CYBERSCAPE

Mark Baldridge

Gender is big enigma in cyberspace

In cyberspace, no one can hear you sing. Rich baritone or off-key soprano — no difference.

The only voice you have comes out of the tips of your fingers and takes the form of cheap electrons on someone else's CRT many miles away.

Simply put, you can be anyone ... of any sex. Sign on to a chat forum in your jammies. Pick a name, any name:

As janet.jackson, you can say hello to BOGART, stop a while with lonelygirl or cast longing *glances* at Big_Boy who says he remembers you from the party at Doug's Chat Server — or was it the "Volcano Room?"

Surf on over to the "Hot Tub" where BIGuns is telling Leatherboy about "her" adventures.

Nevermind the fact that BIGuns is really one Wallace Rodman of Long Island, an unemployed claims adjuster and closet crossdresser of cyberspace.

Log onto any reasonably friendly chat server and a chorus of welcome rises to greet you:

"Hi, JunGirl! Where are you from?" they shout in chorus.

And some awkward guy calling himself A.Trebek sidles over to you to *whisper* in your ear, "Hey baby, wanna make it in the shadows here?"

Stroke your stubble and think about it first. These guys can be obnoxious, following you from room to room like a lurker with intent to loom.

Or, if your real name is Candi, you might want to log on as Cyrano or Brutus. It makes things easier if all you want to do is talk.

Of course, that's all you will be doing, but there's talk and then there's ... well, talk. You know what I mean.

But for some people the urge to "talk dirty" is just too great. Overpowering even.

"Hey, baby, I wanna frank your footsies."

They can't keep their fingers to themselves. On any given evening there must be hundreds of men in chat rooms dressed up in some fancy girly name.

But people continue to ask.

I sign on as Ubik, most times. Meet an Ubik out there and it's probably me.

"So, Ubik, what kind of name is that? Are you a girl?" I get asked this regularly.

What I always want to know is what possible difference it could make. I'm not generally looking to hear some guy describe his penis in heroic terms, so why do they care if I'm a boy?

But they do.

"Any girls here tonight?" some guy called Rome0 wants to know.

We carry our genders with us all day and all night and here's some frood wanting to carry the whole mess into cyberspace as well.

"YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU" I want to shout in large capital letters.

To some of us, the gender vacuum of cyberspace offers a nice respite from the roles and demands of gender. We don't go around sexualizing it unnecessarily.

Its a place where you can cut loose and swear like a sailor, scratch yourself, vent your spleen or just, like they used to say, "rap" with your fellow cyberghosts.

It's kind of like being dead.

Relaxing like that.

But then, in walks a cutie with a great set of parentheses and — well, who can resist?

Internet acts as '90s singles bar

By Jeff Randall
Senior Reporter

The heydays of "The Dating Game" and "Love Connection" are long gone, and the Internet could be partly to blame.

Meeting people online has become one of the Internet's fastest growing and most popular uses. Whether looking for love, friendship or just someone to talk to, a number of college students have discovered the advantages and disadvantages of online interpersonal relationships.

Carla Ott, an undeclared freshman, said making friends through the computer was, for the most part, easier than making friends in person.

"I'm pretty shy around people I don't know," Ott said. "But when I can type what I want to say to other people, I get more confidence.

"I can talk to almost anybody on the computer."

The majority of electronic conversation takes place in "chat rooms," sites on the Internet where people can type and send messages to a single site for viewing by anyone who happens to be logged on at the time.

For more private encounters, programs such as the "talk" function in UNIX exist. This program allows two people to type messages to each other in real time, the sender's messages appear on the receiver's screen as they are typed.

These options and several more are utilized by people in search of companionship across the world.

"It's amazing how many people are out there who are looking for someone to talk to," Ott

Bret Gottschall/DN

said. "They'll talk to anybody, about anything."

Brian Chandler, a sophomore English major at the University of Kansas, commented on his more romantic Internet experiences through the Iowa Student Computer Association's Bulletin Board System (ISCA BBS).

"I met this girl from Alaska on the computer," Chandler said. "We talked to each other all last year; we were like high school kids.

"And as far as I knew, she could have been a retired fisherman named Bob. I never actually met her in person."

The main mystery of electronic interaction is caused by the fact that the people one meets over the Internet are neither seen nor heard. For some students like Chandler, that can be a problem.

"I never know who I'm talking to, really,"

Eric Columbus, a freshman psychology major, said. "I know I've lied about my identity once in a while. My secret identity used to be Marsha, just so I could see what it was like to have guys hit on me.

"I didn't like it."

And that sentiment has been echoed by many women who have had less-than-positive experiences in the Internet chat rooms.

"Harassment is a big problem," Jennifer Sands, a junior theater major, said. "There are some pretty depraved guys out there with too much free time on their hands.

"If they find out that you're a single woman, it can get to be a pretty ugly time."

Sands said she combatted the harassment by either using masculine identities or ignoring the more persistent men.

"If you don't respond, they usually get bored of you after a while. There's not much they can do if you don't pay attention to them."

For those who have been able to overcome the uncertainty, the confusion and the other problems of online encounters, however, the rewards have proven worth it.

Greg Anderson of Lincoln said he had been able to coordinate a number of dates through the Internet, and some of them had been worth the trouble.

"It's really the ultimate blind date," Anderson said. "You never see the other person until the actual date, but you set it up for yourself.

"It's a pretty good way to go, especially if you don't trust your friends to set you up with dates."

Computers changing music's score

Patrick Hambrecht
Staff Reporter

With $200 and a computer, Lincoln musicians are building guerrilla sound studios capable of creating the same industrial music as featured on corporate-funded compact discs. And for anyone with a computer, its easy to do the same.

Jesse Bloom, UNL junior and guitarist for the band lowercase i, said using a computer has allowed his band to experiment with styles as different as Japanese rhythms, orchestral string sections and industrial samples.

"If I get frustrated with the way our music is going, I can just type a single line of music into the computer and then just go in a hundred different ways," Bloom said. "You have so many instruments to choose from."

However, Bloom's roommate, a junior computer engineering major, isn't content using existing music software to create music. So Eric Guthmann has written his own computer programs.

"This way I can pretty much do whatever I imagine," Guthmann said. "I can change the tempo, transpose or manipulate a song anyway I want."

Guthmann said the existing computer code for music-writing software, MIDI, is archaic and nearly impossible to understand for the average musician.

MIDI stands for Musical Instrument Digital Interface, and is the language that allows keyboards and computers to talk to one another. But just because a Casio synthesizer and an IBM PC can easily communicate using MIDI, doesn't mean people can.

To make it easier for PC composers to get in on the conversation, Guthmann said he's also writing a new MIDI language that should be easier for the average musician to use.

But MIDI computer language is only half of PC music. MIDI is a language of musical theory, containing everything needed to read a sheet of music. But digital audio is the language of the ear, able to hear a bird chirping, a motor running — and turn that into music.

And this "sampling," capturing a live sound and turning it into a musical effect, is being used

by a lot of the newest types of music: rap, industrial and ambient, among others.

And, of course, computers provide an easy way to record the song with clear digital sound.

With a high-grade recording sound card, there is virtually no difference between the sound that goes into the microphone or wire and out of the computer. And with a cheap or medium-priced sound card, a computer turns music into ... industrial music.

Eric Medley is the resource manager at Dietze Music House and an audio producer for bands like Mercy Rule and Sideshow. He explains the raw, computerized noise of industrial music as the natural effect when using cheap Sound Blaster quality sound cards.

"The more effects musicians pull with digital recording, the worse it's going to sound," Medley said. "But you can throw a musician in a room with anything, and they'll learn to play music on it."

To transform a home computer into an industrial music studio, one only needs a sound card, a microphone and an inexpensive soundwave file program. All of these things are usually included in a multimedia package for around $100.

With the proper tools, it's easy to make groovy samples and repeat them in rhythmic intervals, as is done in hip-hop and industrial music. Electronic effects needed to make the formulaic "techno" sounds are usually included with software program.

For simple recording purposes, even a cheap

sound card often captures music better than a tape recorder or tape deck. A quality sound card, like the Roland Rap-10 will cost at least $300 and is necessary for any sophisticated recording.

Of course, once a recording is made, it has to be reproduced somehow: either on tape, CD, DAT or perhaps purple translucent collector's vinyl — and all for a lot more money.

James Mehsling/DN