

Digital drama: **classical storage & streaming**



iTunes logo © da-kuk iStock

Christopher Gillett has enough trouble with the way his digital music library is organised without even starting on Apple Music's new streaming service and its confusing approach to classical. A symphony is not a 'song', the artist is not the same thing as the composer – and don't even get him started on those dogfood adverts...



I have always liked compactness. I think it goes with the job. Back in the day, when I used to fill my suitcase for long opera jobs abroad with a printer, a fax machine, guide books, novels, a discman and CDs, I'd probably have slightly wet my knickers if I thought that one day I'd been able to swap them all for a tiny smartphone.

Like most of you, I got an iPod in 2006 and dutifully emptied all my CDs onto it via iTunes. Driven on by the whole compactness obsession, I reckoned that we could save acres of shelf space at home by throwing out all the CD jewel boxes and putting the discs in folders instead (alphabetised, of course). So I did, and still do, even though it is a continual sore point with the missus, for whom compactness is not such a thrill. But she's American, so compactness possibly isn't in her DNA, despite being properly compact herself. Don't mind me while I dig myself a hole...

Whoever attached the metadata didn't give a toss whether Mozart was the Composer or an Artist

iTunes, like so many technical advances, was so exciting at first. But it didn't take long to lose its charm. In those days, [Wagner \(/uk/learn/composers/richard-wagner\)](#) operas, composed in uninterrupted brilliance, played back with annoying pauses between tracks. Worse, whoever attached the so-called metadata to classical CDs didn't seem to give a toss whether, say, Mozart was the Composer or an Artist. Or who the conductor was. Or they thought that Tennstedt was the composer, Mahler, the Artist, and I was listening to The Complete Symphonies 1, 2, 3, track six. Meaning what exactly?

Finding the music I wanted to listen to, in the right order, without a sudden interruption in a playback of [Handel \(/uk/learn/composers/george-frideric-handel\)](#) concertos by a James Taylor song (I'm just that hip) proved well-nigh impossible. Box sets were torn asunder when disc one was composed by Giacomo Puccini, and disc two by Puccini, G, half a mile down the screen.

Apple started to do other things that irritated me, like dropping Google Maps from their iPhones and rendering my perfectly good iPad obsolete with software updates. I rebelled. It suddenly all seemed a bit cult-like for my taste and I got rid of all things Apple, including iTunes. Besides, Apple was so expensive.

But it still doesn't really work with classical music

Google was my new way ahead. A couple of years ago, I uploaded my entire digital music library to Google Play Music. It took about a day and meant, in theory, that I could now listen to my entire library anywhere I was connected to the internet. And there it all is. But, like iTunes – and, I gather from the [current storm of online comment \(http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/07/the-tragedy-of-itunes-and-classical-music/399788/\)](http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/07/the-tragedy-of-itunes-and-classical-music/399788/) around [Apple Music and other streaming sites \(http://www.buzzfeed.com/ninamohan/classical-music-streaming-sucks\)](http://www.buzzfeed.com/ninamohan/classical-music-streaming-sucks) – it still doesn't really work with classical music.

For instance, Google has made some slapdash guesses about what some of my CDs are. The recording I bought of [Rameau \(/uk/learn/composers/jean-philippe-rameau\)](#)'s *Dardanus* is by [John Eliot Gardiner \(/uk/learn/artists/john-eliot-gardiner\)](#) and the [English Baroque Soloists \(/uk/learn/artists/english-baroque-soloists\)](#), but Google has given it the cover from a completely different recording by Jeanne Lamon and the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, whoever they may be. My [Carlos Kleiber \(/uk/learn/artists/carlos-kleiber\)](#) [Beethoven \(/uk/learn/composers/ludwig-van-beethoven\)](#) symphonies disc has a bizarre cover assigned to it with Ludwig van B dressed as Elvis. It's dispiriting and annoying.

Perversely, some record companies are now going too far in supplying metadata. I'm on a recording of [Peter Grimes \(/uk/features/series/opera-strip/peter-grimes\)](#) in which every single track, of which there are many, credits every single artist who is singing on that particular track, of which there also many. Perhaps it helps with handing it out royalties, but it makes a nightmare of finding anything by Artist.

And since when, Google, has a symphonic movement been a 'song'?

On Spotify, an interest in opera prompts suggestions that I might want to listen to something by Jackie Evancho

And don't get me started on Spotify, where [Haydn \(/uk/learn/composers/franz-joseph-haydn\)](#) symphonies are interrupted by adverts for dog food, and an interest in opera prompts suggestions that I might want to listen to something by [Jackie Evancho \(/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/why-it-is-wrong-to-let-children-sing-opera\)](#).

There's little more annoying than a technology that promises so much but which really doesn't do the job – and digital storage and music streaming for classical fans certainly fit into this category. They're like American dishwashers that only work if you handwash the dishes first, or robot vacuum cleaners, which are fine only if you want something for the cat to play with.

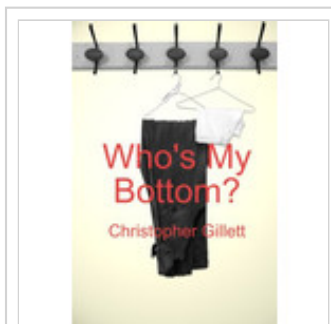
The recording companies have got to get their act together and sort out the metadata. They need to stop giving the job to some intern with a GCSE in typing and hand it over to a geek with a degree in music; because at the moment I'm just about ready to give up on all digital music and pack a good old-fashioned record player in my suitcase the next time I hit the road.

More from [Christopher Gillett on Sinfini Music \(/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett\)](http://uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett):

- [Alcohol and the opera house – why the two don't mix \(/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/the-dangers-of-alcohol-abuse-and-addiction-for-musicians-and-opera-singers-2015\)](http://uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/the-dangers-of-alcohol-abuse-and-addiction-for-musicians-and-opera-singers-2015)
- [Pavarotti couldn't – so why should other singers learn to sight read music? \(/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/should-opera-and-classical-singers-like-pavarotti-be-able-to-sight-read-music\)](http://uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/should-opera-and-classical-singers-like-pavarotti-be-able-to-sight-read-music)
- [Regietheater in opera – is it great art, or simply pretentious tosh? \(/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/regietheater-director-theatre-is-it-pretentious-or-artistic-august-2015\)](http://uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/regietheater-director-theatre-is-it-pretentious-or-artistic-august-2015)

Read more of Christopher's musings on his blog, christophergillett.co.uk (<http://christophergillett.co.uk>).

Recommended



Who's My Bottom?

Christopher Gillett

[\(/uk/store/products/1447674936\)](http://uk/store/products/1447674936)

[Buy](#)

[\(/uk/store/products/1447674936\)](http://uk/store/products/1447674936)



Scraping The Bottom

Christopher Gillett

[\(/uk/store/products/1291543473\)](http://uk/store/products/1291543473)

[Buy](#)

[\(/uk/store/products/1291543473\)](http://uk/store/products/1291543473)