

Bring order to your music files

MP3 TOOLS

Storing your MP3 collection on your hard drive or CD-ROM may be appealing but it soon becomes unmanageable. Do you have that song and if so which disc is it on? Anja M Wagner introduces some tools to help you get your house music in order

MP3 MP3 is the abbreviation for "MPEG 1 Audio Layer 3" and is a standard format for the compression of audio files. An MP3 file has about one twelfth the size of the original audio file. This is possible because MP3 filters out the frequencies in audio data which the human ear cannot hear. MP3PRO is the official successor format of MP3. It is claimed to halve the bitrate required while still keeping the same quality. The MP3PRO format was developed by the Fraunhoferinstitut, Thomson and Coding Technologies and should be downward-compatible.

We'll start off with a little program to help keep track of your MP3 files. KDiskCat can be found in the SuSE distribution but you may need to install it via YaST2. Start the tool by entering *kdiskcat* in the quick starter (Alt+F2). KDiskCat distinguishes between catalogues and archives in the archiving hierarchy. Catalogues are superordinate to archives, so, for example, you can make a catalogue for music files, one for radio plays, one for radio recordings etc.



Figure 1: First create your catalogue

Since the capacity of a hard drive can be rapidly exhausted when MP3s are collected intensively, it's a sensible idea to burn the files to a CD. To manage the collection it seems a good idea to make a separate archive for each CD; this should be given the name of the respective CD. You can of course choose a totally different method for your archiving.

First create one or more catalogues. To do this, click on *File/New catalogue* in the menu bar and give it an informative name, such as Music. The MP3 CDs with music will now be archived in this folder. Click on *Archive/New archive*. Place the CD with the MP3s in the drive and click in the search button with the three little dots. Don't forget to first to mount the CD drive before this though. Enter the directory path, for example */cdrom*.

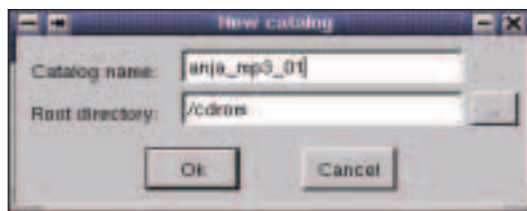


Figure 2: The archive should be named after the CD

For a new archive name it would be a good idea to use the name and/or the label of the CD, which you

will have declared during burning, for example "mymp3_01". The use of labels makes it easier to get an overview. If you have not given the CD a name when burning, this doesn't matter – just name the archive as you sort and label the CDs.

So enter the name as the new archive designation and click on OK. KDiskCat will now scan the CD, which can take some time. Following the scan, you should be able to see mymp3_01 archive in the Music catalogue – and more will join it when you scan further CDs.

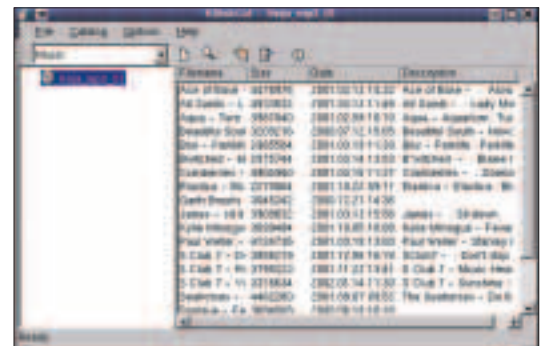


Figure 3: KDiskCat lists the files in each archive clearly

For example, if an archive is now to be added to the Radio plays catalogue, first select the Radio Plays catalogue from the drop-down menu and then proceed as with the Music catalogue. Click on *Archive/New archive* and scan the CD. If the files on your CD are arranged into folders, KDiskCat takes on this structure.

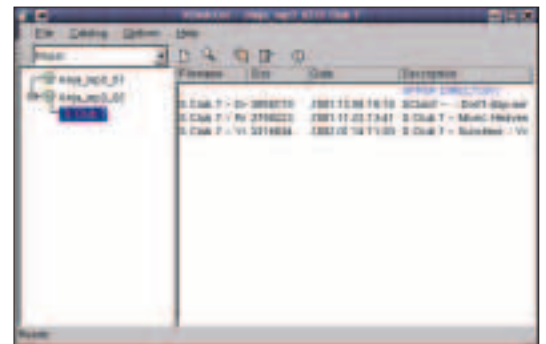


Figure 4: The folder structure on the CD is taken over by KDiskCat

You can also add a description to each archive. To do so, select the menu item *Archive/Archive*

properties and enter the text in the box provided. In the search function you can look for the entries via the descriptions later. Here you can also look up when you created the archive.

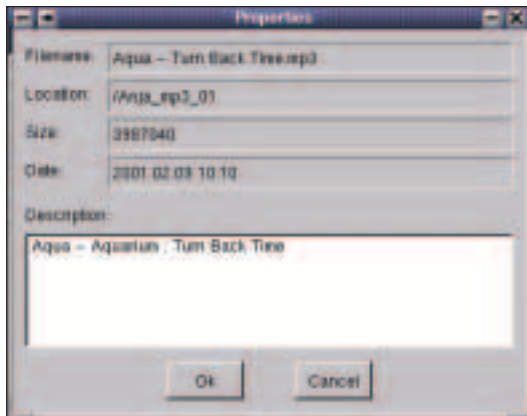


Figure 5: Add a description for an archive

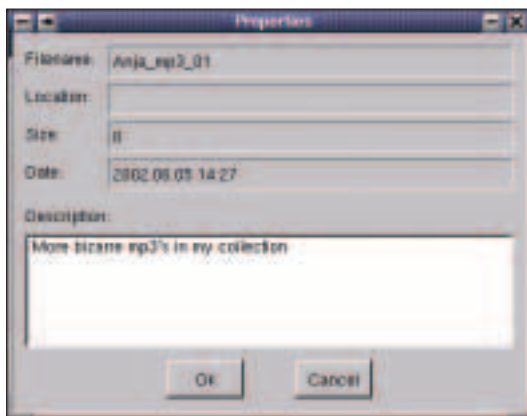


Figure 6: You can also store personal comments for entries in the archive

With a right-click on one of the entries in the archive you can open a Properties box with exactly the same structure for each file. A tool like KDiskCat is of great help if it has a good search function, because it's very easy to lose track of an extensive MP3 collection. Maybe you still know that a file exists on CD, but on which one? Even with well-labelled covers it is tedious searching by hand.

Lost and found

Click on *Archive/Search*. In the search mask first define in which of your catalogues to search; they are listed in the left-hand column. With a click on the A button, you can mark all catalogues, a click on N cancels the marking. A click on C marks the catalogue which you have previously selected from the drop-down menu. You can mark additional catalogues with the click of a mouse, and there is no need to press the Ctrl key when you do so.

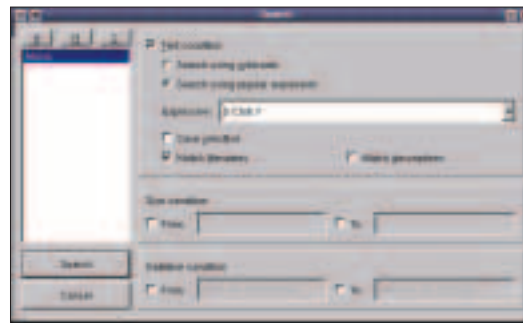


Figure 7: The search function can use wildcards or terms

The search function allows wildcards. "*" stands for as many characters as you like, while "?" represents just one character. If you know exactly what you are looking for, select the option Use regular expressions and enter the search term in the text line.

You can search through the file names and the descriptions. Place a tick against the option *Upper/lower case*, so that KDiskCat takes upper and lower case into account. Then if for example you enter *acdc*, files with the name component *ACDC* will be ignored by the search. You can also specify as search criteria the file size and the date of creation.

When entering the file size keep to the figures displayed in the main window by KDiskCat. For MP3 files these are usually seven-digit numbers. You must nevertheless, if you search according to file size or date, enter something in the text line *Search term*. It's a good idea to use the wildcard "*", if you want to look solely according to size and/or date. The search results are then shown by KDiskCat in a new window.

In addition to the parameters of file name, size, catalogue, date and description, the Path column is especially helpful: this shows the name of the archive in which the file is kept. KDiskCat does not save any files, but merely archives names and the aforementioned parameters. Now it becomes clear why the archive ought to bear the name of the CD, because this is how you know on which CD the file you seek can be found. The results list can be saved as a text file and thus be accessed and printed out at any time.

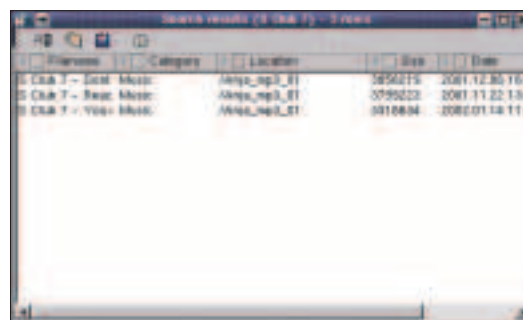


Figure 8: The results of a search can be saved, in order to view and print them out later

ID3 Tag ID3 tags allow metadata to be added to MP3 files. The older version, ID3v1, stands at the end of the file and can only include details on the artist, album, song, genre, year and a brief comment. ID3v2 stands at the start of the MP3 file and can include, with up to 256Mb of data, a picture of the artist amongst other things. Most MP3 players can read out ID3 data.

FreeAmp – another Winamp clone

KDE offers a number of software MP3 players. Here we shall present FreeAmp, which you can obtain at <http://www.freeamp.org>, where you'll even find a Windows version.

Start FreeAmp via the start menu item *Multimedia/Sound/Freeamp* or by entering *freeamp* in the fast starter.



Figure 9: The main FreeAmp screen

After a few clicks, there is nothing standing in the way of your musical pleasure: to play back an audio file, click on the button marked Files and search in the following window for the tracks on your system. Mark a song by mouse click and hold down the Ctrl key, if you want to mark several. After a click on OK FreeAmp plays the tracks in the marked sequence. The MP3 player displays details of the song during playback (title and artist) and MP3 properties.

Windows. First we will explain how you create playlists with FreeAmp.

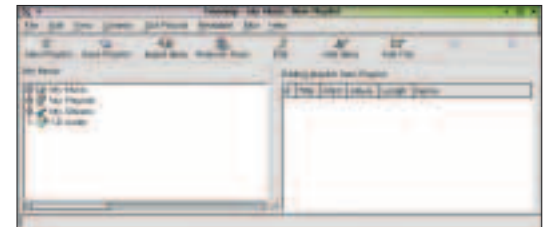


Figure 11: How a file browser shows FreeAmp your media files

Click on the My Music button. In the window that opens click on the New playlist button. A second window will now open – select Add Files. Search in the system for the songs which are to be collated as a playlist. By pressing the Ctrl key you can mark several songs simultaneously. After confirming with OK the right-hand side of browser window will list the title, artist, album, length in minutes and music genre of each track.

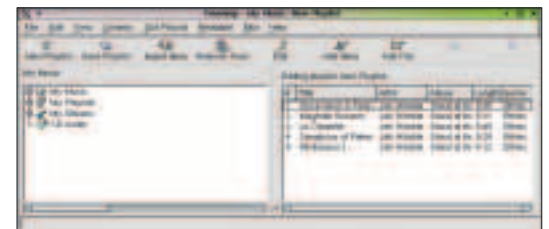


Figure 12: Collate the songs for a playlist

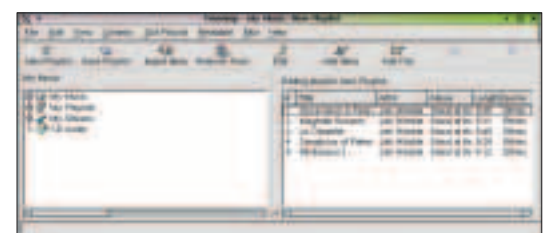


Figure 13: All the important details on the MP3 file are shown on the playlist

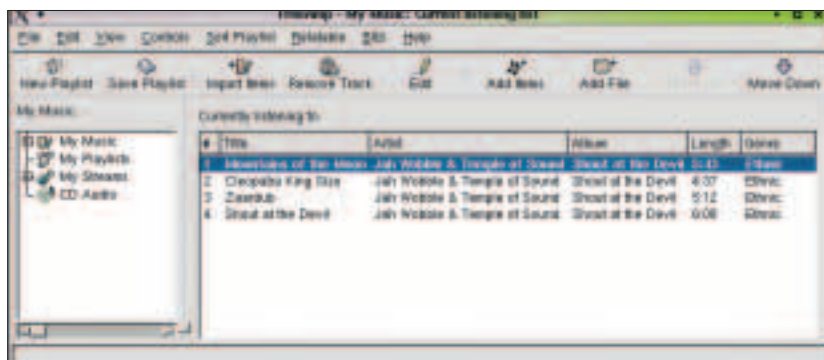


Figure 10: At a glance: Details of the song and MP3 properties

The volume is adjusted via the left slider; the right slider shows the progress of the playback, and you can “spool” back and forth through the track, if you move the slider with the mouse. You can use the lower symbol buttons to jump from track to track, stop playback and pause it. Random playback can be activated via the left button. A click on the Repeat button means the current track will be played again. If you click a second time on the button, the whole track list is repeated.

To save yourself searching for tracks every time you run FreeAmp, you can create playlists. FreeAmp stores these in exactly the same way as WinAmp and other MP3 players in the .m3u format. As such, you can easily import the playlists you have created under

Click, once all the songs have been collated, on *Save Playlist* and give the list an informative name. If you now click, in the left hand browser window on the +sign before *My Playlists*, all the lists created appear. With a double click the list is opened and its content displayed in the right window.

It's quite likely that you've been annoyed at some time or other by incorrect details in MP3 files. These are due to erroneous **ID3 tags**. Select the file whose ID3 tag you want to edit and then from the drop-down menu select *Edit/Info*. In the next step you can correct and add to the details. And you can also add a commentary. Confirm your inputs with *Apply*.

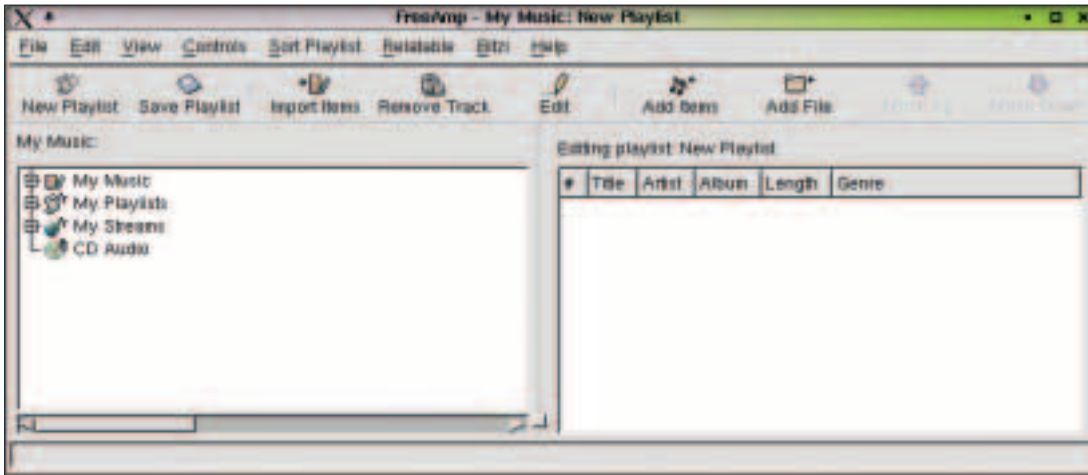


Figure 14: Correct the ID3 tag of a file if necessary

In a similar way to Microsoft's Windows Media Player, FreeAmp searches your system on request for audio files and adds them to the My Music folder. To do this, select *File/Search computer for music* in the *Files* menu bar and define which directories in the system are to be searched. The default option is the root directory "/", so the entire system is searched. If you select this option, after the scan, which takes a very long time, you will also have all the system sounds in the My Music folder.

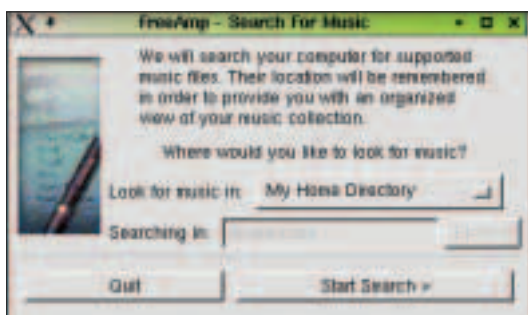
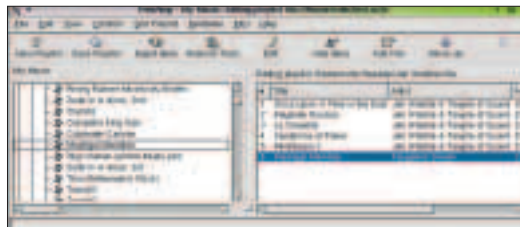


Figure 15: FreeAmp scans your entire system

It makes sense to restrict the scan, for example to your home directory, because this is where, as a general rule, you will find your audio files stored. Click on the button *Entire file system* button and in the following menu select *My Home Directory* or *Let me select a directory to restrict the scan further*. The result of this is to activate the *Start Search* button, and you can select the corresponding directory. FreeAmp saves links to the scanned files in two subfolders: *All Tracks* and *Uncategorized Tracks*.

After the scan you can create a playlist even more simply: click on *New Playlist* and then open *My Music* in the left browser window. Each song which is to go on the playlist, can either be dragged using *drag & drop* into the right browser window or selecting *Add to Playlist* from the dropdown menu. Next, save the new list.

Figure 16: Files can be added to a playlist via the dropdown menu or via drag & drop after the system scan

If you want to play back a playlist with FreeAmp, start the program, click on the *My Music* button and double-click on the list. FreeAmp then begins to play back the songs in the sequence of the list. Alternatively, activate *Controls/Play Tracks in Random Order* for random playback. The sequence of the tracks in the playlist can be altered via the button *Sort/Playlist*.

If you like FreeAmp and want your MP3s to be played as standard following a double click on this program, use a right-click to open the drop-down menu of any MP3 file and select *Edit file types*. On the *General* tab a few MP3 players will be listed in the lower window. Mark FreeAmp and click *Up*, until FreeAmp stands at the top of the list. Confirm with *OK*.

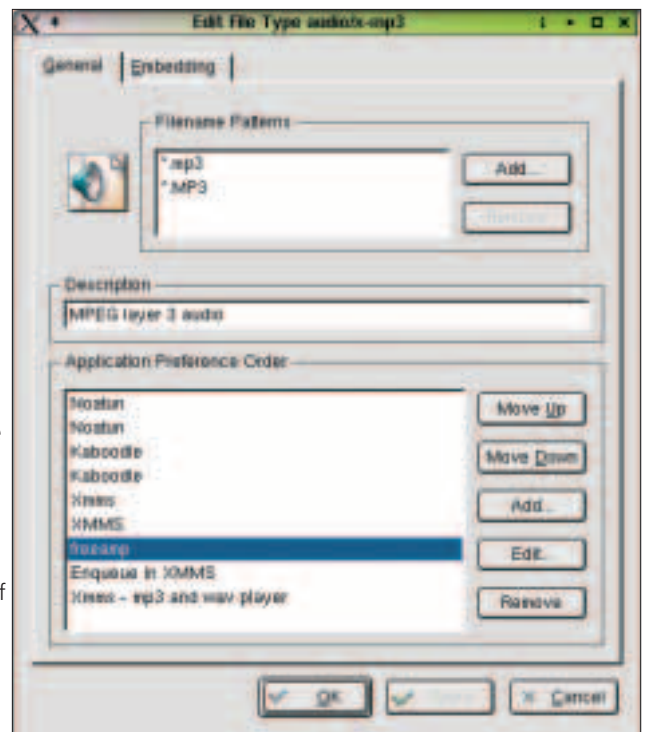


Figure 17: FreeAmp can be selected as standard application for MP3 files