

Music Piracy ©

By Connie J. Schlosberg

Music piracy has certainly wreaked havoc on the economy of the free market. With programs such as the now bankrupt Napster that enable computer users to copy and share digital music files, music fans can easily and freely trade songs. Anyone can search for a particular song and the software searches its library of uploaded songs that match the selection. The process is completely automated that once the search parameters are entered, it is only a short amount of time before the job has been completed.

However, this free exchange is considered a copyright infringement and theft. As much as the music industry is perceived as a bohemian enterprise, the truth is that musicians do what they do for money and reasonably, most of them want to be paid for it. New musicians may feel that this free exchange of their music as a great way to gain recognition and fans, but eventually will want to see some profit from their endeavors.

In 2000, the heavy metal band Metallica filed a lawsuit against Napster demanding their music be removed from its service. This lawsuit led to subsequent litigations with record labels. In 2001, after Napster failed to appeal to the Ninth District Court, Napster was issued an injunction to prevent trading of copyrighted music on its network. The company eventually filed for bankruptcy but other file sharing networks still exist. According to a study by comScore, 62 percent of people who download music do not pay anything for it.

Whether original music is freely copied and shared should be left up to the musicians in the first place. It should be their right to say yes or no. Violators should be prosecuted in the same way as someone who steals a car. If musical artists want to spread their message to the world for free than they should be free to do so.

The United States' current copyright laws are to protect artists' materials and to give them control of publishing, copying and selling their work. Copyright statutes were started for this very reason. If technology is not created to block the exchange and copying of music, a lot of musicians will lose revenue and any business that relies on musicians' products – whether they are physical CDs or digital downloads – will lose that source of income to keep their businesses thriving.

Technology has made it easy to distribute information but that information still belongs to the owner. Not only has technology made it possible to share and copy music, but with the freedom of the World Wide Web, people have been conditioned to expect to receive free information. During the early years of the

internet, companies lured visitors to their sites by offering free information. Even music companies offered free electronic single songs.

The mindset – that computer users are entitled to whatever is available on the internet – is partially to blame. Changing users' mindset will require a lot of education in schools, media and the internet. If the illegal downloading continues, there may be nothing worthwhile to copy. Music may continue in the form of tours and shows, but if the music industry finds itself with no one willing to pay for its efforts perhaps musicians may not want to be bothered.