My original iPod is a time capsule from 2002

I bought my first iPod back in 2001. I didn’t buy it just because I was a massive Apple fan or an early adopter; I bought it because I traveled a lot for work and spent hours of my life in trains, planes, and hotel rooms.

At the time I was living in my home city of London. I had working space in photo studios just off Camden High Street in North London, an area with a vibrant live music scene still enjoying the tail end of its post-Britpop cultural high and a large number of venues such as Underworld, Barfly, and The Dublin Castle. Camden was the perfect place for me as a significant part of my work was photographing actors, writers, artists, theatre productions, and of course, musicians. Though I certainly couldn’t claim to be working *in* the London music scene, I was certainly on the edge of it. And I listened to *a lot* of music, especially when I traveled.

Back in the early 2000s, your options for entertainment while traveling were somewhat limited. Watching pretty much anything other than CNN or VH1 in a hotel room was expensive, and the only airlines that had sophisticated in-flight entertainment systems tended to reserve them almost exclusively for their longer international routes. So whenever I traveled, especially around Europe, I carried my own entertainment with me.

From the late ‘90s through to the early ‘00s, I was regularly

journeying between Europe and the US to shoot commercial work. On these trips, I would take along my trusty Sony MD Walkman MZ-R50 MiniDisk (MD) player. I bought it soon after it came out in 1998, mainly to reduce the weight of my carry-on bag which was getting out of control thanks to the huge case of CDs I'd been lugging around the world since the early '90s. The only downside of the MiniDisk player was that I had to do the work of transferring the music from my CDs onto the MiniDisks themselves. That novelty soon wore off and I came to regard the making of "mixtape" MiniDisks as a complete chore. I never seemed to remember to label them correctly, which resulted in finding the same tracks on different disks and realize I was missing the ones I actually wanted. When I heard about the launch of the brand new Apple iPod and its "1000 songs in your pocket," I absolutely knew that this was going to be the device for me.

My first iPod was the smaller 5GB model (it also came with 10GB of storage) with a movable scroll wheel, a tiny 2-inch black and white backlit LCD display, an open Firewire 400 port and 10 hours of battery life. With the possible exception of the first iPhone, I still consider the original iPod to be the most perfect Apple product ever made. In 2018, a 5GB music player with no internet connectivity may seem laughable, but back in 2001, it was nirvana. Though I subsequently bought the second, third, and fifth generation iPods, none of them came even remotely close to delivering the utter joy I experienced the first time I used my original iPod.

I recently decided to charge it up and find out what gems from my musical past were hidden on its tiny hard drive. But, it

turned out that powering up this 17-year-old device wasn’t quite as straightforward as I thought.

Though I had kept my iPod collection safe and sound, the same cannot be said of my old FireWire 400 and 800 cables. I threw them all out years ago as there seemed to be no rational reason to keep them. Yes, hindsight is a wonderful thing. Fortunately, Vox Studios managed to find a FireWire 400 to FireWire 800 cable. I plugged one end into the iPod and connected the other to my Mac Pro by adding a FireWire 800 to Thunderbolt dongle. It didn’t work. Shortly after plugging it in, the iPod’s black and white screen flickered a few times before the sick iPod icon appeared making it clear to me that this hacked approach was a complete non-starter.

My second attempt was much more successful. *The Verge* staff photographer Amelia Holowaty Krales managed to find a FireWire 400 cable at home and I used that to connect the iPod directly to the FireWire 400 port in the back of my original Mac Mini. After leaving it charging up overnight I returned the following morning to a working first-generation iPod. Finally, it was time to scroll through my music playlists for the first time since creating them in 2002.

There are a total of 789 songs and 21 playlists taking up 4.6GB on my old iPod. Some of those songs are still featured in my Google Play playlists to this day: David Bowie, Dixie Chicks, Green Day, Foo Fighters, Pink Floyd, Tom Petty, Marvin Gaye, Peter Gabriel, Genesis, Radiohead, The Strokes, and U2 to name just a few. Others occasionally pop up when I am feeling particularly nostalgic: Abba (#notsorry), Crash Test

Dummies, Fleetwood Mac, Alanis Morissette, Supertramp, Red Hot Chili Peppers, early Dire Straits, and some of Mark Knopfler's solo albums (as a guitarist, I still think he is one of the very best).

Other singers and bands in the "Browse" section that took me right back to London circa 2002: Kylie Minogue (she was – and I suspect still is – a British National Treasure despite the fact that she is Australian); Jamiroquai (a British dance/funk outfit whose lead singer was a collector of sick Lambos and Ferraris); Dido ("Thank You" was on continuous rotation in 1999); Moby; Madonna (I think *Ray of Light* produced by William Orbit is still one of the best recorded albums I have ever heard); Robbie Williams (in an attempt to distance himself from Take That, he went off to record a collection of big band classics by the likes of Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin for his album *Swing When You're Winning* which was surprisingly good *)*; and Norah Jones, whose album *Come Away with Me* was colossal in the UK back in 2002.

I also came across music and artists which made me wonder what on earth I was thinking of when I loaded their tracks into iTunes. If I could talk to my 2002 self, I would sit him down and explain that Limp Bizkit's album *Chocolate Starfish and the Hot Dog Flavored Water* is an abomination and not at all funny (my London music buddies and I thought it was hilarious at the time). I would also ask myself why Pink's *Missundaztood* has a playlist all its own because I have no memory of ever listening to this album even once. But perhaps my most vexed question would concern the fact that *Baby Got Back* by Sir Mix-a-Lot is on my iPod. It's not that I hate it (it is kind of fun), but I was completely flummoxed that my 2002 self would have ever shelled out hard earned cash for a Sir Mix-a-Lot album. (It turns out that I didn't; I bought the *Charlie's Angels* soundtrack album and *Baby Got Back* is one of the featured tracks.)


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In fact, I bought a lot of soundtrack albums in 2002. A few of the more notable ones are *Dumb and Dumber* (which feature a number of great tracks including "The Ballad of Peter Pumpkinhead" by The Crash Test Dummies, "Crash" by The Primitives, and the bonkers "Bear Song" by Green Jelly); *Moulin Rouge* (made relevant again thanks to figure skaters at the 2018 Winter Olympics); *The Matrix* (still a classic); *Godzilla* (featuring "Come with Me" by Puff Daddy and Jimmy Page); and of course, *Charlie's Angels* from 2000, which, in addition to the aforementioned "Baby Got Back" also feature some great tracks by Destiny's Child, Tavares, Apollo 440 and Fatboy Slim.

The reason, dear reader, that I am the proud owner of so many soundtrack albums is because the iTunes store didn't launch until April 28, 2003. That meant that in 2002 the only way of getting any music onto an iPod was by uploading CDs into iTunes on a Mac. New CDs were pretty expensive in the UK at the time (about $18-$25 in today's money) but film soundtrack albums tended to be a little cheaper and often featured hits by a wide variety of artists. The only downside was that some of those albums also included tracks by Sir Mix-a-Lot.

Scrolling through my newly recharged iPod in 2018 and laughing at some of the song choices I had made back in 2002, I was also struck by how badly I had organized the playlists. They are not really organized at all. Some songs are featured two or three times in the *same* playlists, or in two or three *different* playlists (I clearly carried this bad habit over from my MiniDisk days). Other playlists aren't playlists at all: they're entire albums like Pink's *Missundaztood* I mentioned earlier, or "Röyksopp 2" (I have no idea what the "2" refers to) which only contains the band's album *Melody A.M*. "Eminem" is just *The Marshall Mathers LP.*

And it is not only the organization (or lack thereof) of my playlists that leaves a lot to be desired, the naming is a little erratic too. For example, putting Limp Bizkit in "Hip

Hop / Rap" is an unintended insult to the entire genre, and the playlist "Nice" features so many tracks by Crowded House and Norah Jones that it should have probably been labeled "Slightly Bland."

But a few titles are still totally on point 16 years later: "70's – 80's 'TASTIC" (which contains tracks by Abba (#reallynotsorry), the Bee Gees, Supertramp, and Fleetwood Mac, etc.) is a nod to Harry Enfield and Paul Whitehouse's characters "Smashie and Nicey" from *Harry Enfield's Television Programme.* Enfield and Whitehouse's catchphrases were the staple diet of my photo crew's banter from the late '90's right through until 2005, the year I emigrated to America.

When I traveled "across the pond" to New York and a new life in America in January of 2005, I brought with me my collection of early iPods. Of course, by 2005, I no longer needed to load my CDs into iTunes. I could instead buy single songs for 99 cents a pop and save myself the price of an entire album. My fifth-gen iPod had a 60GB hard drive, a bigger screen and enough space to hold many thousands of songs. But it too would be consigned to a dark draw in my desk when I bought my first iPhone in the summer of 2007.

Though my Apple music devices changed over time, growing slimmer and more powerful with every iteration, much of the music on them remained the same. Seventeen years is a long time in both the worlds of music and technology, but not everything dates in the same way. Though today I am listening to a lot of new music from the likes of Adele, Alabama Shakes, Kaki King, Lana Del Ray, Philip Glass, Michael Kiwanuka, Chvrches, and Gary Clark Jr., looking back through the playlists on my first and oldest iPod I was struck by the fact that some of the music from 2001 and 2002 seemed far more dated than some of the '70s, '80s, and '90s.

As I mentioned earlier, most of the music and the artists from that period are *still* in my playlists: Abba is as vibrant and

fun as the day it was written (#notatallsorrysojustdealwithit); Rush may have retired from playing live and recording new material, but I am still listening to their enormous back catalog; Radiohead continue to make angst the most powerfully powerful creative force in the universe; Oasis and Blur (both of whom are surprisingly missing from my iPod, but I was definitely listening to them back in 2002) are a link to my London past; and David Bowie's final album *Blackstar* proved that the world is a less interesting place since his untimely death in January 2016.


iPod
Serial No.: U22087EMLG6
Designed by Apple in California Assembled in Taiwan
Model No.: M8541 EMC No.: 1910 Rated 8-30Vdc 0.5A Max.
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Tested to comply with FCC standards
FOR HOME OR OFFICE USE

But can the same be said of the first generation iPod? Does it still hold up 17 years later? I think it does. Despite its insanely thick body, small black and white screen, lack of connectivity, tiny 5GB of storage, and the fact that it has less computational power than most basic smartwatches in 2018, it still just works. This small, heavy but beautifully crafted piece of industrial design does *exactly* what it was designed to do back in 2001: select and play music. Everybody I handed the iPod to in *The Verge* office couldn't help but smile as they spun the scroll wheel and listened to the clicks while they navigated the playlists or just played the game "Brick" (designed by Steve Wozniak).

As for me, the moment I plugged my headphones into my freshly charged iPod and listened to music that had lain dormant for the past 16 years, it was like being transported back in time. Nothing had changed. The music sounded as good as it did back then. Some tracks even sounded better on my old iPod than they do on my Google Pixel 2 XL. My iPod may be scratched and dented but it still looks cool as hell and is a joy to use, even if it is just for a short while before its ancient battery gives out. And at least it has a headphone jack.

Photography by James Bareham / The Verge

https://www.theverge.com/2018/2/18/16992972/ipod-original-vintage-throwback-mp3-2000s