

# Haute coutunes

Got iPod anxiety? A new 'aural middleman' can make you a play list good enough to take anywhere

BY ELIO IANNACCI

Stylist Jeremy Abrams just finished his third conference this week with Kate Bosworth's assistant. They were talking Tiffany. Apparently, Bosworth is very picky about whom she puts around her ears.

However, the objective was not to prepare Bosworth for her walk down the red carpet at the Oscars this month. The Tiffany *he* was discussing is the pop tart darling of 1988, whose retro-chic No. 1 hit, *I Think We're Alone Now*, he just "styled" into Bosworth's iPod.

Abrams is a new kind of stylist: His niche is in the increasingly popular world of MP3s and their related hardware. For a select several hundred clients, who include celebrities and people just too busy to choose their lives' soundtracks, his company, New York-based Audiostiles, selects music for personal collections, parties, restaurants and events by programming individual iPods and other MP3 players (they'll also create CDs for the less technically advanced).

Call them the aural middlemen. Since the dawn of the iPod in 2001, the rectangular, portable jukebox has provided millions of on-the-go music lovers like Bosworth the opportunity to carry around their libraries of favourites. Since downloading songs into an iPod can be a lengthy and tech-savvy affair, Audiostiles has created a service that costs \$30 (U.S.) for an hour of MP3 playing (plus shipping costs), if the owner can live three to five days without it.

To start, Audiostiles' five-person team consults with clients to determine their favourite artists and where they'll be using their iPods



MARIO TAMA/GETTY IMAGES

(at the gym, for example, or at a dinner party). "We then style their play lists accordingly," Abrams says.

A self-professed music addict, Abrams, born in Montreal, has worked in the industry for more than a decade, moving to New York at the age of 22 to pursue a music business degree at New York University. After graduating and career-climbing at Dreamworks, BMG and VH1, Abrams moved into radio and

became a talent booker, working alongside Linda Lopez (J.Lo's sister), and *Entertainment Tonight's* Chris Booker. When the iPod's popularity started to soar, he thought up Audiostiles.

It was only a matter of time before Abrams's connections garnered high-profile clients such as the Four Seasons in California, where guests can borrow "Amenity iPods" for the gym. For Vanity Fair

magazine's celebrity issue, out this week, Audiostiles created individual play lists for the cover's entire cast of stars, a group that includes Kate Winslet, Cate Blanchett, Uma Thurman and Scarlett Johansson. Their individually tailored music programs were created through "a lot of discussions with their publicists," Abrams says. The resulting lists have themes such as "Latin Lounge" (featuring world artists

such as Koop and Cesária Evora), "Chillin' with the Ladies" (Everything But the Girl to Annie Lennox), and a "Workout Jamz" collection that mixes Prince with the Pointer Sisters.

Audiostiles has found a friend in the media too. InStyle magazine's executive editor, Martha McCulley, hails the service as "a godsend" in her deadline-heavy world. When she recently received her iPod back

after having it "styled," she was surprised to get a "new school" musical education.

"It's been such a learning experience and I'm getting exposed to music that I didn't even know I loved," she says from her New York office. "I told them how I listen to bands like U2 and Coldplay and they took it to another level, introducing me to [British band] Keane, which I now love."

Abrams and his team pride themselves on selecting artists that aren't Top-40 fare. "If someone loves electronica, we'd place bands like the Prodigy and the Chemical Brothers in a play list that includes great material from virtually unknown places, like David Byrne's new label, which houses artists that fuse electronica with world music. We love to mix music from well-known to almost unknown artists like [Canadian] Feist, for instance."

Audiostiles also creates discs and play lists for parties. The company created some of the music for Holt Renfrew's star-studded Vinyl event promotions during last fall's Toronto International Film Festival, as well as an in-store disc that ended up being one of the store's bestsellers. Holt Renfrew's fashion director, Barbara Atkin, says Audiostiles has "its finger on the pulse of the hottest, latest music."

She also thinks Audiostiles is the wave of the future. "Their concept of styling music for home, cottage, car and travel is brilliant. Music is mood-altering. The right music keeps you in pace with life, bad music turns you off. Audiostiles knows how to market ambience perfectly as it relates to our personal style."

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