

Announcement for Spotify Listeners

Transcriber: Daneran, the dread biter

Austin: Welcome to Friends of the Table. This is not a full episode, so I'm not going to do the full intro. Uh, I'm Austin Walker. I'm joined by Jack de Quidt. Hi, Jack.

Jack: Hi, Austin.

Austin: As you can see in the episode title, which we haven't named exactly yet, but I think we're tossing around, like, "Attention, Spotify listeners!"

Jack: Listen up, Spotify listeners.

Austin: Something like that. We have a—we have—

Jack: But everyone's getting it.

Austin: But everyone's getting it. So, if you're not a Spotify listener, have a good day. You go on with your life. Keep on listening to us on—when I'm looking here, mostly Apple podcast and uh Overcast. Big Overcast listenership these days, which is fun to think about. It seems like people have left—not left because Apple's still our, is still like very very clearly our biggest across all the different shows, but huge Overcast listenership for over the last like, I don't know, year or so. Big, big pivot there.

Jack: Huh.

Austin: Which is interesting, and nice to know. So, go leave us a review on Overcast since that seems to be a place people are finding and listening to podcasts. But high up there for the last year has been Spotify. And that's not the case anymore. It will stop being the case. Because as you may have already noticed, we have not been publishing stuff to Spotify for the last month or so. Uh, and our plan is to continue not publishing stuff, and eventually to pull down our stuff from Spotify. I believe that's the plan, Jack, right, I'm not just talking out—telling tales out of school.

Jack: No, I think you're right. And you might be thinking, "But I'm listening to this on Spotify." We turned the tap back on temporarily to reach you in your ears.

Austin: That's right. We realized that we needed to let people know, "Hey, we're not going to be here anymore" in a more direct way than just like saying it off-handedly on an episode or on a stream or whatever. Even on social media, where we know not everybody's on Bluesky, you know. Shit, we are barely on Bluesky, right? We're not going to be on Bluesky forever. The world is going to move on that eventually, because as you can tell, it's kind of a nightmare over there in many ways. Just a different, less nightmarish nightmare than Twitter/X.

Um, in any case, we are not going to be on Spotify anymore. We wanted to talk a little bit about that decision and let people know, you know, what our own processes have been like to get off of Spotify and then like encourage you to do the same in general, but especially to come listen to us through a different platform, if possible.

Jack: Yeah. I mean, I think that, over time, our objections both personally and politically to Spotify have kind of grown?

Austin: Yeah.

Jack: I think that recently, as in over the course of last year, we saw Spotify hosting adverts for DHS and ICE, recruitment adverts. They since pulled those adverts, but that is not good enough, as far as I'm concerned. At the same time we are looking at Spotify's interest in, engagement in, or kind of slaving delight around AI. They describe themselves as AI curious but what this means is that they are essentially opening the doors to AI produced music, AI produced bands, and filling the platform with that. More specifically, Daniel Ek, the former CEO of Spotify, invested, I think, €700 million in the AI weapons startup Helsing. If you look up, uh, sorry, let me just say that again into the microphone. *The CEO of Spotify, Daniel Ek, invested €600 million in the AI defense startup, Helsing.* Uh, Helsing, let me just read their thing. They say, artificial intelligence to protect our democracies. We provide AI-enabled precision mass and autonomous systems across all domains. The company develops military strike drones

and underwater surveillance systems. So, that's the music company CEO. Daniel Ek has stepped down as CEO, but he is remaining the—chief executive? No, what was it that I—I found this and I sent it to you, Austin.

Austin: You did, just earlier today when we were making sure we had all of our references ready. I'll put this in the episode description.

Jack: He's the executive chair.

Austin: There we go. Yeah. Great. Which is like there's a real particular, you know, I will say we were reticent to put our stuff on Spotify to begin with years ago. Partly because, you know, they would run ads at the beginning and end of our episodes that we never got a cut from.

Jack: We wouldn't get shit!

Austin: And we said, "Okay, we don't like running ads. It automatically places ads. We have no control over those ads and we don't get a cut. But our listeners keep telling us that's where they are and they want to listen to us there." I don't like it. Jack, you are a musician. You have, you and I have long talked about Spotify as a place that does not pay musicians what they are worth or give them a proper cut of what they're making the company. But, you know, one of my favorite musicians, Phil Elverum, recently talked about this in a newsletter that was like, this is one of the compromises—it is a non, for for Phil of Mount Erie, it is a non-inconsequential amount of money for him and his family, and so it's really hard for him to pull away. And for a long time that was our position kind of generally, not the money part, but just the "we have fans who are telling us it's there." And for a long time, we used the service. You know, a lot of early Friends at the Table, like, playlists that I would make for each season showed up on Spotify. It was really convenient for that. And at when it first showed up, of course, I think many of us were like, "Here is the future. This is like, small acts can get paid in a way that they couldn't get on for via radio play, for instance, right?" Such is how it goes, over and over. It seems like there is a larger system that shapes the smaller actors within it to make certain types of decisions! That's very interesting!

In any case, I think many of us have had different breaking points over the years. Whether that is the opportunity to jump ship and join a different streaming service that better, more equitably pays artists or a breaking point in terms of simply how much they're charging you, or learning new information about various things. For us, it really was their relationship with AI, with this AI defense company with their executive—what did you just call him, the executive director? Is that right? Or executive—?

Jack: Former CEO. Current executive director.

Austin: Yeah, executive director.

Jack: Executive chair.

Austin: Along with the way that they, as people alerted us to, began to, for instance, do unsupported or, you know, unrequested AI deep dives of our own show. People were finding, oh yeah, you listen to this episode of Friends of the Table and then here's a little summary of what you listened to. Here's what happened in this season. And we went, oh, we never okayed that and we don't want them digging through our audio or our text!

Jack: This is repulsive to us.

Austin: Yeah, it's actually repulsive to us. Especially for it to have been done without explicit, you know, explicit consent from us. And especially for a project like this, which is like, you know, so tied up with so many things that we don't believe in. And so I don't know about you, Jack, but I left Spotify last, kind of the last big news cycle around this, completely. I hadn't really been using it much, but except for things like sharing a playlist, and I said, "It's not worth that. There are other options." Um, and so I recently moved all my stuff over to Qobuz. [spelling] Q-O-B-U-Z.

Jack: Yeah, I've heard good stuff about that.

Austin: It's pretty good. I also currently am still doing Apple Music. We'll see how long I do that. There's a couple of things that are not on Qobuz and my hope is that Qobuz broadens out and I can just be a Qobuz guy. But I really advocate for people to make

that decision. Not only for the AI reasons, not only for the connection to, you know, arms manufacturers and defense companies, but also simply because, to go back to the core thing, like, artists should be paid more for their work. We're very lucky to be working artists in our various capacities. And we're only able to do that because you all pay us what you think is fair. And the folks who control streaming services, it turns out, don't let you just give people what they're worth. They convince you and give you an economic argument for why you should support them through their platforms. And it is one of the rare instances in this world where you can very quickly improve the, you know, the lives of your—the artists you want to support by doing it through a different platform. And I really, really advocate folks doing that.

Jack: Yeah. I mean, I think I've said it a few times on social media, but when you buy an artist's album on Bandcamp—if the artist is set up on Bandcamp themselves rather than going through their label, obviously I don't have a label, so I can't speak to it there. And I'm also cognizant that payment processors take fees, etc. But it really is as simple as: you say how much money you want to give the artist on Bandcamp and then that amount of money, minus some processing fees, arrives in their inbox. I am not dealing with complex middlemen. I am not talking to my Bandcamp rep. I am not wondering about what percentage of a percentage I'm going to get. It is the closest thing outside of handing an artist \$5 that you can get to handing an artist \$5. And I will be the first to take arms against Bandcamp when they start to move strangely. We've seen them do that in the past and there has been a lot of push back. But as of right now, it is the best way to support artists. I would also like to shout out two other things. Maybe let's say three other things. I recommend going to local record stores and buying cassettes and CDs. Cassettes and CDs are cheap and they are great. I'm saying this less to support artists in the sense of money because I don't know that—

Austin: [cross] They're not getting a cut from used CD sales either.

Jack: [cross] Paul McCartney is getting anything from me buying *Ram*. But I am going into the shop and talking to the woman across the counter who knows a lot about like English post rock and she's recommending me cool things and that is a million times

better than a computer in Spotify headquarters on an AWS server churning out the same post punk playlist that it's handing everybody.

Austin: Oh, please. It's not even going to be called a post punk playlist now. It's going to be called, you know, Cloudcore.

Jack: Angry vibes.

Austin: Yeah. Yeah. Exactly. Yeah.

Jack: And that's not me hating on new genres. New genres are fucking great. And I'll tell you where they're being made, they're being made at house shows, not at Spotify. I would also like to shout out going to a thrift store and buying the wildest CDs you can possibly buy for 25 cents. These are CDs that were printed by somebody's uncle.

Austin: Yeah.

Jack: And they rip. The third thing I would like to recommend is listening to your local student radio. The radio, like, large scale top 40 radio has been colonized in much of the same ways that these streaming platforms have, in terms of ads, in terms of the financialization of the thing. But I recommend listening to your local student free form radio. Free form radio lets the DJs play whatever they want. And they take advantage of that. You will turn on the radio and you will hear something you have never heard before in your life. Sometimes you'll turn on the radio and it will be unlistenable. Uh, '[positive]'. But dialing into the communities of music curation around you in your communities on the airwaves. That stuff has filled me with real vigor and excitement about finding and listening to and supporting new music.

Austin: And sometimes they will have not just college radio as in college students, you know running the station, though that's also awesome, but sometimes they will have you know a a block that is run by a local community. There's a college station out of I want to say Monmouth County in Jersey, but maybe that's wrong, it's just across the water, that runs kind of like local community interfaith stuff on the weekends for like six hours basically. It's not just interfaith. It's not just interfaith because it's first it's kind of like

various interfaith stuff ,and then it's various like ethnic communities that are not large enough to run a a complete station in their home language, right? But if you want to hear like Estonian music in the greater New York area, that is the place to go listen to it, right? And those groups need support just as much as, you know, independent musicians do. So, definitely consider tuning into that stuff if you live anywhere near something like that. The radio—also just having a radio is cool. You know, Janine and Ali just did this great episode of Side Story on kind of emulation devices. And part of the conversation they had—which was fantastic. Everyone should go listen to Side Story. Sidestory.show. Their conversation was fantastic. Part of the conversation turned to like single use devices, devices with one thing in mind. And my partner recently got like a radio for the kitchen and it is so cool to just like—

Jack: Oh! It changes your life!

Austin: It's just perfect. It's just wonderful. I really advocate for it. Um, so yeah, that's, those are great suggestions, Jack.

Jack: I think we're radio people. I feel kinship to the radio as a broadcaster.

Austin: Oh yeah, we are in the legacy.

Jack: Podcasts are not quite radio, but we are, we're, we're, you know, clasping hands with them going backwards.

Austin: I hope so. I hope that we have not angered them by moving the broadcast—

Jack: [cross] Angered the radio!

Austin: [cross] Out of linear time and broadcasting format and into “you can listen to this whenever you want to.” You know, if they would, if they would, if y'all would let us have a radio station to put this show on, we would do it.

Jack: Oh, wow!

Austin: We would put this on weekly. We'd have to—we'd have to probably get ahead of our recordings in a way we are not able to right now.

Jack: We'd have to get a radio license.

Austin: We'd have to get a radio license. Yeah.

Jack: 'Cause they fuck you up if they catch you doing pirate radio. They're fucking serious about that.

Austin: They do. It is big illegal. But yeah, I have some, I have some pirate radio stories to tell you off mic at some point. Some fun stuff. Not with me. Not with me. Not with me, but some stuff I've learned about recently, which is really cool. In any case, yeah, those are great things to support. I hope that that helps clarify some of our decisions around why we are stepping away from Spotify for all of our shows. If you want to support us, the best thing you can do is go to Patreon, is go to friendsatthetable.cash. I think it's patreon.com/friends_table, but friendsatthetable.cash will get you there. You know, that is the way we are able to make the show.

I know that this sounds goofy because we've been running for 11 years now, but like, we are not a big show. I think the size or the length of time that we have been around and the successful Patreon that we have, which I'm not undercutting, suggests a scale that is not true about us in terms of our total listenership. We are—we are much bigger than some very good small actual play shows. We exponentially smaller than what a successful actual play show in the parlance, in the ones that get brought up. We are exponentially smaller than those. We can only do it because y'all support us, we do not have the capacity to do it without that support. And so it really means a lot to us that you have supported us, and if you're someone who's like listened to us on Spotify and thought that maybe we get a cut of your Spotify subscription and that made you feel good about that: we don't get that. We've never gotten that. Even when they run ads around the show. And so if you'd like to support us, the best thing to do is to give us a couple bucks at friendsatthetable.cash. Like Jack said about Bandcamp, it's the closest thing you can do to giving us five bucks. You know? So. Please—and also go to

notquitereal.bandcamp.com and give Jack some money for the incredible music. Jack has been working so hard on Perpetua and Realis stuff right now. You have no idea how hard they've been working. We had a production meeting earlier today. The amount of work that Jack has been putting in and is continuing to put in to make what I think is some of the best music that they've made, in a show filled with great music, is—it's monumental, and I really, really appreciate it. And so please also try to appreciate it by going to notquitereal.bandcamp.com and giving Jack a couple bucks.

Jack: Thank you. Also, for the listener who feels like they need to make a mea culpa for being on Spotify: don't worry, man. You're good. Just stop using it.

Austin: You're good. We don't need the apology. Just, yeah. You know, there's a real, the opportunity is to change the action but it's not—I'm not sending anybody to hell. You know. You don't have to say any Hail Marys to me.

Jack: God, I wish I could send some people to hell!

Austin: Yeah, but none of our listeners are—even—I suspect even our most evil listener, and I'm sure we have some.

Jack: [laughs]

Austin: I think there's redemption available for those folks.

Jack: Dracula.

Austin: Dracula. I believe we could fix Dracula. But there are some people who I just, whew. Made me wish I had a different conception of cosmology of the real world sometimes. You know?

Jack: Well, have a good night everybody, and, uh, turn the lights out when you leave Spotify. We'll see you—oh! Elsewhere—we'll see you on Overcast! Overcast fucking rules. It's what I use.

Austin: Yeah, Overcast seems really great. Please—

Jack: I'm responsible for all those listens.

Austin: That's all you! Okay, great! So, yeah, please go over to Overcast. I believe Overcast has its own review system, so please feel free to review our shows—don't feel free, I'm begging you. Please! Review our shows over on Overcast. Wherever you are, review our shows. And for those of you who've reviewed our shows on Spotify, thank you for having done that also! That was very nice. But yeah! Okay! That's gonna do it. Friends at the Table. Side Story. Media Club Plus. All of them deserve your reviews and we are thankful that you listen to all or any of them.

Jack: And have a good night.

Austin: And have a good night.

Jack: To be continued.

Austin: To be continued! Wait a second.

Jack: [laughs]