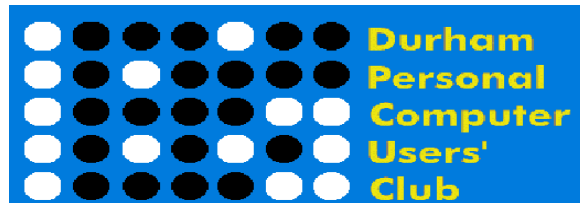Mar 2023

PC MONITOR

Durham Personal Computer Users' Club Newsletter

DPCUC General Meeting

Our Club meets monthly on the second Thursday of each month.
All meetings are currently held using Zoom.

We hope some day in the future to be able to meet in person again.

Please visit the Club Web Page for all the latest links and information
http://www.durhampc-usersclub.on.ca/

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Next Meeting

Social Media for Seniors

by Judy Taylour

On ZOOM – **Thursday, Mar 9 2023, 7:00PM**

FYI   **- By Dan Delong**

Ikea Air Quality Tester

At $16 USD, and only 3 inches high, this inexpensive tester measures VOC levels and small particles, along with temperature and humidity, further indicating the best air quality as **green** in colour (as seen on the screen), medium as **yellow**, and low quality as **red**. The Canadian, North York, Ikea store has them for $13 CAD, and will likely deliver to the Whitby outlet. The same company makes a room air purifier – same brand name – including the tester, for $93 CAD.
[From personal experience, replacement filters for some home air purifiers are quite expensive.]
https://www.ikea.com/us/en/p/vindriktning-air-quality-sensor-60515911/

Blast From the Past – Build a Transistor Radio

The **Electronics Weekly Website** recently featured complete plans (for a youngster, or an oldster) to 'home-build' a transistor radio, with plans sourced from one of the old **Ladybird Books**. I believe the radio is for AM (amplitude modulation) only. This is your chance to learn "large circuit" electronics. Download the PDF at: -
https://www.electronicsweekly.com/blogs/gadget-master/general/gadget-book-turn-the-pages-with-a-ladybird-book-for-electronics-2023-02/

TCL NXTPAPER 12 Pro

TCL is a brand name for a complete line of television sets, tablets, and phones. However, if your main interest is in low blue light screens, that do not flicker and also includes a stylus, this new, larger, and brighter **TCL NXTPAPER 12 Pro** tablet may be of interest. Some other advantages include: - wireless projection to a smart TV, a large battery (with reverse charging), a 2160 by 1440 px, 3:2 screen (rather than 16:9), both 8 MP and 13 MP cameras, all running on Android 12 with an 8 core processor. Specifications are shown at **GSMArena** *(see link)*
(https://www.gsmarena.com/tcl_nxtpaper_12_pro-12062.php) or (more recently) at the **TCL website** (https://www.tcl.com/global/en/tablets/tcl-nxtpaper-12-pro)

[This product was featured at CES 2023, with a release date set for January 2023, yet it may not be available until a few more months.]
Those interested in TCL phones may wish to visit Tom's Guide, for a review, at
https://www.tomsguide.com/reviews/tcl-10-pro

UNIT 1 FARO smart Mips – It's a really safe bicycle helmet

It's a bicycle helmet with superior safety features – front facing and rear facing lighting systems, with Bluetooth connectivity to the integrated signal and brake lights, along with trip tracking, and accelerometers to detect a crash before sending an SOS message should the wearer remain unresponsive. These helmets are water proof, rechargeable (10 hours of usage), and for bicycles only. *[Those interested in buying this helmet will experience a bit of pressure selling, as this is a crowdfunded project. Expect to pay well over $200 CAD.]*
https://unit1gear.com/

Lockly Flex Touch Pro – smart dead-bolt lock

After installation, this sliding bolt lock will function in the same way as the old lock *(with a key)* in addition to recognizing up to 99 fingerprints and opening with a phone app *(remotely too – for you, or some temporarily authorized guests)*. Your phone can alert you whenever the lock is opened or closed. A clear installation video is also provided (with a 30-minute installation claim); that is, before app installation and configuration. Four AA batteries are needed for the inside electrics. Commands through **Amazon Alexa** and **Hey Google** devices are also recognized, using queries like "*Alexa, is my door locked?"* Or "*Hey Google, unlock my door.*" Despite the approximately $200 USD price, this electric lock can bring peace-of-mind to many householders.
[A caution – Smart phone features require a Lockly secure Wi-Fi transmitter (additional cost), and the lock should not be exposed to wet weather.]
https://lockly.com/products/lockly-flex-touch-deadbolt

Robotic Portraiture

Husband and wife artists, **Rob and Nick Carter**, programmed an industrial robot to dip various sized brushes into pots of black/grey/white acrylic paint, while composing portraits. The Mashable video *(link below)* does not make it clear, if this industrial robot is equipped with a camera, or if the controlling computer uses a photographic image of the personage; but, the website does claim to employ some form of AI. Each portrait completion requires many hours, sometimes days, to complete. The results are compelling, and similar to a paint by number project.
https://mashable.com/video/industrial-robot-painters-rob-nick-carter

A few years earlier, another artist used automated robotic drawing arms to sketch models sitting in front of a set of cameras. The results, shown in the video, are made with ball point pens.
https://mashable.com/video/robots-drawing-portraits

More recently, some less impressive results came from **Ai-Da**, a realistic female robot, with mechanical arms and cameras in 'her' eye sockets; 'She' draws while holding a pen.
https://mashable.com/video/ai-da-ai-humanoid-robot-artist

Blink and Wyze claim least costly security cameras

The **Blink Wired Floodlight Camera** is a combination wireless camera and wired floodlights ($100 USD). Features: - motion sensing (with delayed activation and optional person detection), night and day modes, siren, and two-way audio. https://support.blinkforhome.com/en_US/f-a-q/wired-floodlight-camera-faq

The **Wyze Cam OG weatherproof security camera** boasts 1080p HD video, 4 IR sensors for night views, 8x zoom *(Extra $s)*, up to a 256 GB micro SD, and built in microphone and speaker... and siren... and spotlight. Wyze has tried to keep their cameras at the $20 USD price point. Even though this model is improved, recent events *(Covid, supply chain, inflation)* have forced a slight increase. Prices range from about $25 - $60 USD depending on features, like stacking two cameras together (to cover a wider view) and the motorized panning model. As with Blink, full integration with wireless notification and audio appears to be on a subscription basis. Wyze recommends using their correct outdoor power supply (V1 $14 or V2 $17) for installation of the weatherproof OG models.
[On the Wyze site, I noticed a less expensive floodlight camera, in competition with Blink.]
[Also, it may be wise to avoid cloud storage subscription plans, in favour of your own video storage device. Recent reports of short end-of-life, and short end-of-support times, for some camera models, have surfaced.]

Jooki, a Childrens' Story and Music Player

Advice from child rearing experts, about avoiding exposure to 'screens' before the age of 2.5 (damage not only from blue light exposure, but also from rapidly changing content) is better for the very young, because their brains have no time to process flashing images. Although the **Jooki Story and Music Player** is recommended for age 3 to 10, some younger children may benefit from it too. Jooki plays .**mp3 files**, be they songs or audio book stories.
[Note: No screen here!]

All **Jooki** content is under parental control. So, parents who use the preferred **Spotify** files for suitable content should fear not. Two orange knobs allow the child to skip to the next/previous track, and change volume. Colourful **figurines** and **flat tokens** activate particular songs and storybooks, as programmed by a parent. Once an item is placed in the 'screen-shaped' receptacle, the file runs. This lets a child choose from among many programs, since the same figurine, or token, always plays the same stuff.
https://jooki.com/

iRobot Create 3

Another educational tool – **iRobot Create 3** – is a **Roomba** kit (minus the vacuum motor and dust catcher) with extra pieces and programming options for high-school-aged students, to enhance their programming skills. The supplied '**Roomba guts'** are just staging hardware, for lots of neat experiments. [$325 CAD]
[This educational site offers other less expensive kits, for younger students.]
https://edu.irobot.com/what-we-offer/create3

Flipper Zero and the Vulkit RFID blocking card

Flipper Zero (not included) is a handheld device for reading the encrypted RFID (radio frequency) information on bank and credit cards. The **Vulkit RFID blocking card**, when inserted in a wallet or purse in close proximity to other cards, will prevent decryption by the Flipper Zero, and most likely any other card reading devices.
A Vulkit RFID blocking card looks just like most plastic money cards – same thickness and other dimensions. This is just one of many such signal blocking cards available on Amazon.ca.
[A visit to the Vulkit website was disappointing, since no menu tab led to the purchase of an individual blocking card. Instead, the website offered only more expensive wallets.]
To buy a two-pact for $13.50 CAD, try this link: - https://vulkit.com/products/vcp100-rfid-blocking-cards-2-pack-4-pack

[I'm guessing the card's plastic is impregnated with a metallic layer or metallic dust, to block signals in the 13.56MHz-frequency.]
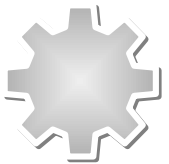https://www.zdnet.com/article/testing-rfid-blocking-cards-do-they-work-do-you-need-one/

Adaptive Driving Beam Headlights

Overly bright headlights are dangerous – not for the owner (who may not be aware of the problem) – but for everyone else who meets such vehicles head-on. Whether it be a curve, a hill, fog lights, or high beams left on, or these newer high intensity after-market bulbs, night driving has become more hazardous.
[Even in the daylight, I've been nearly blinded by pick-ups, with bulbs mounted up high, shining in the rear-view mirrors.]
Jalopnik reports that changes are coming to US rules, allowing manufacturers to install headlights that change intensity automatically, depending on the degree of curvature of roads. Up to now, once a vehicle leaves the production line, headlights are seldom checked again, thus, eventually, over time, resulting in many misaligned headlights on our roads. Ontario's mechanical fitness exama addressed this problem in the past, requiring every resale to be checked for badly aligned sealed beams. Newer headlights are not adjustable, and replacement bulbs can be of the overpowering kind.
https://jalopnik.com/you-re-not-imagining-it-blinding-headlights-are-a-real-1850112863

Google Appeals Billions in Fines

The European Union has used its legislative clout, to fine Google over market malpractices from different points of view. The EU demands (and now India as well) the removal of 'required' apps from Android phones – specifically the Play Store, Chrome, Google Search, Google Cloud, YouTube, and likely a Gmail account, which includes Maps and Photos.
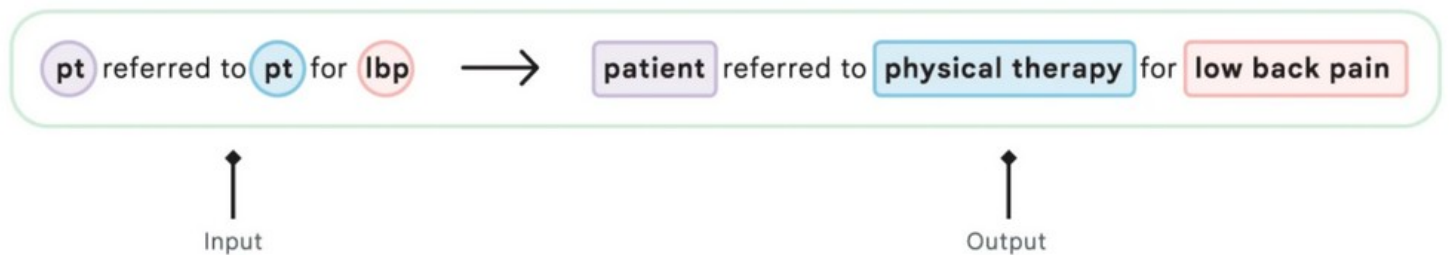https://www.androidpolice.com/google-2018-european-union-antitrust-fine-appeal/

Google Meet – formerly Duo and Hangouts – gets panoramic backgrounds

A newly released feature for **Meet**, on Android phones, lets users appear in virtual locations; moreover, the gyro in your phone (should it have one) will move the virtual background in a complete circle (360 degrees) as you turn your phone. The example shown in the link puts the person in a tropical scene. It works, no matter the real background (and without standing in front of a green screen). The **host** of any **Meet** meeting can turn this feature off – for one, or all participants. If your Meet app does not yet offer this feature, **Google Meet** can still blur your own background (a still image). Google Meet also offers transcriptions and breakout rooms.
https://www.androidpolice.com/google-meet-360-degree-virtual-backgrounds/

Google Translate for your medical records

Governments are not the only organizations using lots of acronyms. Look to the medical profession too. Doctors use shorthand when writing up coded, clinical notes. Google Research has taken those notes – written in almost a foreign language – and translated them into common speech.
https://ai.googleblog.com/2023/01/deciphering-clinical-abbreviations-with.html

"Code to Learn" is a Canadian initiative

Here, computational thinking and robotics, with cultural in-clusivity and a climate focus, along with free resources for students, trainers for teachers (including in a number of coding languages) is available. Instruction is in English and french, along with three indigenous languages.
https://www.codetolearn.ca/en

Teksavvy may be the last independent

Just as ACANAC, one of the oldest ISPs in Canada, was announcing free Internet (including installation and modem) for 6 months, through Start.ca (of London) and Altima, news appears that it has been bought by **Telus**. In further news, **Cogeco** bought Oxio: **Bell** bought Distributel and Ebox; VMedia went to Quebecor/Videotron, and **Rogers** has set a closing date for merger with Shaw as March 31, which may include Shaw's holding, Freedom Mobile, if not first purchased by Videotron. That's six down, and only one more independent ISP to go. Some of these slightly more economical re-sellers, may continue to run under the same brand name, in the same way that cell phone company sub-branding works for Koodo and Public Mobile *(Telus)*; Virgin, PC Mobile *(Bell)*; Fido, Chatr, PetroCan WhistleOut, and 7-Eleven Speak Out *(Rogers)*.

[As a side note, most of the original cell phone companies, when still analogue, billed talk time to the nearest second. Now, they all bill 'UP' to the nearest minute, even though there is no technological reason for this.]

https://www.thestar.com/business/2023/02/21/the-industry-is-in-crisis-another-small-internet-provider-sells-to-big-telecom.html

Netflix – Set Primary Location

The Feb 21st date has passed for subscribers, to set a primary location for their viewing habits, identified mainly by IP address and device. The Netflix verification process is different for those who mainly use a smart TV, rather than a computer or tablet or phone. Your main account credentials will work for anyone watching within the same household. Those outside your home location need a special sub-account ID for watching their own shows. ($8 CAD plus tax.) It appears that travellers will be able to reset the home location, during their travels.
https://mobilesyrup.com/2023/02/13/heres-how-to-set-a-primary-location-for-your-netflix-account/

DPCUC President's Notes

Writing these notes each month, it is very interesting to consider how the world has changed in the last year.

A year ago, I was frantically finishing off my presentation on crypto-currencies. At the time, I wrote "Ignorance is not bliss." Turns out to have been true. Since then we have seen the collapse of the FTX exchange as a result of massive fraud on the part of the criminals running the scam. It seems that the wealthy victims of this scam may have been rich, but they were not smart enough to avoid being ripped off. Scams are not new, so being careful should never go out of style.

Secondly, I wrote about my well known love of pie. Raspberry PI to be exact. It seems that supply issues continue and it is still all but impossible to get your hands on the current model of this small computer.

Finally, February has been quite a month in another way. The insanity of the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine continues. In a pathetic bit of sabre rattling, Vladimir Putin now says the Russia is pulling out of its last nuclear arms control treaty with the USA. Another empty point as that rogue nation has never held up their end of that agreement.

As always; Please, Pray for Peace.

Peter Camilleri, President DPCUC.

Linux in the News   by Alex Morrison

TUXEDO OS 2 Launches with KDE Plasma 5.27 LTS and Linux Kernel 6.1 LTS
0 Comments

TUXEDO OS 2 distribution is now available for download from TUXEDO Computers featuring KDE Plasma 5.27 LTS and Linux kernel 6.1 LTS.

New Raspberry Pi OS Release Adds Support for New Touchscreen and Video Drivers
1 Comment

Raspberry Pi OS 2023-02-21 is now available for download as the latest stable release for Raspberry Pi boards with various new features, bug fixes, and updated components.

KDE Plasma 5.27.1 Improves Support for Wine Games in Plasma Wayland, Fixes Bugs
2 Comments

KDE Plasma 5.27.1 is now available as the first point release to the latest and greatest KDE Plasma 5.27 desktop environment series bringing several bug fixes and a handful of improvements.

Ubuntu's Latest Move: Goodbye Flatpak Support

In yet another highly controversial move, Canonical announced that future Ubuntu flavor editions would not support Flatpak by default.

KDE Plasma 5.27.1 Improves Support for Wine Games, Fixes Bugs

KDE Plasma 5.27.1 further improves the Plasma desktop experience, especially when playing video games via Wine on Plasma Wayland.

Lightweight Linux Desktop Xfce 4.18 Released After Two Years With Small Tweaks

Xfce seems to believe that slow and steady wins the Linux desktop race. The new version adds some new features but keeps things largely the same.

NOTE: Click the titles of each section to read the full articles online.

FREE Linux Wallpaper

If you like this style image with the calendar let me know and I will send a new one each month.

There are only a couple of days left in February as I create the newsletter so I add March as well.

Linux – Easytag   **By Alex Morrison**

If you are like me and sometimes prefer to listen to your own music while in the car then I will show you a very useful program.
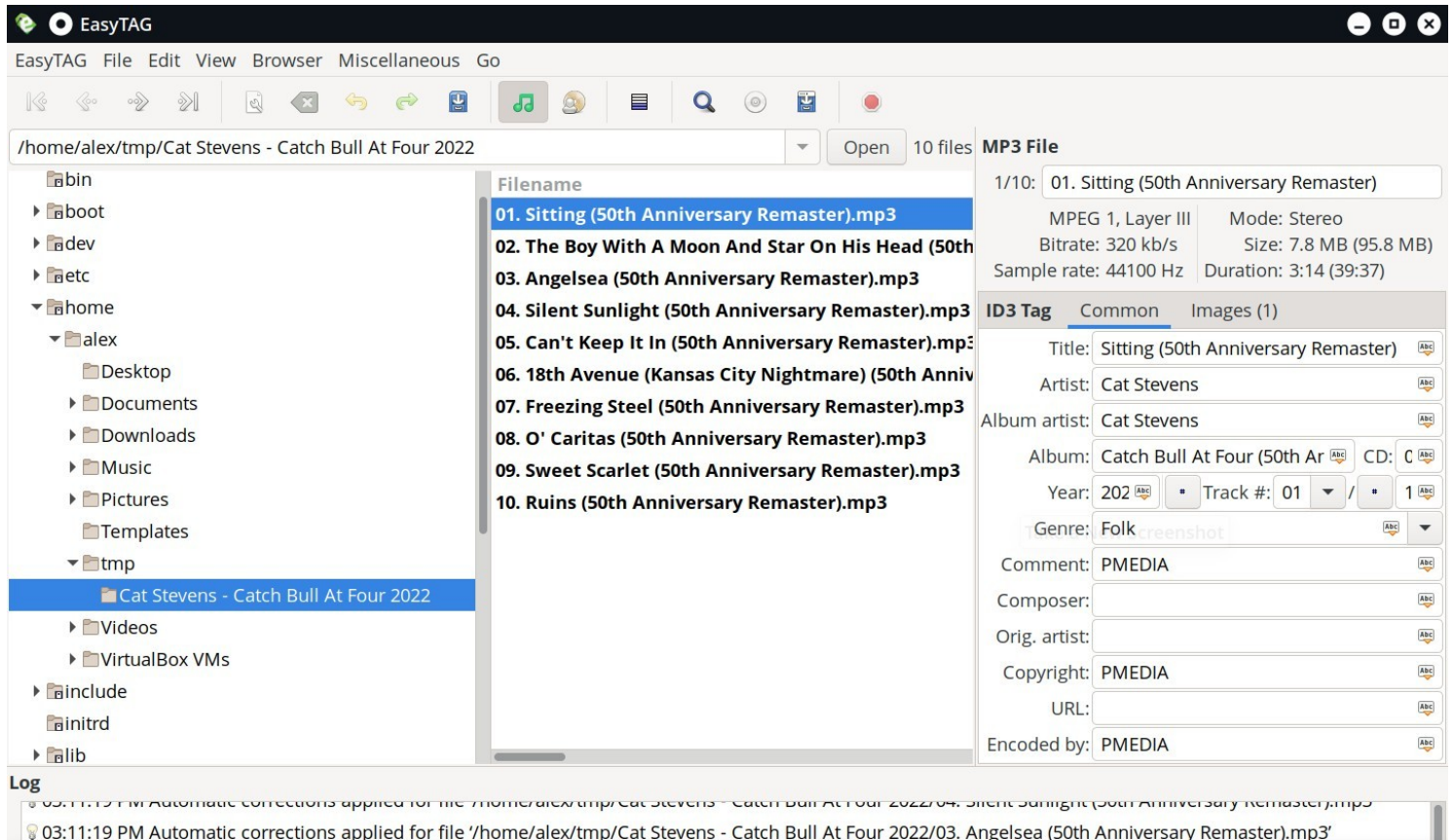
Some people still use music CD's in their vehicles. I use a USB key. The USB key will hold a much larger collection of music files. It is also a lot easier to store hundreds of Music files on a USB instead of storing dozens of music CD's somewhere in your vehicle.

Depending on the source of the music in your collection you may not have the Artist and Title or other info attached to the music files.

Vehicles are able to read information embedded in Music Files but not if the information is missing.
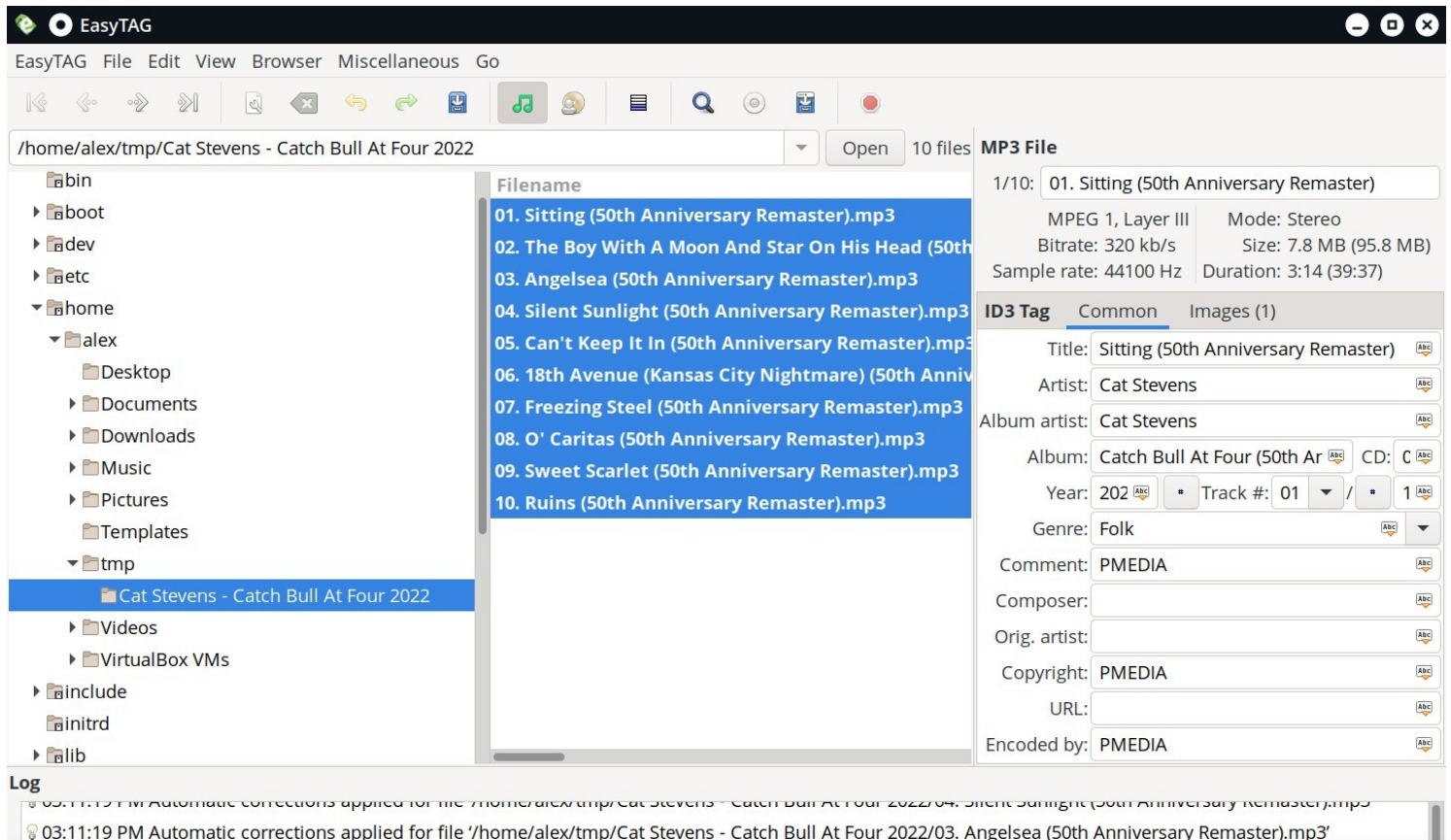
This is where Easytag is very helpful.

 Here is the screen I see when I open Easytag and point it to a music folder on my PC.

You are able to edit a single file by clicking on the file clunder Filename and then editing the name or removing any info you do not need using the area on the right side of the screen.

File name and Artist are often unique to the album. Other areas on the right are common the whole album. EG Genre

If you double click the first name under Filename it will highlight the entire list of songs. See image below.

Now if you edit Genre or Comment files or Copywrite or Encoded by boxes it will automatically change all the file info.

To make any change active press the small box on the far write of any area [marked ABC in small print] and in this case every file will be changed.

Last step is to press the small Blue box on the top menu to save the change to the file.

Now when this file is opened from the USB in my vehicle I see the Album Name and Artist and Title of the song.

Easytag is available from the package manager of almost any Linux system and also available to download for Windows --→ https://easytag.en.softonic.com/

I hope all find the program as usefull as I do.

Here is a Youtube video that explains Easytag in more detail than a short newsletter article allows. The video assumes you use Linux but Easytag works the same on Windows as well.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f08g4ZR00Kk

Sudoku   Mar 2023   by Alex Morrison

EASY

Sudoku

The game boards on this page were produced using **Sudokuki** on PCLinuxOS 64 Bit running KDE Plasma.

The objective is to fill in the missing numbers ensuring that every 3 X 3 grid has the numbers 1 through 9 with no repeats and every full column or row has the numbers 1 through 9 again with no repeats.

 If you have troubles solving the puzzles send an email to me and I will send you the solution.

Have fun! Alex

MED

HARD

IF you don't Like Sudoku puzzles – try these pages

https://www.boatloadpuzzles.com/playcrossword

http://www.freegames.net/puzzle-games.html

https://www.cryptograms.org/play.php

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS SIG's

Special Interest Groups are for members only.

SIG's are really free monthly seminars with question and answer sessions following the presentation(s)

Members of SIG's enjoy a feeling of community and share common goals and interests.

Most SIG's are informal and members who attend them set the agenda for the meeting based on their own needs.

New ideas for SIG groups are welcome.
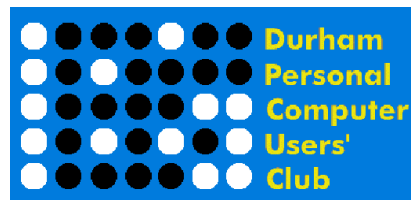
Special Interest Groups

Durham Linux User Group

Coordinator: Ed Goudge

Our Linux group meet on the first Thursday of every month.

All meetings are currently held using Zoom.

We hope some day to meet again in person.

DPCUC EXECUTIVE

2022-2023

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Newsletter Information

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