

When shelling out \$16 for that coveted Nelson CD is just a leetle too painful to the pocket-book, many savvy, seasoned college students turn from the rows of shrink wrap to the consumer's haven: the used CD racks.

But recently, music distributors and some recording artists have tried to end the party, saying the sale of used CDs is robbing them of royalties.

Unfortunately for them, student music fans don't seem to be in an ethical quandary over the issue.

"Screw the record companies," says Northeastern U. senior John Pelletier. "They already got their cut."

After last summer's used CD controversy — in which four record labels attempted to stifle the used CD trade — that seems to be the take of music customers and retailers alike.

Why else would independent music store Music Millennium in Portland, Ore., roast the anti-used CD figurehead Garth Brooks in a "Brooks Barbecue"? The media event was so successful that the clean-cut country western icon also got barbecued in San Diego, Los Angeles and Seattle, says Music Millennium operations manager Bill McNally.

"We had coals, and just held [Brooks CDs] over the coals until they started to warp a little bit," says McNally. "We got them all nice and floppy and soft, put them on a bun and took a bite."

But despite the tremendous groundswell of support for used CDs, this summer's convoluted series of lawsuit filings, settlements, statements and reversals of statements does raise several questions about CD sales. We know that record stores were pissed and that Garth got some major PR from this, but where does that leave us?

Is buying and selling used CDs wrong?

Not according to Bryan Sundblom, a senior at Northern Arizona U. "I don't feel bad about it at all," he says. "With anything else you buy, you have the right to sell it if you wish. So I don't see anything wrong with it."

"The Garth Brooks argument that the artist should get royalties off the sale is ridiculous," says Don Watson, manager of The Mad Platter music store in Riverside, Calif. "If Chrysler sells a car, they don't get a cut when the owner sells it later."

Brooks's counter-argument to this counter-argument, given during an August press conference: "The difference between CDs and cars is a CD lasts forever and a car has mileage on it." (Garth, who has already made millions, says he's not after more money for himself but for songwriters and the other little people.)

Do used CD sales hurt the sale of new CDs?

According to Tim Sites, vice president of communications at the Recording Industry Association of America, "What's extremely shortsighted on the retailers' side is that it severely undercuts the work of emerging artists."

"There's a significant amount of money that needs to be recouped because of that investment," he says.

But apparently the record labels

Used Or Student consumers Abused? and retailers don't The Great buy the guilt trip CD Debate



By Tom Evans, *The Lumberjack*, Northern Arizona U.

weren't worried about used CDs as long as independent stores were the only ones selling them. Only after a national record store chain, the Wherehouse, decided to sell used CDs in 250 of its outlets (the first major chain to sell them) did several labels clamp down on the trade by withholding advertising dollars from used CD retailers.

Brooks, who says he's not against independent stores selling used CDs, makes a dire prediction for the music industry if all the chains get in on the action.

"There's 8 percent of the retail right now out there that's doing used CDs," the oft-checked-shirted Brooks says. "If the thing really soars for these people, the other retail has to give in to compete."

"If that happens you're going to see the beginning of the end of the music industry."

Why do CDs cost so much?

According to industry sources, CDs cost anywhere from \$1.25 to \$1.75 to produce and package (royalty payments are about \$1.50 extra).

While this is almost double the cost of cassettes, which run from 60 cents to \$1, the increase by the time CDs reach store shelves — due to promotion and distribution fees and retail markup — is still considerable.

The used CD ethical dilemma becomes even less troublesome for students when cost comes into the picture.

Since a new CD costs from \$13 to \$17, and a used CD can be as cheap as \$6, many have little choice but to buy used and save their bank accounts.

But Brooks cites the tremendous sales of *The Bodyguard* soundtrack on CD as a justification for the high price of CDs in general.

"If I could sell a CD for seven bucks, if they'd do that, I'd be the happiest man in the world," he says. "But if they're selling them for what they are and *The Bodyguard* sells for that price, I must say that it's not overpriced yet."

What's going to happen next?

Since the retail stores started fightin' the power — filing lawsuits against labels which withheld advertising money — all of the record labels (but not Garth) have backed off from their stance.

Regardless of all the bickering, used CDs are only going to get more popular, says Desmond Macamera, manager of the Wherehouse in Flagstaff, Ariz.

"I would be willing to bet that in five years everyone is in on [used CD sales]," Macamera says.

Judging from student responses to used CDs, Macamera may be right. "I would be inclined to buy more used if the bigger chains start selling them," says Ryan Day, a junior at the U. of California, Riverside.

And what about selling them? Just because students bought Bon Jovi albums in 1986 doesn't mean they want to keep them. Pete Howard, editor and publisher of national CD newsletter *ICE*, says this is one reason the debate isn't going to die down.

"We're going to be up to our knees in a few years, and people will have a lot of old CDs they don't want," he says. "It ain't going away."

Brooks says: "The answer for used CDs is compensation [by the retailers]. And they need to pay the writers, the publishers, the artists, the labels' distributors, for what they're sending them."

Uh, Garth? Lighten up.