

STUDENT LIFE

Cell phone users spend millions on ring tones

By Jenee Osterheldt
Knight Ridder Newspapers
(KRT)

KANSAS CITY, Mo. - When Cassie Keller gets a phone call, a lot more happens than an archaic "ring, ring."

Instead, her cell phone launches into this: meow-meow-meow-meow, meow-meow-meow-meow ...

Right. The "Meow Mix" TV jingle. That's how it rings for the unidentified callers, says Keller, a senior who attends Fort Hays State University via the Internet from her Fairway, Kan. home.

Just about everyone in her cell phonebook has been assigned a distinct ring. For her mom, there's a rodeo song and her boss has an ambulance siren. She even has the Kansas Jayhawks fight song, and snippets from the movie "Office Space" and "Chappelle's Show." Then there's her personal favorite, "Build Me Up, Buttercup" by the Foundations.

"I like the fact that I can tell who is calling," Keller says. "If the phone is in the other room you can hear it and tell who is calling. It's funny. I have even had people request ringers; it's like you can give different personalities to different people."

Keller gets her ringers from her wireless provider, Sprint, as well as from Web sites like www.3gupload.com and www.matrixm.com.

Most Web sites have a yearly fee that gives customers access to unlimited ringers, games and screensavers. Some even let you make your own ring tone. At www.3gforfree.com, you can pay \$7 a year for unlimited downloads. Other sites, like matrixm.com, sell individual ring tones, starting at \$1; a few are offered for free. And you can access the sites from your PC or your cell phone, if your phone has Internet access.

U.S. cell phone owners spent more than \$75 million on ring tones in 2003, accord-

ing to research by In-Stat/MDR, a digital communications research firm. Researchers predict cell users will spend \$146 million this year.

They won't see any of Kristen Vincent's money.

"I think I would have a hard time paying for ring tones," says Vincent, 39, a Hallmark associate product manager. "You have to pay to download music already, gas prices are already higher and with people just trying to survive, it's just hard to see myself paying for a ring tone."

Vincent says younger, hipper people might think differently and she thinks it is a great option to have. But she's happy with the 40-plus tones standard in her Verizon phone.

"I have never heard anyone with the same ring as mine," Vincent says of her Dagnet-like tone. "I'm unique, and it gets a lot of laughs when people hear it. I like that."

Keller says it's the individuality that fu-

els the ringer trend.

"It has to be in the same vein of expressing yourself through fashion and stuff," Keller, 23, says. "When you have a ringer and it makes people go 'What is that,' it's fun."

Wireless providers are broadening the alternatives to give cell users plenty of creativity when it comes to customizing their phones.

Sprint, the first mobile carrier to offer master recording tones, just released two new ring options this week: pro football player voice ringers and BlingTones.

For \$2.50 a ringer, you can download (www.sprintpcs.com) the voices of NFL hot shots like Tony Gonzalez and Daunte Culpepper. That same price will get you a BlingTone. Sprint has partnered with some of hip-hop's hottest producers and DJs like Rockwilder and Hi-Tek to deliver the BlingTone ringers.

Hip-hop is not only dominating the Billboard charts, but it also dominates the

ringer world as well. At Sprint, Beyonce has achieved platinum status, with ringers like "Baby Boy," "Crazy in Love" and "Naughty Girl" being downloaded more than a million times. And 50 Cent has been downloaded more than 500,000 times, giving him gold status.

In the future we'll see even more innovative ways to customize cell phones, says Nancy Beaton, Sprint general manager of wireless music and personalization.

The next step in mobile customization is AAC sound, which has CD-like quality, Beaton says. In addition, there will probably be video ringers that not only play your favorite song, but also show a short clip of the video as well.

"It's all about personalization," Beaton says. "People buy ringers to customize their phones. They want ringers that are popular, the songs that they enjoy and they want ringers that have a special place for them."

O'Brien to host 'Tonight Show'



NBC STUDIOS

Jay Leno is turning over "The Tonight Show" to Conan O'Brien, above, in 2009.

By Aaron Barnhart
Knight Ridder Newspapers
(KRT)

The announcement that Jay Leno is turning over "The Tonight Show" to Conan O'Brien in 2009 surprised most people and at the same time, did not.

A surprise because Leno's gesture to step down after his current contract expires seemed improbable. Why would the comedian known as "Robocomic" for his legendary work ethic freely give up one of the top jobs in television? And why announce it half a decade before the fact?

For that matter, why was NBC so eager to declare O'Brien the heir to Leno's throne? And why is O'Brien so sure he'll even want the job in five years?

The truth, though, is the answers to all these questions are obvious. Giving "The Tonight Show" to O'Brien was the safest, smartest move NBC could have made.

All the network needed was Leno's assent. After thinking it over and discussing the choice with his close friend Jerry Seinfeld, who also walked away from a top-rated NBC program Leno decided to grant the network its wish.

Among the reasons he gave during Monday's "Tonight Show" broadcast, one seemed especially poignant. Leno and David Letterman had been friends and allies during the 1980s. Leno was a frequent guest on "Late Night," and these appearances helped Leno get back in Johnny Carson's good graces after he had bombed on "The Tonight Show." Eventually, Carson named Leno and Garry Shandling his two permanent co-hosts. Shandling later dropped out, and Leno was poised to take over after Carson retired.

In the messy backroom fracas that followed, Letterman, who had lusted after the "Tonight Show" gig, lost and jumped to CBS.

"When I took this show over, boy, there was a lot of animosity between me and Dave," Leno said Monday. "Good friendships were permanently damaged. And I don't want to cause anyone to go through that again."

He added, "This show is like a dynasty. You hold it and you hand it off to the next person." And then he reiterated, "I don't want to see all the fighting," as the studio audience broke in with applause.

It has been clear for some time that the "next person" was O'Brien. With a built-in nightly audience of 2.5 million (and more younger viewers, at times, than watch Letterman), O'Brien, 41, is by far the most seasoned late-night performer not working at 11:35 p.m. EDT. Next January he will surpass Letterman's tenure as host of "Late Night," 11 1/2 years. As he stands at the same career crossroads Letterman faced in the early 1990s, O'Brien appears to have made all the right moves.

Letterman had an awkward relationship with NBC executives that kept him from actively pursuing the "Tonight Show" job he dreamed of having. By contrast, O'Brien has always been open about desiring Leno's position. In an unpublished interview with me in 1996, O'Brien said he expected someday to be offered the job. He considered it a logical career goal.

Over the years, however, he has been happy to listen to other networks looking for a late-night host. He sent a message to the higher-ups at NBC that was inoffensive yet unmistakable.

Earlier this year O'Brien turned the heat up, ever so slightly. A curious story appeared in the New York Times in February. It was a less a profile of the late-night host as a declaration of sentiments. "A big question is looming," he said. "What's next?"

Over the course of 3,000 words, O'Brien quietly turned the tables on NBC. After all, he had been strung along for nearly two seasons of "Late Night." As late as August 1994, when O'Brien had been on the air more than a year and won over many of his early critics, NBC would not sign him to a one-year contract. Now it was O'Brien who could afford to be coy and the network that was nervous for a long-term deal.

And who will take O'Brien's place as the third host of NBC's "Late Night" in 2009?

That may be the most speculative question of all. His successor may not even be on the celebrity radar. When O'Brien was picked in 1993, he was unknown outside of "The Simpsons."

Letterman's rise to prominence took only three years. He made his first appearance on "The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson" in November 1978 and was offered "Late Night" in late 1981.

Springsteen accepts risks of partisanship

By Tom Moon
Knight Ridder Newspapers
(KRT)

PHILADELPHIA - When the music quiets and Bruce Springsteen begins what he calls the "public-service announcement" portion of his set at Friday night's Vote for Change concert at the Wachovia Center, the New Jersey rocker will do something he has resisted throughout a career of more than 30 years: make an overtly partisan political statement.

"There's some reluctance, certainly, to be coming out and doing what we're doing now," Springsteen said Tuesday in a phone interview about the series of 37 benefit performances he helped organize for Americans Coming Together, the group that's mobilizing voters for Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry.

The barnstorming tour of 12 swing states which involves Pearl Jam, the Dave Matthews Band, the Dixie Chicks, R.E.M., Sheryl Crow, Keb' Mo' and others, represents a significant change in the delicate mix of rock and politics. While stars have often lent their skills to causes (famine relief, nuclear disarmament, aid to farmers), there has never been such a coordinated campaign to elect a candidate. The two-week effort arrives in Pennsylvania with shows held simultaneously in Philadelphia, Reading, Lancaster, Pittsburgh, State College and Wilkes-Barre. (The Philly show is sold out.)

Springsteen, 55, acknowledges that his stand probably will alienate some fans. He has accepted the risk, he says, because he believes the stakes are too high.

"This election is about a set of ideals, and truthfulness, and creating the country you want your kids to grow up in," says the father of three, who lives in Rumson, N.J. "No other election I can remember has had that kind of significance to me."

Early in the campaign, Springsteen discovered that many of his musician peers felt likewise, and were looking for "some way to have a collective impact." Those conversations sealed it for him: "I realized that this is the time. I can't sit this one out if I meant the things I've been writing about these 30 years."

Springsteen's songbook includes poignant odes about deserted Rust Belt towns and police brutality and the heroic firefighters of 9-11. But while he has spoken eloquently on social issues at his shows for years, he says he isn't preparing a statement to deliver at the Vote for Change performances.

"There will be no intense speechifying from the stage, as far as I know," he says of the bill, which also includes John Fogerty and Bright Eyes.

Yet he knows that everything he says will resonate differently. "The same words are going to be ... changed by the moment and the event. I actually think it will add clarity to some of my music, recast some of the things I've been saying in a clearer and more powerful light."

He rejects criticism that the Vote for Change shows preach to the converted. After all, everyone with a ticket knows that his money is going to a group bent on dumping President Bush.

"We're going to find the republicans in

the crowd, and there will be a laying on of hands. We're going to convert people!" he says, sounding like a street preacher.

Then, turning more serious, Springsteen notes that he has encountered "a lot of people who actually haven't made their minds up" about how they will vote. "I have friends who grew up republican, and they're unsure. One guy's an outdoorsman, so the environment is important to him. Those kinds of people we might be able to reach."

Another issue is the war in Iraq, a topic on which Springsteen is anything but ambivalent: "If you mislead your people into a war, and that costs a thousand lives and many, many more wounded and \$200 billion of taxpayer money, and it turns out the grounds for going to war have been false, you lose your job ... There's an element of common sense to it."

Springsteen says that while he's been frustrated by the media's handling of Iraq and the apparent unwillingness of John Kerry to treat the election as a "street fight," he remains convinced that the idealism that spawned Vote for Change is not misplaced.

"Sen. Kerry has to make the point that America isn't always right, but it's always true," Springsteen says. "It's as seekers of truth that our real Americanness comes to the forefront."

"That is a deeper sort of Americanism than the jingoism, the right-or-wrong dime-store version of the American myth the republicans are so good at packaging. To me it's the essence of patriotism, being truthful."

Know an interesting student? Want your band featured? E-mail the Beacon at behrendbeacon5@aol.com

WELCOMES

Carrot Top

FRIDAY OCT 22 8:00PM

ON SALE NOW!

FEATURING ACOUSTIC & ELECTRIC SETS

Jethro Tull

ACOUSTIC ELECTRIC

SUNDAY NOV 7 7:30PM

WARNER THEATRE
811 STATE ST. • ERIE

TICKETS AT THE CIVIC CENTER BOX OFFICE AT ALL [ticketmaster](http://ticketmaster.com) OUTLETS. CHARGE BY PHONE (814) 456-7070 & ONLINE AT ticketmaster.com

PRODUCED BY JNP CONCERTS