

“I Have iPod Envy”

I have iPod envy. I probably shouldn't be admitting this in print. It makes me feel like a high-schooler, afraid that if people know the truth they won't like me any more.

It's not the actual iPod I'm talking about. My iPod is three years old, a really nice apple green, and right after I bought it they redesigned the Nano to about half the size, which is fine by me because the new ones are too fiddly. I'm not a gadget fetishist.

Those remarks that the first President Bush made about people not being able to program a VCR: that's me. Instruction manuals make my head spin. I wait until everyone else has something, that way they can explain to me how to work it. And even then, I probably use about 10 percent of the features of anything.

It's the contents. Everybody knows that the music you like is shorthand for the kind of person you are. When I was in college you could get away without having an amazing record collection: perhaps you didn't have the money, or the space, or the means to transport all those albums across the country. As long as you knew the good music, that was enough. There was something geeky about owning too many albums, anyway, something a bit sad, as if listening to that much music in your room was a substitute for having a real life. But now a song

costs 99 cents, and space and weight are yesterday's problems. Every song in your playlist is a facet of your personality. Every song that isn't there isn't you. Your iPod is a window into your soul.

"It's heavily weighted toward exercising," I insist, trying not to sound apologetic, whenever my iPod is revealed. That excuses the relative absence of slow songs, but it's not quite good enough. The eyebrows raise, even at songs I thought were failsafe. "Suffragette City" – what's wrong with early Bowie? It elicited a pitying remark from my friend Bryan. "Crocodile Rock" – okay, a little embarrassing, but it was my favorite song when I was eight and it brings back good memories. Wham's "I'm Your Man" – so my tongue's in my cheek, you have a problem with that?

I do not have teabag envy, because my selection of teas – caffeinated, uncaffeinated, English, French, Navajo, waking up, calming down, antioxidant, liver-supporting, lung-supporting, immune system-supporting – is second to nobody's. I do not have DVD shelf envy, because I have no desire to watch movies that many times. But when Bryan says, "I'll lend you my iPod, it's my little way of making the world a better place," I feel a rush of greed. Maybe I can steal some of his songs. Probably some of them are African. I love Youssou N'Dour when he sings on Peter Gabriel records, and Ladysmith Black Mambazo when they sang on *Graceland*, but I've never been able to find the good stuff at the source. I feel it as a failing. Now I'm going to get the chance to have really

obscure and fantastic African artists on my iPod, and when, casually, I mention them, people will be really impressed and have iPod envy of me.

But how many titles and artists can I make a note of and download before I'm stealing Bryan's personality? And, the more immediate issue: when he lends me his iPod, I'm going to have to lend him mine. Certainly, after that Bowie remark, I can't give it to him as it is.

I could ask Tara for her playlist. She always has cool music. But maybe that's cheating, because I'd be doing it to impress. Is padding your iPod like padding your bra?

As I look through my playlist, I see Taj Mahal: "Take a Giant Step" – outside your mind, the lyric goes. I love this song, maybe because I'm in my mind so much that the thought of stepping outside it is delicious. Taj is right. Thinking doesn't make you happy. Don't think about your music; just listen to it. If it makes you happy, that's enough. That's everything.