NDA Tasmania
Who Mangled my Music?

Last year, global revenue from digital music sales exceeded those from physical sales for the first time ever and there is no doubt that this trend will continue

Essentially, there are three common ways you can purchase recorded music:

- Buy a physical CD to play in your hi-fi system or computer
- Download the tracks from an online store
- Subscribe to a streaming service and listen to anything in their library anytime you want

We won't go into the relative merits of these formats but let's say you have built up a large library of CDs and **you want to transfer (rip) them to play on your computer or portable device**. The difficulty comes with the metadata – information about the tracks themselves, things such as album title, track title, artist, composer, release date and many others.

Where is this information on a CD? It's not; it's printed on the album sleeve. While the original CD Redbook standard allowed for some metadata to be stored digitally on the CD itself, essentially nobody ever used it. Hence when you rip a CD you get unhelpful names like Track01.

You can name your tracks and put them in beautifully arranged folders on your computer but no media player will take the slightest bit of notice of the filenames or locations; it's only interested in the metadata, which at this stage doesn't exist. So how can we get it there? Well, there appears to be a neat solution; **you can configure your media player to fetch the information from an online database**. It will match the track lengths and sequence and write the missing titles, artists and even fetch the album artwork. Great idea? In theory, yes; in practice, it could be a disaster. Unfortunately, the online databases used by media players can be seriously flawed. They contain inconsistent data, in many cases uploaded by ordinary people without any checks.

Here is a likely scenario. You scan your album (*Endless Tides* by Joe Orbit and the Songsters) to add the metadata. You open it up in Windows Media Player and there are three albums called *Endless Tides*. One contains Tracks 3-8 another other contains tracks 9-12 and the third contains the remaining two tracks. How did this happen? Even though all the tracks have the correct album and track title, some of them have the album artist listed as 'Joe Orbit and the Songsters' others just have 'Joe Orbit' and still others 'The Songsters'. Media players generally consider these to be different compilations and list them as separate albums. **So what do you do?**

You will need to edit the metadata yourself. Neither Windows nor Windows Media Player will give you access to edit anything but the most basic fields. iTunes fares a lot better but ultimately the best approach is to use a dedicated tag editor such as **mp3Tag**.

Now for the title of this article. You spend six hours carefully hand-tuning the metadata on your enormous mp3 collection so that everything is perfect. You open your media player, listen to a few songs and then notice to your horror that your albums have been split up and hundreds of your tracks have been assigned to the 'Unknown Album' category. Then you discover that there is a default setting that automatically updates the metadata online and it has gone off and done this without consulting you. You find where to turn it off but it is too late, there is no undo and all your hard work is trashed.

Our recommendations? Always turn off any setting that would automatically update metadata tags. Never update your entire collection at once. Instead, update individual albums to get the bulk of the work done but be prepared to edit them manually if the result is less than satisfactory.

- Wayne Madden, Senior Systems Support Consultant

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