

Tale of the tapes

Internet trading networks, DAT technology introduce music fans to artists new and old

By BRIAN RAFTERY
Collegian Arts Writer

It was the fall of 1995, Jerry Garcia had died, and it was obvious that the Grateful Dead would never tour again.

But Gabriel Montemurro wasn't about to give up listening to the band's live performances.

"I thought if I couldn't see the new shows, I'd buy tape equipment and start to get old shows," said Montemurro (senior-marketing), who heads Fifty Inspired Barton's Knights, a collective of Grateful Dead fans. "That's when I got involved with the tape trading scene," he said.

Montemurro isn't alone. The practice of tape trading — in which music fans exchange copies of their favorite bands' concerts or outtakes — has grown rapidly during the last few years. And with the Internet providing a new forum for traders to meet and communicate with other fans, it shows no signs of slowing down.

Just as the means of meeting fellow music fans has gone high-tech, though, so has the method many of them use.

Although standard analog audio tapes remain the mainstay, DAT (digital audio tape) has emerged as the format of choice among audiophiles.

The digital audio tape came into prominence in the early '90s after years of being held up for legal reasons. It's considered by many music fans to be superior not only to regular analog cassettes (the kind used in car stereos and boom boxes), but also to CDs.

DATs are available in a variety of time formats, including 60-, 90- and 120-minute, and generally run a few dollars higher than standard analog tapes.

"It's definitely the best format out there," said Mike Walsh (junior-communications), who

trades and tapes with DATs and who maintains a trading World Wide Web site. "It's a lot more expensive, but the quality is there."

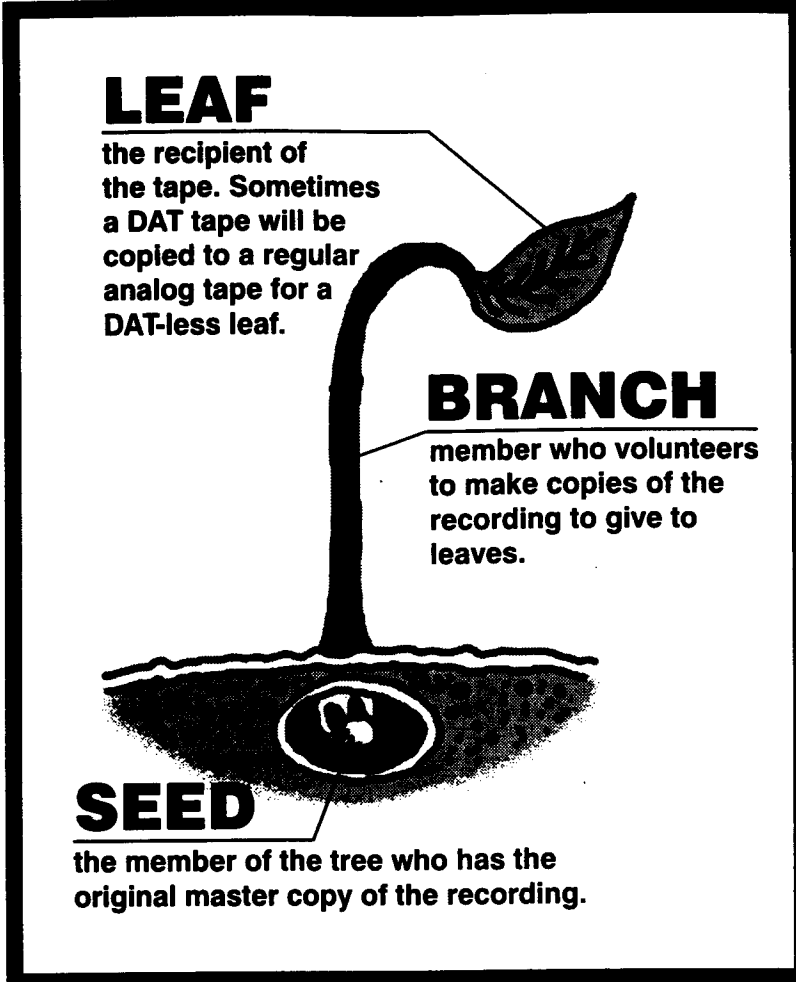
Like many other Internet-based traders, Walsh subscribes and posts messages on the DAT-Heads Digest, a daily E-mail digest that connects music fans worldwide.

The list covers a wide range of topics — from the most obscure technical questions to U2 concert ticket information.

The list is at times also a starting ground for "tape trees," a system of organizing large groups of traders so they can each receive copies of specific shows.

"Using the tape tree is a really good way to get a copy of a certain show," Walsh said. "It's almost like a pyramid scheme, but it actually works," he said.

Another method often used by traders is the



Collegian Graphic/Christopher Kelleher

Two-for-one trading is when two copies of a blank tape are sent to one trader, who keeps one tape for his own collection, and copies a show on the other tape. No money is exchanged except for the cost of buying and shipping the tapes.

Brian Liska (junior-mechanical engineering), whose collection of analog and digital audio tapes contains over 200 shows, said he used the system to help build his own collection.

"If someone doesn't have anything and is trying to start a collection, they can just send a blank one," Liska said. "It's a good way to get some live music," he said.

Both Montemurro and Walsh, however, dislike the two-for-one system.

"It's immoral," Walsh said. "Why should I pay for a tape when I can get one sent to me for free? Besides, there

are always people on the lists who are willing to help you start out a collection," he said.

Though there are charitable members willing to help start a collection, there are also some traders who rip off collectors, Liska said.

"There's always a few people who never send a tape, or who say they've sent one when they haven't," he said. "I've only been ripped off a couple of times," he said.

Such traders often have their names posted on "bad trader lists," a listing of collectors who have allegedly ripped off other collectors.

Another problem within the trading community is the sale of tapes, which many collectors dislike.

"I think it's wrong," Liska said. "It can ruin it for everyone else."

Montemurro said collecting solely for the sake of money ultimately hurts legitimate traders.

"It's just ridiculous," he said. "It's what gives the whole image of bootleggers. That word makes me cringe," he said.

All of the traders said their main reason for collecting grew out of an appreciation for the music — not the hopes of making a profit.

And though the Grateful Dead — one of the first bands to allow music to be taped and traded — is clearly still the granddaddy of live tape collecting, many new music acts are beginning to pop up on the trading lists, including jazz and folk artists, and younger bands like Widespread Panic and Yo La Tengo.

For music fans like Montemurro, the hobby has pointed him to the direction of bands he never listened to before.

"There's so many musical styles out there," he said. "But you can find it all if you look hard enough. It's just a great way to find new music."

Bootleg concert CDs with rare material carve a niche in music stores

By BRIAN RAFTERY
Collegian Arts Writer

As many artists are learning, it's getting harder to beat the boots.

Once buried in the back of record stores, bootleg CDs now often can be found displayed prominently in many independent record stores.

Despite the stigma attached to the term "bootleg" by many traders, the fact remains that it is a lucrative and constantly expanding field.

Labels like Swingin' Pig have made big money off of the contraband, sometimes charging about \$25 for a single CD and \$50 for a double disc set.

Usually, the CDs are taken from high-quality DAT tapes and brought overseas to be pressed in Europe, where copyright laws are sometimes hazy.

The bootlegs then return to the United States, where they are found at record conventions and among the ad-ridden pages of record collecting magazines such as Goldmine.

However, one would be hard-pressed to find a successful record store proudly boasting of a bootleg section.

Often the discs are branded as imports, even though illegally-produced CDs can often come from New York or Los Angeles.

It's important to note that not every CD marked as an import is illegal — in fact, many bands release special editions of their singles and LPs overseas, often containing a hard-to-find B-side or rare live track.

But if the Pearl Jam CD you just shelled \$30 for is manufactured by an obscure label in Germany and half the songs are misspelled, chances are the album is not on the up-and-up.

So where is the music coming from? Sometimes it is a radio show or an audio copy of a foreign TV show performance.

For higher-quality sound, it is a copy of show taken directly from the soundman's mixing board.

Sometimes material is released through more clandestine means. Artists such as Bruce Springsteen have had material stolen directly from the studio, only to find it wind up in the record bins years later.

But most of the time, it is a high-tech concert-goer with a hidden microphone and recorder.

One such concert-goer, who spoke only on the condition of

anonymity, has taped multiple shows using analog and DAT equipment, including January's Smashing Pumpkins performance at The Bryce Jordan Center.

"It's pretty hard to get caught," he said. "I have my mikes covered when I go in, so I'm mostly worried about getting stopped at the door," he said.

The taper claims the lack of security at many venues makes it easy to bring in recording equipment.

"The hardest thing is the metal detectors," he said. "But they only frisk you at a lot of places, so it's not a big problem," he said.

Al Karosas, event coordinator at the center, said the venue takes adequate measures to prevent shows from being taped.

"We have an announcement outside that says no audio equipment is allowed, and the guards will take tapes and equipment if they see them," he said. "We don't physically search people unless it's required by the band," he said.

In fact, many of the policies regarding the taping of shows is dictated by the artist, Karosas said.

"If a guard finds someone taping, we'll then escort the individual out of the center," he said. "But it's ultimately up to the band and their management to decide," he said.

Taping opponents point out that the sale of illegally obtained or recorded material is a serious offense.

In recent years, conventions and record stores have been raided and store owners have been subjected to heavy fines or even prison terms.

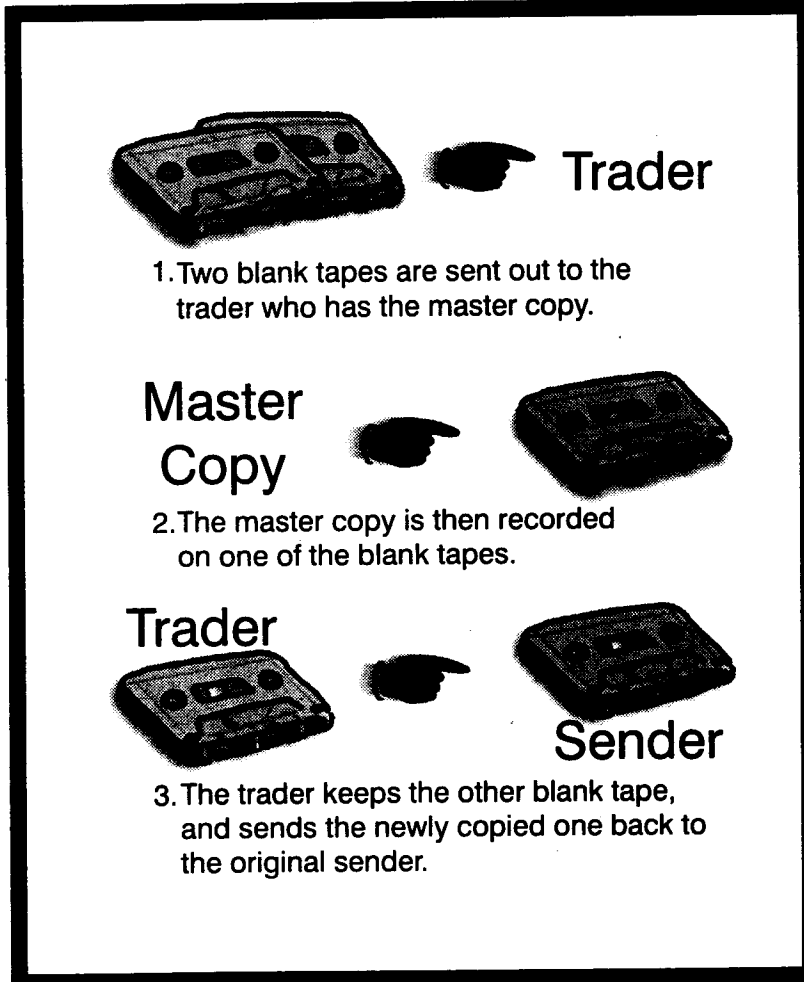
Some bands, including Hootie & The Blowfish, have even launched campaigns to crack down on those who sell bootleg CDs.

With the responsibility now resting on the performers' shoulders, many mainstream bands — including Phish, Dave Matthews Band and Metallica — have established designated taping sections at their shows.

Audience members are permitted to set up mikes and equipment or sometimes even hook up to the soundboard to get a copy of the show.

The theory is that if they can allow the fans to tape shows themselves, they will not spend money on bootleg CDs.

"It seems to be the direction that a lot of bands are heading toward," Karosas said.



Collegian Graphic/Christopher Kelleher

Sci-fi class hits campus with new perspectives on life, future

By CHRIS KREWSON
Collegian Arts Writer

The University was started as an agricultural school. As such, the focus was probably on little green plants.

This summer the focus is on little green men.

Aliens are the order of the day in English 191 (Science Fiction), a reading and discussion class that tackles a genre that seems to be in the spotlight in recent years.

The class is taught by Anne Gossage, who said the University is a pioneer in the instruction of science fiction.

"Penn State was one of the first schools to teach it, which really acknowledges it as a respectable literary form," Gossage said. "The prevailing attitude of some students is 'I can't believe I'm getting college credit for reading science fiction!'" she said.

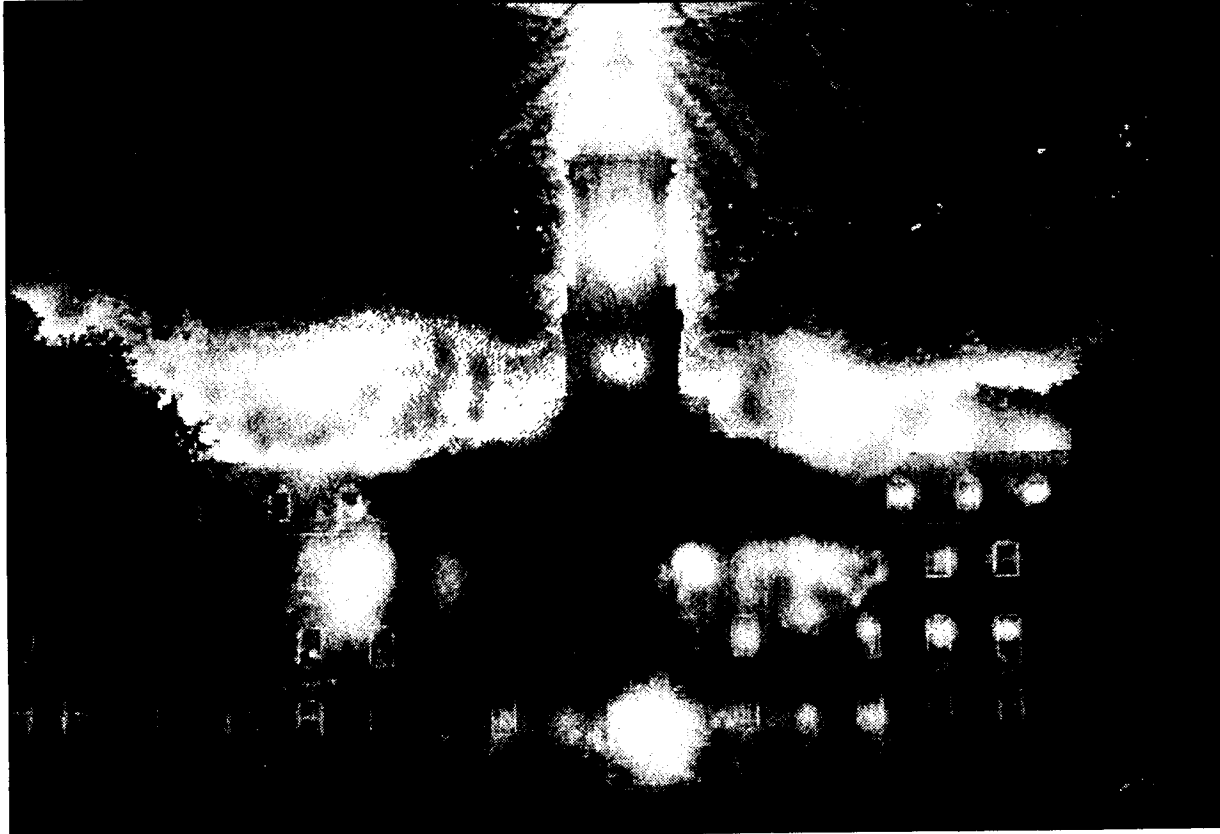
Despite a low interest in general humanities classes during Summer Semester, Gossage had an initial attendance of 18 students, which she accredits to the advertising she did for the class.

Flyers could be seen in local bookstores and coffee shops, as well as on bulletin boards on campus. The unusual method certainly bore fruit, Gossage said, "which is good, because I probably spent 50 to 60 hours on advertising."

The class is small; Gossage pegged the current roster at 13 students, and said she had a good mix of sci-fi veterans and newcomers.

"Last year and this year, we've had a couple of die-hards," she said. "We also have a couple of people who only read fantasy. I can always count on people having read the big authors."

One student who is an avid fan is Brett Borger (junior-letters, arts and sciences). The class is good for longtime fans for many reasons, Borger said, with discussion as the foremost.



Collegian Photo Illustration/Christopher Kelleher

"We can learn concepts behind the stories I hadn't thought of before," he said. "Plus, the stories that I hadn't already read were ones that I wanted to (read)."

A highlight of the class was a visit from local author James Morrow, who came to discuss one of his books, *Towing Jehovah*.

"That was good. A lot of times, we discuss interpretations of the stories. This time, we got the answers from the horse's mouth," Gossage said.

Students enjoyed the experience as well, Borger said.

"In many classes we've analyzed stories. I had one teacher who found a phallus in every story. It was

good to hear from the author and hear it from the source," he said.

Followers of the genre feel that it does not often receive the literary respect it should.

Classes that teach science fiction are long overdue, said Fred Ramsey, co-owner of Seven Mountains Books, 111 S. Pugh St.

"It must be obvious by now that pop culture is dominated by the stuff," Ramsey said.

In addition to the pop-culture appeal, college towns tend to generate interest in speculative literature.

Science fiction is one of the best selling genres at Seven Mountains, Ramsey said. "It's one of the things that pays our rent."

While popular culture may be seeing a peaked interest in science-fiction-geared television shows and movies, the impact is not seen on similar literature, Ramsey said.

"Generally, the big science fiction fans of popular culture have been 'Star Trek' and 'Star Wars' fans, and they don't usually go beyond the movies and TV stuff. They're usually pretty happy with what they're getting," he said. "There are some people who cross over, but not that many."

However, avid fans have a different view about the genre's appeal.

Science fiction should be read by more people, Borger said, because of its value in stimulating thoughts.

"People should give it a try, because life isn't always about answers. It's about questions," Borger said. "Science fiction asks those questions and makes you ask them, too. It would be foolish not to give it a try."

There are other reasons why people should, and do, pick up science fiction, said Gossage.

"If you're not completely satisfied with life, it's a fun, intellectual escape," she said. "It really makes you think about society and what would happen."