

Osmotic Friday **Tags and**
Tag Radio at Last.fm

30 May 2008 Martin Dittus

(a subjective overview by someone who's
not actually involved in product development)

brief history of
Tags at Last.fm

introduced
August 2005

Pre-Launch discussion on Audioscrobbler Flickr group

Audioscrobbler tags?

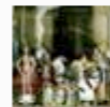


[publicenergy](#) pro says:

On the Audioscrobbler home page today is this...

Also being worked on at the moment:
- "Tagging" (flickr/delicious-esque)

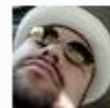
Could prove interesting - especially if it ends up being included in the Technorati tag search.
Posted at 10:35AM, 10 May 2005 CEST ([permalink](#))



[drl.](#) pro says:

what exactly would be tagged?

they need to fix what they have and straighten out artist names before adding new things to be buggy, imho
Posted 37 months ago. ([permalink](#))



[lantzilla](#) pro says:

not really sure how tags would work with music...there's already so much rich metadata included in the ID3 tags. Perhaps they could make sense when tagging with things that are not in the ID3 set. Like, "depressing" or "sucidal." Perhaps it could work, depending on how it is implemented.
Posted 35 months ago. ([permalink](#))



[tomeppy](#) pro says:

Audioscrobbler is wicked cool, but does seem to have a lot of issues with what they are already doing. I'm not sure what tagging would add, but it might just make more of a mess.
Posted 35 months ago. ([permalink](#))



what exactly would be tagged?

they need to fix what they have and
straighten out artist names before
adding new things to be buggy,
imho

drl.



Perhaps they could make sense when **tagging with things that are not in the ID3 set.** Like, “depressing” or “sucidal.”

lantzilla

Post-launch
(same thread)



I started tagging my music with
location, instrument and genre.

kenyahudson



if I want to listen to some background music while I'm studying, **i add the tags “studying,” “study,” and “mellow”** on the Last.Fm player and presto, **a good selection of soothing tracks** that aren't obtrusive.

pain_amp1013



I've been trying to tag all my music with descriptive tags as well, so **hopefully that functionality of the tags will be used by others**

pain_amp1013

And Elsewhere...

apophenia :: making connections where none previously existed

« [Mobile Phones in Japanese Life](#) | [Main](#) | [live on NPR](#) »

August 12, 2005

tagging music

::bounce:: OMG!!! Remember when [i whimpered about how audioscrobbler should tag music](#)? **They did it!!** Audioscrobbler and Last.FM finally came together as one ([Last.FM](#)) and they introduced a new interface. With the new interface, they introduced [tagging](#). This means that you can tag any artist, song or album. They have a tag editor that lets you tag en-masse. (Unfortunately, a lot of the tagging is painfully slow and not nearly as clean and easy as things like Flickr - it often requires multiple steps before you can add a tag and i keep hanging browsers.)

This is absolutely brilliant! Music is the best candidate for tagging because there's no authority on genre (although lots of people think they are). Genre is something that is collectively discussed and disagreed upon in almost every music community. Genres regularly split as innovations in music occur and club wars take place over particular tracks and whether it is really X genre. Music genres are highly personal while simultaneously collective - communities are built based on people with similar music tastes and they collectively negotiate the boundaries of a particular genre.

Every music fiend i know bitches about the fact that iTunes only has one possibility for genre. It makes it difficult to negotiate music and you have to create hierarchies. With tagging, that is no longer necessary. Tagging allows people to negotiate music in a more sophisticated way, slicing through the genres in structures that better reflect how people conceptually organize music. Furthermore, in the case of Last.FM, it allows us to move away from streaming by person to streaming by person by their genres (or any tags really). This lets us shape how our music is perceived by others by giving us a way to control the slices.



Music is the best candidate for tagging because **there's no authority on genre** (although lots of people think they are) ...

Danah Boyd about Last.fm Tags

zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/2005/08/12/tagging_music.html



... Music genres are highly personal while simultaneously collective - communities are built based on people with similar music tastes and **they collectively negotiate the boundaries** of a particular genre.

Danah Boyd about Last.fm Tags

zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/2005/08/12/tagging_music.html



The best last.fm tag I have come across so far is: **“songs that i sing along to but i always forget the words so i say duh duh while trying to sound like i do know the words and no one is falling for it but they keep quiet because they are embarrassed for me”**

blog comment by **Quiplash** *1 week after launch*

zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/2005/08/12/tagging_music.html

tagging music
Immediate Uses

Describing Music

(some examples)

- **chicago blues, mangubeat**
wikipedia.org/wiki/Mangu_Bit
- **tv themes, gtasa tracks** wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Theft_Auto:_San_Andreas
- **artists with disco in their name, over thirty minutes**
- **bing crosby cover, blue note label classic years**
- **hope-filled, inspirational, blessing**
- ...

tags provide **context**

- **i am a party girl**
here is my
soundtrack
- found through
audioscrobbler
- Carnival 2006
Notting Hill
- **quartier latin**
- **june 2006 berep**
tag pre1960s
treasures [http://www.last.fm/
group/This+Group+Only+Exists+To+Have+The
+Best+Eclectic+Radio+Ever+-+Period](http://www.last.fm/group/This+Group+Only+Exists+To+Have+The+Best+Eclectic+Radio+Ever+-+Period)
- my lusty lounge
- awesomenesssss x
31 million million
and five
- random
mindlessness 0707

moik's most-used tags

1	retro lounge	162
2	good during short runs	142
2	beefalo	142
4	good during long runs	120
5	good for driving around in a truck	97
6	between here and there	91
7	wanna shut that door	90
8	stoned at the alamo tonight	87
9	devastating	60
10	seen live	57
10	oink	57
12	love	52
13	dental surf combat	45
14	emo	42
15	boozey	41

IanAR's "streamable track wants" tag

You can also see what everyone has tagged "[streamable track wants](#)"



Play Music tagged
streamable track wants

[Play in software](#)

That Dog. – Summer Night

That Dog. – One Summer Night [#]

Lemon Jelly – Return to Patagonia

Psapp – Rear Moth

Pram – Sirocco

Psapp – Velvet Pony

Gotan Project – Chunga's Revenge

Georges Brassens – Je m'suis fait tout petit

 Kevin Ayers – Song for Insane Times

Miles Davis – Eighty-One

The Velvet Underground – Venus in Furs

Pulp – Common People

The Prodigy – Charly

Babs_05 enumerates

- **personal meaning**
- **playlists** with unusual names
- **regional** - eg russian, manchester
- **decade** - eg 60s, early music (not a decade but where else would it go?)
- group-specific - eg **my gang**
- descriptive, eg **gorgeous**, comedy
- tempo
- **mood** - eg sad, happy
- **instruments** - eg guitar, piano
- films - eg **bollywood**, anime
- music to... - eg **music to fall asleep to**, music to read to
- album labels - eg **4ad**
- based on **radio shows or nightclubs** - eg duyster, rum runner
- (can't think of any more)

???

- and finally laughing like a maniac saying i am the ruler of this stupid little world called me
- that one song
- spiked-candy radio
- songs with my name in the title
- i woke up this morning and the sun was gone

hm. whut?!



Play Music tagged
**i used to suck blood
with gothic dogs but
now i...**

| [Play in software](#)

Chris Squire – Hold Out Your Hand you idiot!	22 Apr 2007, 02:22
▶ The Lit Life – Jiffy full track	26 Oct 2006, 19:14
▶ Dimmu Borgir – Progenies of the Great Apocalypse	18 Oct 2006, 22:43
The Fall – Cary Grant's Wedding	18 Oct 2006, 06:05
The Forget	18 Oct 2006, 05:08
▶ Deficients	18 Oct 2006, 01:54
▶ Deficients - Live Like A Motherfucker	18 Oct 2006, 01:53
The Deficients	17 Oct 2006, 14:46
▶ X-Ray Spex	15 Oct 2006, 06:00
▶ Dead Kennedys	15 Oct 2006, 05:43
▶ The Saints	15 Oct 2006, 05:26
▶ Liz Carroll	15 Oct 2006, 04:41
▶ Dinosaur Jr.	1 Oct 2006, 05:29

tags are another channel for
**narrative and social
interaction**

and all of this affords us...

- **Music metadata.** Tag clouds as descriptions of music.
- **Music connections.** Making music searchable by more than just the name.
- **Global Tag Radio.** Currently the fastest way to listen to radio for newbies.
- **Personal Tag Radio.** Quite different from global tag radio, even for the same tag...



Finding **Paris Hilton in the brutal death metal tag** might be **incongruous** or downright annoying for brutal death metal fans, but there's probably a large proportion (and much greater number) of **hip hop fans annoyed by the presence of 50 Cent in the hiphop tag top ten.**

*blog comment by **James Holloway***

<http://blog.last.fm/2007/10/01/lastfm-community-enables-music-research>

personal tags allow you to
draw a circle
around **stuff you**
care about


Tagging-centric User Groups


Subscribers and their tag radio stations


“This group is to bring together subscribers who have **taken the time to tag and share the music they like.**”


“This is just **a way to find and listen to great music** from other people.”


Recent Discussions [\(see all\)](#)

 klimaz commented on
“Classical”
🗨️ (9) yesterday evening

 klimaz commented on
“National / Regional based tag stations”
🗨️ (15) Wednesday morning

 klimaz commented on
“Electronic & Dance Music”
🗨️ (22) Wednesday morning

 klimaz commented on
“Reggae”
🗨️ (5) Wednesday morning

 klimaz commented on
“Jazz”
🗨️ (18) Tuesday evening

The Special Interest Tag Radio Collective

“We have the radio you want! :-D If not, **join and help us grow musically... YAY!**”

Recent Discussions (see all)



photobyas commented on
“submit your tag stations YAY :-D NEW STUFF NEW STUFF”

🗨️ (26) last month



mandrak2000 commented on
“Stations saying something about you”

🗨️ (3) March 2008



Cornelly commented on
“Thinking of new themes...”

🗨️ (27) February 2008



thisfred commented on
“New Recruits”

🗨️ (9) February 2008




hm_hallo commented on
“Changes...”

🗨️ (4) January 2008

Genre-free tags!


“That's right; there's more to tags than silly genres.”


Recent Discussions [\(see all\)](#)

 **Khantatat** commented on
“**Completely free tags....**”
🗨️ (8) 7 days ago

 **Khantatat** commented on
“**tags which make me laugh**”
🗨️ (11) 7 days ago

 **Deebster** commented on
“**Tag suggestions**”
🗨️ (67) March 2008

 **adnolows** commented on
“**Interesting stations**”
🗨️ (12) July 2007

 **Akorem** commented on
“**the most tags**”
🗨️ (4) July 2007

Tag Top

All about **creating interesting global tag charts.**

“Create a new topic in this forum to **announce your new Tag Top.**”

Recent Discussions [\(see all\)](#)



elliotb2 commented on
“POV Bio tag”
March 2007



PeterRDavey commented on
“Worst Song of 2005”
(2) December 2006



PeterRDavey commented on
“1stRealTag TAGME U FUCKS. FagTag”
(4) December 2006



PeterRDavey commented on
“In order to function well...”
(1) December 2006



PeterRDavey commented on
“Tag Me a New Tag”
(2) December 2006

Thursday Night Party Hat Party

“A diverse group that **meets every Thursday Night*** to **listen to music** selected by a different member designated as DJ each week. (Whenever it is convenient for you to party, **as long as it is after 6PM on Thursday somewhere in the world.**)”

Recent Discussions (see all)



intpmann commented on
“May 15:This week the devil is in the details”
👍 (5) yesterday morning



aniaki commented on
“First TNPHP Birthday Party!”
👍 (1) 10 days ago



intpmann commented on
“April 24th 2008 theme: Numbers”
👍 (29) last month



aniaki commented on
“April 17 ”
👍 (3) last month



aniaki commented on
“DJ schedule! updated - Dec 4!”
👍 (42) last month

Pure Track-Taggers

Join if “you have **at least one tag that is: purely composed of tracks, streamable (at least 15 streamable tracks) and meaningful (i.e. for argument's sake, we'll say, one that do not appear in the top-20 global tags).**”

Recent Discussions (see all)



IanAR commented on
“Nice work!”

👍 (1) October 2006



IanAR commented on
“tag radio”

👍 (3) October 2006



IanAR commented on
“[New Group] BerePTTrove”

August 2006



IanAR commented on
“Thinking Of Shutting The PTT Journal!?”

August 2006



farbror_traktor commented on
“Surprising Fusion Survey”

👍 (4) August 2006

Track-Tag Bitches

“A group for folk who like to listen to stations composed of pure track-tagging (a sister group to Pure Track-Taggers).”

Recent Discussions [\(see all\)](#)



IanAR commented on
“PTTs in the Wild”

🗨️ (11) February 2008



IanAR commented on
“[PTT] 0c MySpace Download”

🗨️ (5) November 2007



Babs_05 commented on
“Vote-a-Tagger”

🗨️ (13) August 2007



IanAR commented on
“[Last.fm Client Support] Tag Track radio problem”
August 2007



talking_animal commented on
“Last.FM Site Structure Downplays User Tagging?”

🗨️ (1) August 2007

these people are using
our tools for quite
sophisticated means
of expression

So Tags...

... are **great mediators** for all kinds of things

... are incredibly **versatile**

... allow us to **do stuff that nobody else can**

Our folksonomy is a seemingly infinite pool of *interestingness*.

(feature request:)

Last.fm as platform for **curated content**

- Personal tags, *social* tags (not the same as playlists)
- Great way to find good **stuff that bears no relation to your previous listening history**
- Could be excellent to **get new radio listeners interested**
- Also great if you're just lazy

as we just saw

**we already have lots
of volunteers**

beta.last.fm introduces...

- Great new **tag editor**
- **'Related stations'** on listen pages
- Playlists
- Soon: web services for tags

What we could add on top of that...

- Mechanisms to **expose prolific taggers**
- Mechanisms to **expose ‘interesting’ tag radio stations**
- **Tag recommendations** (“Tell a friend”)
- Batch tagging tools?

**(... all of which I assume will
happen anyway.)**



Part of the fun of tagging is the **quirks and aberrations** that crop up, and either disappear as quickly as they appeared, hang around for a bit like a drunken hobo, or fully catch on. **I'm immediately grabbed by *cheese on toast* because I don't initially get it.**

blog comment by **James Holloway**

<http://blog.last.fm/2007/10/01/lastfm-community-enables-music-research>