



SANJOY Narayan

download central

TEST DRIVE
DJ Moby put a mega mix of his latest album on RCRD LBL



It's Free... It's Legal!

Don't die of guilt getting music off the Net

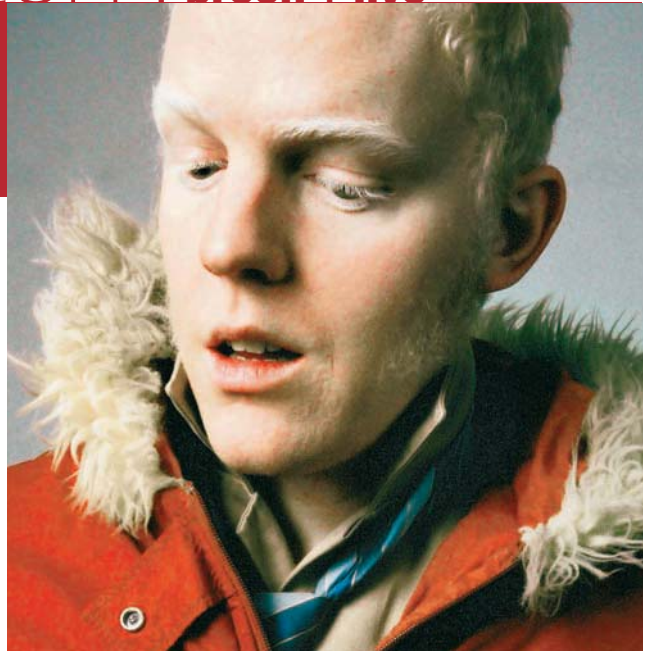
MANY PEOPLE ask me whether I download music illegally. Whether whenever I download a file in mp3 or other digitally compressed audio formats I am actually hoodwinking the music companies and depriving musicians I like of a bit of their livelihood. Well, to be fair, I know many people who do just that. Otherwise decent chaps who'd never crash a traffic stop sign or jump a queue think nothing about illegally downloading the entire new Franz Ferdinand album, *Tonight*. Or the original soundtrack of Oscar nominated *Slumdog Millionaire*. Or, even a similarly illegal copy of London's dance band, Bloc Party's latest, *Intimacy*.

All of these and more are available free on a host of websites, many of them organised and searchable with precision. All you'll need, besides a Net connection, is software that allows you to share files across the Internet. I know people who don't just download their music but the latest films, television shows and other forms of entertainment, all completely illegally, of course.

Yet, there are ways to get your music off the Internet legally and free. One such is actually encouraged by small and independent record companies and their (usually indie) bands that offer free tracks and, on occasion, even full albums on the Internet. This is how it works. Bands offer a track or two off their albums to influential music bloggers who put them up on their websites in the hope that those who download them would follow up by buying the albums. There are hundreds of music bloggers, though some of them are more influential than others (the web version of this column lists a few biggies), and bands and record labels jockey for their attention.

I have discovered dozens of indie bands through this route. I subscribe to feeds from several music blogs that are constantly uploading tracks by new bands that you can sample. Some of them even put out weekly playlists of that week's selections on mixtape-like compilations that you can download and listen to. Others release regular podcasts. Last week, I found Rogue Wave, a band formed by Zach Schwartz, a techie who lost his job in the dotcom bust of the early 2000s and reinvented himself as a frontman for a band that delivers a low-fi but appealingly dreamy sound. Likewise, on another blog, I came across The Thermals, a post-punk band bursting with potential.

The only problem is most music blogs are very personalised websites that are the products of the whims of one or two authors who



NEW SOUNDS

Gentleman Reg, a gig comprising singer-songwriter Reg Vermue, is a one-man Canadian band whose music has infectious tunes

run them. So you get what they like and that may not always be what you like. A better way of getting new music free is to go to exclusive online record labels. Like RCRD LBL. A brainchild of an indie record label CEO, Downtown Records' Josh Deutsch, and the popular gizmo blog, Engadget's founder, Peter Rojas, RCRD LBL (www.rcrdlbl.com) is really an exclusive online record label that offers all its music free of cost as mp3 downloads. RCRD LBL allows you to download music free but charges record companies to advertise their music on the website. A bit like what a free newspaper might do: readers don't pay anything but advertisers do to reach them. And it seems to be working.

In late 2007, RCRD LBL started with 15 indie music labels and around 250 lesser-known bands. Today, the biggies are climbing aboard. Last year, Moby, the American DJ, singer and songwriter, launched his eighth studio album, *Last Night*, and put a mega mix of the album on RCRD LBL. Bloc Party are another heavyweight that's on the website. So are Iceland's Sigur Ros and American country rockers, The Felice Brothers (check them out if you haven't yet) and the really hot Canadian indie band, The Arcade Fire.

Last week, my iPod was buzzing with a bunch of new sounds – Antony & the Johnsons, a New York band who use cellos, upright basses and violins and play pop inflected with chamber music; Santogold, a rapper who you might like if you liked M.I.A.; Gentleman Reg, a melodious Canadian band whose music has infectious tunes; and Mi Ami, incredible blenders of '60s free jazz, '80s disco and African music (yes, it's possible). All from RCRD LBL and all free. And, I may add, legal.

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

SANTOGOLD IS A RAPPER YOU MIGHT LIKE IF YOU LIKED M.I.A.

