

Music to My Ears

This month I thought I would write about a subject that I find very interesting and that applies to computer techies like us: electronic music. It is applicable because in the future, chances are we will be getting more heavily involved with multimedia and teleconferencing within the enterprise.

Some musicians are technical wizards. Especially those who use electronic devices such as synthesizers and sequencers. I have a modest music studio that consists of an Ensoniq KS-32 weighted action MIDI studio (a piano-like keyboard synth), a Peavey MIDI-Bass guitar (yes, even my bass is a computer [what a geek]) and a PC-based music sequencer called Cakewalk for Windows. Also, I have a small (six input) Tascam mixer board, power amplifiers, a Peavey subwoofer and Yamaha studio monitor loudspeakers. For those of us who don't know what all this stuff means, I'll briefly explain.

MIDI is an acronym for musical instrument digital interface. A sequencer is in essence a digital music recorder and editor. Until the "digital age," 16-track recordings were considered "state-of-the-art." With the advent of digital, MIDI and the sequencer, 256-track recordings are now the norm.

Well, hooking all of this stuff together is quite an ordeal. Have you ever "heard" a spin loop? I have and it isn't pleasant! You might have experienced them in your operating system but a musical spin loop is enough to drive you nuts! It can lock up your PC or your synth while emitting either a high-

pitched squeal or a low-frequency rumble. It normally happens when you plug the right MIDI cable into the wrong plug.

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I encountered such a problem, so I contacted my friendly neighborhood music dealer. He sold me what is known as a MIDI Patch Bay, a patch panel for MIDI devices. It is, like most everything else today, a computer. It is also, like too many computers today, quite complicated. Who would have thought that a simple patch panel would be so complicated?

So, I dialed the manufacturer's tech support line and was connected to a knowledgeable techie who answered my dumb questions with patience and understanding. He then took it a step further by asking me what my total configuration was. Based upon my hardware, he made several suggestions to help me optimize my music "network." Then, since the MIDI patch bay was manufactured by the same company as my synth (Ensoniq), he gave me updated tips for the synth. Finally, he ask me what I was doing with my music studio and we chit-chatted for a while about music.

These technicians are people who love music. They use computers

and digital equipment to make music. Computers and networks are simply a tool for them. They are not hobbyists either. They are serious professionals.

Are computers and networks simply tools for us—a means to an end—or are they the end? If your answer is the latter, then you had better re-think your job. Corporate computer systems and networks grow as an enterprise grow. The enterprise does not grow because the computing systems grow or become "modernized." Our job is to help our enterprise grow by providing the best solutions possible and keeping the whole thing running. This means we had better know why we are there and what our enterprise is doing.

Perhaps the end product of our computing efforts is not as exciting as music, but it is important just the same. Do we have the same love for our end product as the musicians?

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