

# small screens, big dreams

By Jeff Howe

Technology has always been a boon to graphic designers, boosting creativity and lowering costs, but it has not been equally kind to every artistic medium. As we move closer to a fully digital universe, album art and packaging is becoming obsolete. CDs may look small, but music-file downloads dispense with visual expression altogether.

Last year, Josh Koppel and Tom Gibbons set out to save album art from extinction with Tunebooks, an application that uses Macromedia Flash to generate digital liner notes in Quicktime. "Our idea was, let's really exploit the medium, not simply upload the art off the CD," says Koppel, whose Tunebooks files amount to dynamic representations of a musician's work—as opposed to static PDFs that now pass as digital album art.

But it's the little screen, not the computer screen, that Koppel and Gibbons are setting

their sights on. Computers are not the ultimate venue for digital art and information, Koppel says: "We need to bring this to where the music lives, which is the iPod"—and ultimately, the mobile phone. To that end, Koppel has hacked iPod's photo-browsing function to create another application, ScrollMotion. Thumbing an iPod wheel on the Tunebooks prototype of the Rolling Stones' *Some Girls* swoops the album cover into view (against a lipstick-red background), followed by lyrics and art from the LP version; the procession plays in reverse when the wheel turns backward. It's a flipbook for the digital age, harnessing Apple's genius for simplicity.



Tunebooks digital liner notes for (from left) The Darkness, LL Cool J, and Paul Simon. Creators Josh Koppel and Tom Gibbons view Tunebooks as a Trojan horse for digital design innovations.

Beyond reinventing the liner note, however, Koppel and Gibbons see Tunebooks as a Trojan horse for innovation in digital design. "I want people to think of their devices as more than a jukebox or a phone," he says, sitting in his studio in lower Manhattan. "We're trying to use these Tunebooks to make the next platform for visual storytelling."

He pulls up another file on his video iPod and puts it in my hands. "It's a video trading card," he explains. Onscreen, an image of Michael Jordan looks like its paper cousin, but a turn of the iPod's wheel animates the card, each click revealing a new statistic. Further scrolling activates a video of Jordan dunking.

As with the *Some Girls* liner notes, the user can navigate in both directions, making Jordan leap to the hoop or fall backward in reverse. Koppel and Gibbons have also created prototypes for animated horoscopes, comic books, and greeting cards, and are in talks to bring ScrollMotion to mobile phones as well.

Singlehandedly inventing the next great platform for visual design sounds like an act of hubris, but Koppel, 32, is uniquely suited to the task, having spent most of his career mastering existing media to create new ones. Three years after graduating from Amherst College, he published *Good/Grief*, an experimental book that can only be described as a photographic memoir. Koppel calls the book a failure, but, he says, "I learned so much from its flaws." Its publication led the rock band Rage Against the Machine to hire him to create the liner notes for its CD *Renegades*.

After two years as a game designer for Sony and two more as a TV producer for cable network Oxygen, Koppel started Josh Koppel Productions, which makes TV ads and broadband programming for such clients as Wal-Mart, Comedy Central, and AMC—and funds his digital ambitions. "I've got a full-time staff of incredibly creative people," he says. "When they're not working on a TV spot, they're developing new ideas that will work on these platforms we're creating." In their effort to bring ScrollMotion to the largest possible audience, Koppel and Gibbons have chosen not to patent it, saying

they've really only taken advantage of a quirk in Apple's photo-browsing software. "I'm a content-maker, not a technologist," Koppel says. "The more designers creating applications of ScrollMotion, the better. Look at Walt Disney: He didn't patent animation. He just made the best examples of it."

Koppel's innovations could transform the design community, touching off a wave of graphics designed expressly for handheld personal devices and mobile phones. Tunebooks is gaining traction; Koppel and Gibbons have designed digital liner notes for LL Cool J, The Darkness, and Paul Simon (in a collaboration with Chip Kidd). Of course, that output represents the tiniest fraction of album releases—and so far, most digital downloaders are buying songs, not albums.

The designers have yet to persuade Apple to make Tunebooks and ScrollMotion standard formats in its iTunes application, but they hope music labels will demand the ability to sell ScrollMotion in future Tunebooks products. One major-label client, Koppel says, has asked Apple to implement ScrollMotion in future iTunes releases. Momentum is on Koppel's side—digital music sales, while still marginal, are forecast to constitute 20 percent of the global music market by 2009. And where the Tunebooks digital liner notes first tread, other printed media—from comic books to, yes, trading cards—may be expected to follow, on devices that haven't yet reached their design potential. **P**

audience will accept.

Homeless photographer Mike Brodie is the founder and principal photographer at **plrds.com**, a community of Polaroid enthusiasts. His fascinating portraiture of fellow runaways (below) captures delicate moments of pride in the midst of deep destitution.



Are you sick of your MySpace profile page? So is Mike Davidson, a Seattle-based designer who complained about MySpace's faulty composition—and then hacked it, offering his recoded version for free on **mikeindustries.com**. Easy to redesign, easy to install.

Leif Peng hosts **Today's Inspiration**, a blog and e-mail list cataloging classic illustrators of the mid-20th century, like Harry Anderson and Lowell Hess, and delivering their work to your inbox daily.

Think you're a clotheshorse? Visit **Hel Looks**, a fascinating compendium of street fashion from Helsinki's punks and fashionistas. Then look at what *you're* wearing, and hang your head in shame. **PATRICKING** and **SU**

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