



Brian Shellito/DN

# Labels ridiculed in 'The Dialogue of Cartercrates'

The following dialogue is between Socrates and Cartercrates of Lincolnlea. The site of the dialogue is unclear; it probably takes place outside some public place where people loiter about and act philosophical.

**SOCRATES:** So, Cartercrates, what brings you to the union today, do you have business here?

**CARTERCRATES:** No, Socrates, I am simply passing the time. I just finished giving a presentation to Alcibiades here on the subject of music (1).

**S:** Really, Cartercrates, I have heard that you have great knowledge in such matters, and I would like very much to rid myself of my ignorance. Alas, it would seem that I have arrived after the plant has found the bridge (2).

**C:** Yes, Socrates, it is true that I have great knowledge of these things, and I would be happy to give you a presentation as well.

**S:** Splendid, my dear Cartercrates, but I am not fond of presentations, as you know. Perhaps we could engage in a discussion, and you could save this presentation of yours for another day.

**C:** Very well, my dear Socrates, ask me anything you wish.

**S:** Thank you, Cartercrates, I will. I have heard talk of a thing called "alternative" music. Is this a thing with which you are familiar?

**C:** Yes, of course.

**S:** Tell me then, son of Samimenes of Lincolnlea, what, exactly, is it?

**C:** Is this all you want to know? Why Socrates, even an infant could tell you this.

**S:** Well, Cartercrates, since there is no infant here, you'll have to do.

**C:** Really, Socrates, "alternative" music is the most virtuous and wonderful of all musical forms.

**S:** Indeed, Cartercrates, you do answer much like an infant, but I don't wish to hear your infantile praises of this kind of music. I wish for you to tell me what "alternative" music is, and if you would tell me also what it is an "alternative" to.

**C:** Well, my friend, it is the music that is not heard on Top-40 radio, for it is an "alternative" to this kind of music.

**S:** I see, so that would include the likes of Bob Marley, Branford Marsalis and Primus?

**C:** No, not Bob Marley, nor Marsalis, but certainly Primus, for they are most "alternative."

**S:** Well, I hear none of those groups just mentioned on Top-40 radio, so how can this be, according to what Cartercrates says?

**C:** What I mean is the music which is non-commercial in nature. That which is played on public radio stations.

**S:** Indeed, is this what you mean? Like Bach, Paganini and the like?

**C:** No, not at all. I mean the college radio stations.

**S:** Well, my friend, I wish you would say what you mean in the first place. So, "alternative" music is the music played on college radio stations — the ones run by the colleges?

**C:** Yes, that is what it is, Socrates.

**S:** Stations like KRNU?

**C:** Yes, exactly.

**S:** Didn't KRNU start out by playing what you call Top 40, and don't

many other such college-run stations, in fact, play many other so-called "types" of music as well.

**C:** Well, yes, perhaps I mean that "alternative" music is that which they play now on KRNU.

## Carter Van Pelt

**S:** By the dog, Cartercrates! Is it or isn't it?

**C:** I say it is.

**S:** So a band that is alternative is one like Midnight Oil, Jane's Addiction, U2 or R.E.M., for they are played on KRNU. One that isn't "alternative" would be one like Living Colour, Dead Kennedys, 999, Nick Cave, or The Sex Pistols, because they aren't played on the station?

**C:** OK, all of those are "alternative" bands, but it's because they are not commercial that they are so, not because of KRNU.

**S:** By the cat, Cartercrates, your statements do waggle about like the sick, festering Ionian in the vat of boiling lemonade (3). What are you now saying? Groups that are non-commercial are "alternative"?

**C:** Yes, that is how it is.

**S:** How marvelous, Cartercrates, this is the part of discussions I love the most. This is where my victims abandon their initial statements, and I use my vastly superior intellect to set them up and chop them off at the knees like the old Persian who wore cylindrical boots (4).

However, I assure you, my friend, that I am in this discussion to gain knowledge, and not to humiliate you in front of this rather large and influential crowd gathered here — the ones who are jeering you and throwing things. Pay no attention to them.

To continue with the contes... discussion, groups like R.E.M., U2, and Jane's Addiction are said by Cartercrates to be "alternative," so it follows that they are non-commercial?

**C:** Yes, that is how it is.

**S:** By non-commercial, you mean that which lacks in commercial success?

**C:** Yes.

**S:** So, lacking in commercial success according to Cartercrates is selling several million copies of albums, and playing concerts in football stadiums?

**C:** OK, Socrates, so those bands aren't "alternative," but commercial, by my definition. By non-commercial, I mean those that some people listen to, but not too many — not a horde of people.

**S:** Excellent, Cartercrates, you now give me the opportunity to make you look foolish by using one of my favorite paradoxes. Suppose you have one person listening to a band and no more. Would this band be "alternative"?

**C:** Yes, I say, for no horde listens to them.

**S:** Suppose we add another person to this band's group of fans — making two. Is this a horde?

**C:** Certainly not.

**S:** Suppose we continue this process. One by one we add fans.

At what point do we have this horde of yours that makes a band "commercial" and not "alternative"?

**C:** OK, Socrates, I don't know what constitutes a horde. Maybe "alternative" is when you have a skinny butt, sideburns and Manchesterian accent.

**S:** So those bands with fat butts like TAD...

**C:** OK! OK! So I don't know what it is Mr. Smarty-ropes! You say you are ignorant in these matters, but you seem to know soooooo much. You tell me what kind of music you think "alternative" music is.

**S:** Very well, my young and humbled friend, I will tell you. I think it isn't any kind of music at all.

*This forcing of words upon music is done in order to do something that is very dependent upon words — making money. I believe the same to be the case with all the so-called "types" of music. There are so many different artists, songs and sounds which utterly defy description that it is meaningless to categorize them.*

**C:** What? Ridiculous!  
**S:** I think not, oh dog-faced one.

I think is not a kind of music, but a mere label, a tag, a handle. It is a mere name created by the music industry to describe something that can't be described in words, namely music — which is itself a category of sounds whose meaning is unclear.

This forcing of words upon music is done in order to do something that is very dependent upon words — making money. I believe the same to be the case with all the so-called "types" of music. There are so many different artists, songs, and sounds which utterly defy description that it is meaningless to categorize them.

People would be better and more virtuous if they merely concerned themselves with whether they gain pleasure and satisfaction from that to which they listen, instead of worrying about whether or not it is of one type or another.

Only the industry benefits from this group labeling, and therefore I will have none of it, and neither will you, Cartercrates, if you are wise.

By the way, Alcibiades, are you done taping my Butthole Surfers CD yet?

(1) Alcibiades was an Athenian general and a friend of Socrates.

(2) Socrates here is referring to the obscure Greek poem of the plant searching for the bridge. It is somewhat akin to the modern phrase, "I guess I'm too late."

(3) An even more obscure reference to a poorly groomed man from Iona who failed in the attempt of a party stunt.

(4) We have no idea what the hell he means by this.

Van Pelt is a junior broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan staff reporter.



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