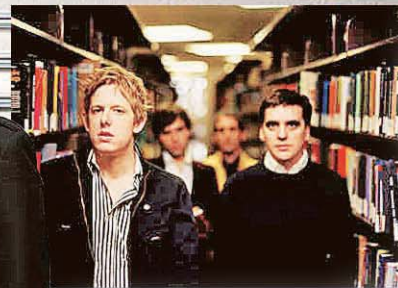




SANJOY Narayan

download central

Music, Cheap And Best...



CHEAP AT THE PRICE
Thievery Corporation (left), The members of Spoon (above), Stevie Ray Vaughan jamming with Albert King (below)

Forget Amazon or iTunes, there are a number of great websites out there that will let you download new music for less than the price of a CD

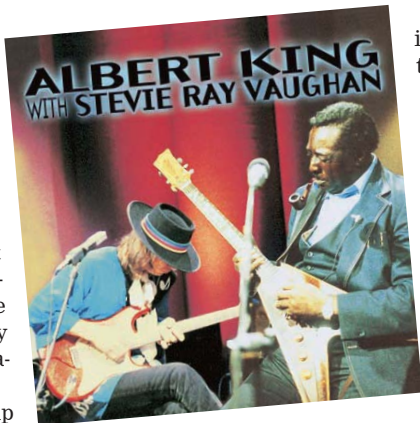
I DON'T REMEMBER when I last bought an album by a new band from a store. A few weeks back on a stroll through a Gurgaon mall, I browsed the CD shelves in a bookstore and picked up a copy of Radiohead's *In Rainbows*. That doesn't count because I'd already got the album, having downloaded it when the band put up all the tracks on the Internet in October 2007, letting downloaders decide what they'd like to pay for it. I didn't pay a paise, of course. And, in any case, Radiohead is anything but a new band.

It wasn't guilt that made me pick up the physical CD, despite having got the mp3s for free (after all, the band had offered it on the Internet and although I've heard some people paid for their downloads, I'm yet to meet someone who has), but just that I wanted the Radiohead part of my CD shelves at home complete – I already had the other six ever since they released *Pablo Honey* in 1993. I'd hardly played those CDs in recent years. I mean, I do listen to the albums but don't actually pop the CDs into the player for that. Most of my music is digitally ripped on to some device or the other – iPods, storage drives or even the laptop – making it much more convenient to call up what you want at the click of mouse or a button. So my CDs have become like postage stamps. You don't use them. Just collect them.

So where do I buy my music online? Firstly, it's not easy buying music online from India. For instance, iTunes, which charges an exorbitant US\$0.99 or nearly Rs 50 per song, doesn't allow you to download if you have an Indian credit card or IP address.

Strangely, Amazon, which also sells mp3 downloads of albums, offers them only to US customers although if you want to buy CDs they'll gladly deliver them to you nearly anywhere.

I really don't know why both of these online retailers don't sell to customers in India. Perhaps it's a pricing issue – Rs 50 for a track can mean a lot for a full album. If you were to buy Oasis's *Dig Out Your Soul*, which has 11 tracks on iTunes, you could end up paying \$10.89 or nearly Rs 545, significantly higher than, say, the Rs 499 you need to fork out to get an imported CD at a local store. If the CD isn't imported,



EVERYONE CAN LOG ON AND BUY ANY AMOUNT OF SONGS AT EMUSIC

it could even cost you a hundred bucks less than that.

You may be better off buying CDs in stores here than buying pricier downloads but what happens if you're interested (like I am) in music that has little or no chances of being published or marketed here? All the indie bands that *Download Central* raves about or its readers keep writing in about? How do you legitimately get your hands on those? Fortunately, there are solutions.

Like www.emusic.com. At emusic, there are no geographical restrictions. Nearly everyone can log on and buy any amount of music that he or she wants. What's more, there is a treasure of indie, nearly unknown and small yet highly creative musicians whose work is to be found there. And it's all reasonably priced. Let me give you an example. Spoon are an indie band from Austin who turn out catchy, infectious songs with lyrics not half bad.

You can pick up their last two albums, *Gimme Fiction* and *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga*, a total of 21 songs, for just \$0.25 (or Rs 12.50) per track. So, if you're buying *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga*, an album with 10 songs on it, you actually get it for just Rs 125.

You can sign on to plans that enable you to download 20, 30, 50, 75 or 100 tracks a month from emusic, which has thousands of new as well as old bands. In recent months, I downloaded a December 1983 concert where Albert King jammed with Stevie Ray Vaughan. King, who died in 1992, was known for playing right-handed guitars left-handed, and Stevie Ray Vaughan was another American guitar hero who died prematurely in 1990. Their collaboration, titled *In Session*, is an excellent album and I downloaded it for a piffling Rs 130.

Like emusic, there's Amiestreet (www.amiestreet.com), where you can download a host of old bands as well as new ones. Like Thievery Corporation who make abstract, instrumental music that has a fair amount of jazz whipped together with trip-hop. Eleven of Thievery Corp's albums are listed on Amiestreet, some of them (*The Heart's A Lonely Hunter*) costing as little as \$1.85 (around Rs 93). If that's not a good deal, I don't know what is.

(To stream or download the music mentioned in this column, go to www.hindustantimes.com. And send feedback to downloadctrl@gmail.com)