

# OPINION PAGES

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## Our VIEW

### Sold out?

*Euro may give dollar a run for its money*

Though the Euro has yet to prove whether it will be a heavy hitter on world markets – it's still in its infancy, being released only last week – most experts agree it could present a formidable competitor to the U.S. dollar.

The 11 Euroland nations are poised to become a new powerblock on the international economic scene, and could surpass the U.S. dollar as the currency of choice for the world's cash reserves.

But before the United States packs up its world bank moneybags, the 11 European nations must prove themselves – prove that they can work together to overcome centuries of continental political strife and create an economic giant.

It won't be easy – there are skeptics even within the European Union. Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom, home of the world's largest financial center, all opted not to join.

And the skeptics have at least some merit.

Recent market indicators have suggested the Euro, which debuted on world markets with a bang, is now trading against other currencies with more of a fizzle.

Even if the Euro rebounds from its recent downturn, the currency and its 11 supporting countries must continually face the historical rifts between many of its member-states, which may prove too difficult to overcome, according to some analysts.

Euro-skepticism is most rampant in Britain, with less than 30 percent of the population supporting the United Kingdom's possible entry into the Euro currency when it becomes actual paper and coins, not just computer-traded currency, in 2002.

But if the 11 Euro member-states are able to succeed with this plan – more than 20 years in the making – by sacrificing parts of their economic sovereignties, they will emerge as something bigger than what any of them were alone.

Not only will the European countries increase their economic clout, but Europe will once again rise as a political power that may rival the United States.

Europe may become the "United States of Europe" British Prime Minister Winston Churchill envisioned in 1946.

For this reason, the United States must realize that it may not always hold the top spot in the international economic and political scenes.

The new kid on the block, with a population greater than the United States and a gross domestic product second only to the United States, may win this game, and take the piggy bank, too.

## Horsey's VIEW



## Music for the masses

*Artists should control MP3 accessibility*



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Is music free?

How much does a record company control what a musician makes?

If a song is out of print, is it illegal to make a copy of it, considering you can't legally buy the compact disc?

It's questions like these that are plaguing the MP3 format, a computer system of audio recording that has gotten itself into the news quite a bit lately.

For those of you unfamiliar with computer terms, I'll try to keep it simple. MP3 allows for CD-quality audio to be compacted down to almost nothing in terms of size, allowing it to be transmitted quickly over the Internet.

I'd heard about the MP3 format years ago, but I always considered it a pirate's tool, something that was used by law-breakers and criminals to copy whole CDs and rip off companies.

Certainly the Recording Industry Association of America feels that way. The RIAA has been protesting the MP3 format since its inception, saying it's going to destroy the music industry and that soon artists won't be paid anything for their music.

The way the RIAA describes it, if MP3 isn't banned, they'll be out of business and so will every band liked by, well, anyone.

Over winter break, I started to do a bit of poking into the situation myself.

Sitting at home, I saw a snippet of MTV News all about the MP3 format and one of the more popular bands these days, the Beastie Boys.

As it turns out, the Beasties had recorded a couple of live tracks from some of their recent concerts. For their fans, they had put these tracks up on their Web site. They had, natch, used the MP3 format.

Enter the Man, in the form of Capitol Records.

Capitol is the distributor of the Beastie Boys' albums. If you buy a Beasties album, Capitol gets money.

With a wave of Capitol Records' hand, the MP3 files were gone overnight and in their place were

RealAudio recordings.

This is, in layman's terms, the equivalent of taking down CD-quality sound, and replacing it with a radio broadcast. The sound quality difference isn't huge, but RealAudio is much harder to work with. You really couldn't convert it to a CD without a lot of effort and it honestly doesn't sound as good.

Well, fine, I can hear someone saying, if I were them, I wouldn't want my music given out free either. The key to this conundrum is that it isn't the Beasties who wanted them pulled down – it was the record label.

The Beasties wanted it to be free.

They have no intentions to release a live CD of these recordings, so they aren't cutting into the profits of Capitol, but it's another chance for the label to put its foot down.

Let me offer a different case, one I'm a little more interested in. Not to bust on the Beasties, but they're not my type of stuff.

Weezer is. When I started poking around the Net looking for MP3s, I found that Weezer used to have a whole ton of B-sides available in MP3 format on one of their fan clubs' Web pages.

Eventually someone got around to asking Rivers Cuomo, Weezer's songwriter, if they were ever going to release a B-sides compilation, to which he responded, "Definitely!"

The next day, like the falling of dominoes, all the B-sides MP3s vanished from the net and were replaced with RealAudio versions.

And the band members have the right to do that. It's their music. If they plan on releasing it eventually on CD, then I have no problem with waiting.

Another example of MP3 fair usage is with My Bloody Valentine, a favorite band of mine who hasn't put out an album in eight years.

If you try to go buy any of their early recordings, I guarantee you people will stare at you blankly. They're out of print. They're so far out of print that they're impossible to get.

And gosh, isn't the MP3 format helpful to share that music, which you can't buy, to all the fans who want so to hear it.

The same applies to live and out-of-print recordings of the Dave Matthews Band, U2 and Radiohead, all of whom I've picked up MP3 files of since I began listening to the format.

I have also downloaded and kept songs that I could hear on the radio, although I usually buy the album eventually. My thinking is that if I can hear it on the radio, I can record it.

It's open for public consumption.

See, I'm not making a penny on it. I'm not distributing them for profit. I'm not pirating CDs and anything that's in print, I buy.

But things go out of print and I don't want to miss out on the music, and I don't think the musicians would want me to either.

Do you think John Lennon sat around thinking about how much money he was going to make from a song when he was writing it, or do you think he was hoping it would outlive him, like so much of his music did?

Is it business or art?

I also found it interesting that the RIAA's argument sounds like another argument I read about when I was doing research on copyright laws awhile back.

When VCRs were introduced, there was a fit, saying that with the ability to play and record movies, people were going to pirate them like mad, and that the movie industry would collapse.

Funny, innit, that the video industry has virtually kept some movie studios afloat? Sure, there are some dishonest folks who rent and copy a movie, but for every one person like that, there are 100 who go out and buy the video.

Is the RIAA going to win? Is the MP3 format going to be stamped out? I hope not.

As not only a fan but a musician myself, I believe that a musician should have final control over the music.

You only sell so much of your soul when you get in a contract. The corporate suits should never be able to prevent an artist from creating art.

If John Grisham wants to write and post a story on the Internet, he could.

Why can't the Beastie Boys do the same?



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