To All the Sisters on My iPod

by Con Chapman

It was, as they say, a wake-up call. A bolt out of the blue--a shot across the bow. A sign that I needed to stop and think twice about where I was headed, to ask if I was making wise and sensible life choices.

Worried stock photo guy half my age and twice as good-looking.

That's right--last night my computer told me my iPod was full, and that I couldn't add Peggy Scott and Jo Jo Benson's "Pickin' Wild Mountain Berries."

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So I had to cut back and take stock. Were there too many oddities such as George "Bongo Joe" Coleman's "I Wish I Could Sing," a heartfelt plea to the gods and goddesses of song to please, *please* give a voice to a man who couldn't carry a tune in a wheelbarrow.

I had copied my collection of Dizzy Gillespie's entire *oeuvre,* but the song I listened to the most was--of course--"Hey Pete Let's Eat More Meat." I could delete several of those CD's and re-load them some other time.

But still, I had to cut back and watch my intake, so I resolved to go through my entire list of songs and delete those that I had added despite readily visible warning signs that they were harmful to my listening health.

Some choices were relatively easy: any spiritual--"Amazing Grace," "Will the Circle Be Unbroken"--sung by godless, atheistic rock stars who, as soon as the applause dies down and they're

backstage, start snorting coke and *schtupping* groupies. There's always been a nagging voice in my head when I listen to such Songs of Cognitive Dissonance that something--wasn't quite right.

I came up with a broad-brush rule of thumb--"all songs from Disney movies," but quickly found it unworkable. It would have meant doing without "Beauty and the Beast" by Roy Hargrove and "A Whole New World" by Peabo Bryson and Regina Belle. God--that one brought back memories! Me, my wife and the kids at the old Boston Garden, sitting high up in the rafters, the rest of the family enchanted by "Alladin on Ice" and me looking down at the skin-tight top on Princess Jasmine. Those Disney shows--there's something for every member of the family, including dad!

So unfortunately I would have to scroll letter by letter through my collection, pulling weeds one at a time instead of using mass agricultural methods. What a chore. I took a quick turn around the alphabetical orchard looking for low-hanging fruit when I stopped suddenly at the letter "s." I'd never realized it, but I had *nine* songs by sisters!

Sister O.M. Terrell

Not my sisters, but sisters to everyone such as Sister O.M. Terrell, Sister Ernestine Washington, and Sister Rosetta Tharpe. Was I a victim of musical inbreeding?

I'd taken biology in both high school and college--B's each time, thank you very much, even though the mark I received in 9th grade was easier; our teacher fell victim to amnesia in the fall, wandered off and was found in the spring 100 miles away. By the time he was back in the classroom, he'd forgotten about the leaf collection assignment I never completed. Dodged a bullet on that one! So I

understood that you can get a genetic deformity if you get too cozy with your sister.

Sister Rosetta Tharpe

My first sister was Sister Rosetta Tharpe, who I stumbled upon--was it really thirty-eight years ago? I guess so. Her version of "Up Above My Head (I Hear Music in the Air)" is a gospel classic--the real stuff, not the straight-backed, cold roast beef Protestant hymns I hear at my friends' weddings and funerals. You sit there, reading from the hymnal, instead of letting loose with some joyous noise. I'd complain to my friends, but they're either off on their honeymoons or six feet underground. No--Rosetta gets to stick around.

Then there's Sister O.M. (Ola Mae) Terrell, a country gospel singer who accompanied herself on slide guitar, and who recorded only six sides for Columbia. Rumor has it that she also recorded "Life is a Problem" and "How Long for the Playboy?" for another label but, like Bigfoot, no one has ever tracked them down. Sorry, rarity increases value--Ola Mae stays.

Finally, there's Sister Ernestine Washington. Sure, she's a goody-goody, a trifle *zaftig,* and none of her decidedly minor hits made Rolling Stone's list of 100 Greatest Songs.

But let me ask you something.

Do you really want to mess with a woman named "Ernestine"?