



# PRO/CENIUM clicks

by Patty Caya

**The online-music revolution is already over—only the details remain to be settled.**

## PANDORA'S WEBSITE

Predicting the future of online music is more difficult than I first expected. Why? Because the future is now. Napster, MP3.com, Gnutella, Scour, and all the others who have been battling for their futures (in court) against the big five record conglomerates have already changed the music-distribution model for ever. Music acquisition and distribution as we knew it will never be the same. That's the future, and the rest is just details. Sure, some day we may pay subscription fees to use services such as Napster and the like, but we will never again be completely dependent on music-industry executives and big radio to tell us how we are going to hear.

Imagine the world without record stores and radio stations. People who use internet music services have pondered such a future; big music (BMG, Time Warner/AOL, Seagram's Universal, Sony Music, EMI) fears that just such a future is possible and that they won't be ready for it. Music distribution used to be completely controlled by them via physical distribution and radio air-play. Then it all changed. While the music industry viewed the web as just another marketing medium, Napster *et al.* realized that it was a completely new way to acquire and listen to music. Digital distribution has opened up a world that is going to be nearly impossible to alter significantly.

By all recent accounts, the flurry of lawsuits in 2000 were a desperate attempt to put the brakes on an already pervasive model and buy the recording industry some time while it tried to figure out what to do, how to secure digital music, and how to price it. Whatever comes next from the music industry, one thing is sure: the music industry will set the prices—it always does—but the days of the big-music dictatorship are pretty much over. The ubiquitous model of digital distribution and transport to multiple devices is a reality that has changed the way people perceive music and has created unprecedented demand.

As the lawsuits are settled and the big five record labels work in earnest to figure out what's next, the revolution quietly continues. As I wrote this article (in late 2000), I compiled downloads of my favorite Christmas songs—versions that I love and can't get all in one place—to listen to while I wrote. Would I pay for such a compilation CD? Sure, but it doesn't exist. No record-industry execu-

tive has thought of putting just that combination of songs together, and none ever will. I know because I own 14 compilation CDs of Christmas music, and not one of them has more than two or three songs that I like.

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While some call the current situation piracy, I call it progress. The future is in working out the details—the revolution has already taken place. I'm glad that Shawn Fanning (of Napster) has joined forces with one of the big record labels (BMG). Big music needs that kind of forward thinking on its side.

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