

OPINIONS

Tales of a CD Addict



Mason Currey
Columnist

I have a confession to make. For the last decade or so, I have been under the spell of a most diabolical and cunning organization, a nation-wide syndicate with sinister plans for controlling America's youth.

Yes, it's true. For 10 years, I have been a member of the Columbia House Music Club.

I imagine that most people are already familiar with Columbia House. Surely, everyone has received fliers in the mail, boldly advertising "12 CDs for Free (Plus Shipping and Handling)!" Sounds like a good deal, right?

Well, I know all about those 12 CDs, and I really know all about those shipping and handling charges.

For, over the years, I have joined Columbia House at least a dozen times. At least.

I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me start at the beginning.

I have a very specific image in my mind, a memory from my early adolescence.

I would volunteer to my parents, in what appeared to be a fit of generosity, to walk an extra distance each day after school to pick up the mail. What a good kid, right?

The real reason for this sudden volunteerism is that I needed to see the mail before my parents got it, in order to intercept the flow of ominous red "Final Notice" letters that arrived almost daily in my name.

I was age 10, maybe 11, and I had joined Columbia House in order to receive a measly eight free cassettes.

I thought I could handle what appeared to be minimal costs. How much could shipping and handling be, anyway?

Things quickly spiraled out of control.

When I couldn't make the payments, the collection agencies took over.

Have you ever read the sort of things that collection agencies write to people who don't pay their bills?

Mean, horrible things about how my life was going to be ruined by bad credit. I'm not even in sixth grade, and already I've ruined my entire life!

Well, naturally I was wracked with guilt, literally losing sleep over the extravagant threats from the collection agencies, imagining myself rotting in some sort of debtor's prison for juvenile offenders, a dank, dirty dungeon populated by greasy teenage delinquents with tattoos and switchblades.

How much money did I owe? I don't remember. Surely no more than \$100, but to my young mind, it was an impossibly huge sum.

At nights I would lie awake and think of ways I could bring up the matter with my parents: "Y'know Mom, since it's almost September, I was thinking you could give me my Christmas present early..."

Well, eventually I did wheedle my parents into paying the bill, finally leaving me and my eight cassettes in peace.

But, in the words of an American poet, "the wonder lingers and the shame remains."

So, you would think I had learned my lesson. Oh, no.

A few short years later, I was at it again, only this time I thought I had it all figured out.

Even with the exorbitant shipping and handling costs, I reasoned, I'm still getting 12 CDs for a lot less than they would normally cost.

Then, if you immediately fulfill your membership obligation (buying four more CDs at full price) and quit the club right away, you end up with 16 CDs for less than half what you would normally pay. Brilliant!

So, I joined. And I joined, and I joined.

The funny thing about Columbia House is that while they advertise their little scam to every living entity on the planet, they don't want you to join more than once, because it's such a great deal, ha ha.

Well, being the clever and resourceful fellow that I am, I natu-

rally started using pseudonyms: first simple variations on my name: M. Currey, Nathan Currey, then eventually inventing entirely fictional personalities: Jorge Ranchero, the wealthy Spanish aristocrat, or Gustave Hugo, the jolly fat Frenchman with a taste for classic rock.

I'm exaggerating a little. But, every time my family announced plans to move to a different address, I swear that my first reaction was always, "now I can join Columbia House again!"

Just imagine what happened when I got to college and had a different address every year.

The housing office is still forwarding me bills.

On top of that, the club kept offering to let me re-join as a "preferred member," with bigger and better offers, so I started doing that, too.

Pretty soon, I had more fictitious club members on my hands than I could keep track of.

The damning thing is that, for all the grief it caused me, I continue to this day to join and re-join the club.

As much as logic and reason balk, I can't help myself. It's like an organizational form of Stockholm syndrome: I am hopelessly committed to the very company that is holding me and my bank account hostage.

Not only do I dutifully mail away half of my yearly income to Columbia House, but I'm their biggest publicist.

I tell everyone about the club--"actually, they have a surprisingly good selection"--and not just because I get four free CDs (plus shipping and handling) for every person I sign up.

This, then, is my confession. I have reread it.

I still don't know that I have fully appreciated the ramifications of my addiction.

I don't know if being referred to collection agencies at age 10 has actually affected my credit rating.

I don't know if other people go white as a sheet every time they see a red envelope in their mailbox.

Sometimes, I'm not even sure which of my many alter egos is the real me anymore, which one is pulling the levers and twisting the knobs of my sordid destiny, turning my attention back to the distant land of Terre Haute, IN, where shadowy figures in the Columbia House offices sit and play games with my soul.

Letters to the Editor

Twenty Cents per Copy "Exorbitant"

Dear Editor:

Why is it that Printing Services is willingly letting students pay 20 cents for a single photocopy at the new copy machines? Ten cents is somewhat high, and I understand our need to offset maintenance costs, but 20 cents is exorbitant.

Our school received new fax/copy/printer machines at the start of the semester.

It now happens that you lose 10 cents off of your copy card as soon as you put it into the reader.

That means that every time a student or, moreover, every time a staff member from an academic department on this campus uses a copy machine, they are paying an automatic 10 cents just for the privilege of doing so!

Did you know you also lose 10 cents when zooming pages? Of course, we're talking about pen-

nies here, but think of how many photocopies are made daily on this campus.

A woman I spoke with at Printing Services said they were aware of the problem, and were "working on it".

Why aren't there any warning signs? What is happening to this new surplus?

Does Printing Services plan on keeping 10 cents per use plus 10 cents per page the new pricing structure?

"Penny Pincher"
Senior, Music Major

Implication of Frat Party "Unfair"

Dear Editor:

If the recent article "Cart Stolen After Fraternity Party On Campus" is any indicator of the general attitudes of the UNCA student body, then it is a disappointing and dangerous sign indeed.

Essentially, it seems that it is no longer acceptable to base one's opinions of a person or people based on their race, gender, religion, or sexual preference. These are all universally accepted as the judgement practices of a bigot.

However, it would seem that there are some groups that are still fair game.

The implication in the article that a fraternity party was somehow related to, or even caused, a non-Greek, non-UNCA student to steal a cart and crash it into the bottom level of the West Ridge dormitory parking deck is as unfair as it is obvious.

It was obvious to the point that my 12-year-old sister picked up on it when she read the article.

What is the reasoning behind linking these two disparate events, not only in the headline, but the article itself, when the only tenuous link between the two is that the accused "may have been attending a fraternity party"?

After extensive research, I have discovered that people can do remarkably stupid and illegal things without a fraternity party for a hundred miles in any direction.

To implicate the Greek system in such a way seems irresponsible at best, ignorant at worst.

It paints a very dangerous picture of people who are "selectively tolerant" of those groups for whom it is convenient that they be tolerant of, and unfairly prejudiced against the rest.

That is what makes it dangerous. Half a tolerant attitude is worse than a wholly bigoted one.

Keith Drann
Sophomore,
History/Political Science Major

Linked by Humanity During a Tragedy

Dear Editor:

I really wonder: where do we go from here? I am listening to the news, and am not really sure about how to react, what to feel, who to worry about, or even how to think.

My mind has been ground to a point of blankness. I am making a concerted effort to not lapse into an emotional coma.

Yet I know that this is only the start. We are, as a country, a very small community on this, the day after it all ended.

My sense of innocence, my resolve that there is good in the world has been soundly defeated.

The acts that have been perpetrated upon us are unspeakable, unthinkable and unfathomable. But they are real.

Very real.
As I sat eating breakfast at a local coffee shop Sept. 12, I listened to

people talk about the attack, and it was as if they were talking about a sports highlight film. "The plane did this," "These people were saying this," "Bush said that," and so on.

This is not a highlight film, though. It has not happened in Israel, England, or Africa. It happened here.

Our home.
We have been visited by something that only serves to cement the fact that we are no longer in a safe place. Period.

My sense of innocence died in the flickering video of ABC yesterday. Questions to be asked are many. Answers are few at the moment and will be long in coming.

Can we understand this? Our parents could understand Pearl Harbor; our families could come to grip with the Depression, and we are learning to deal with racism.

But this?
The concept that we must keep in our minds and our hearts after the day to end all days is that we are all linked by our humanity.
We must keep our humanity close

to heart in not blaming a group, person, country or ideology for this crime against humanity without being sure of who is guilty.

We as a nation are vilified for our beliefs and practices by others who do not believe as we do.

It is under these beliefs and practices that we must act and react to the tragedies of the past days.

Our government is best equipped to deal with the actions necessary to find and punish the people responsible for this tragedy. AND THEY MUST BE PUNISHED CONCLUSIVELY AND FINALLY.

We are best equipped to hold our humanity close to heart. Go outside and admire the beauty you see, tell your families that you love them, play with your children and live life to the fullest.

We have been given a rude awakening.

Now that our eyes are open what we do with this awakening is up to us.

With a very heavy heart,

Ted Vogel
Senior, History

The Blue Banner Staff Member of the Week
Congratulations to Lana Coffey, staff member of the week.

Editorials

Buncombe Schools To Offer "Warranties"

If you thought that the average American entering the workforce was nothing more than a piece of machinery, get this: it looks like you might be right.

The commercialization of the human being just went a little further last week, when Buncombe County Schools Superintendent Cliff Dodson introduced the idea of "warranties" for students who have taken vocational classes at the Career Education Center.

Under this plan, schools will retrain any student that does not measure up to specified job requirements.

Listen to the comparison that Dodson made while introducing his idea: "if you buy a refrigerator, when you plug it in you expect it to work efficiently," Dodson said. "That's the same offer we're making to employers."

Am I the only one getting chills thinking about where this could lead? Can you imagine high schools getting paid commission when their graduates make good in the working world, and how that could change the education system as we know it? There would be no need to teach trivial things like science, math and other cornerstones of critical thought. Just send every student to wood shop.

Clearly, this is not to say that vocational skills should not be taught and emphasized in public schools. Let's just not go overboard.

One local masonry worker lauded the new plan, saying it will instill a new discipline and work ethic in students. Well, shouldn't these be instilled in students without the gimmicky "offers" that the next "refrigerator" off the assembly line can do the job?

This Fall Could Be Special

It's that time of year again. Even though Major League Baseball is coming to a close on the 2001 season, it is beginning to heat up as the fall appears to be an exciting one.

For example, baseball fans are already flocking to the ballparks to see whether or not San Francisco Giants left-fielder Barry Bonds can break the seemingly unreachable record of 70 home runs in a single season set by St. Louis Cardinals first baseman Mark McGwire three years ago. With only 18 games remaining, Bonds has 63 and counting..

Also, many are witnessing the career year New York Yankee pitcher Roger Clemens is having, as he has posted a phenomenal 19-1 record and is a heavy favorite for his sixth Cy Young award.

His team, the Yankees, are on a mission to become one of the greatest dynasties of all time. They appear to be closing in on another American League East Division championship, and are gearing up for a shot at their fifth World Series title in six years.

Standing in their way, however, are the Seattle Mariners, looking to make a little bit of history of their own. With a record of 104-40, the Mariners are on pace to break the record for most wins in a single season.

Whether or not the Mariners can catch the record and unseat the Yankees as the kings of baseball remains to be seen. But baseball fans should still be entertained this fall, no matter what the outcome.

So buckle up, because this is going to be one roller-coaster ride to an end of a season that we may never forget.