is that it's being marketed to people twice my age.

Here's the Wall Street Journal, which ran this article on its front page today: "Ann Ridley is the kind of customer Vodafone has in mind. A 65-year-old ballet teacher in Claygate, near London, Ms. Ridley rarely gives out her mobile-phone number, never uses text messaging and doesn't store her friends' numbers on the phone. 'I can't see the numbers, and it's too complicated,' she says. The result is that she uses the cellphone for fewer than a dozen calls a year, spending less than $18 annually. The Vodafone Simply isn't an attempt to match certain ultra-simple phones sold to the elderly for emergency use. ... Instead, Vodafone is trying to appeal to a large market of middle-aged and older people with a handset they won't find intimidating. The company's European target market is everyone who's 40 years of age or over and isn't issued a cellphone by an employer."

OK, so maybe not twice my age, but you see where the company is going with this.

This is the flipside to the increasing trend of marketing cell phones to pre-adolescents, an attempt to cover every potential market. As the Journal noted, some older folks are ripe for a phone like this: "One-third [users in a Vodafone survey], for example, said they didn't know how to tell when they had received a text message. Some thought the envelope icon that signals a message meant their phone bill had arrived. One woman in Italy told Vodafone she didn't know how to reply to a text message, so she would send back handwritten notes through her son, on his bicycle."

Even younger users like what they see: "Gary Sheehan, a 38-year-old director of a London information-technology company, likes that keypad, along with the phone's simple menus and large screen. He replaced his Sony Ericsson camera phone with a Vodafone Simply in July. 'It was all singing, all dancing,' he says of his old phone. 'But if I wanted to change the ringer volume, I couldn't find it."

It isn't often that I hand out kudos to a massive corporation, but they're in order today.

Send links and comments to robertDOTmacmillanATwashingtonpost.com.

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