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CELLPHONES

Tones cause many groans

Experts say cellphone ring tones are a reflection of people's tastes and personalities -- and are annoying as all heck.

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Photography student Maggie Kufahl doesn't embarrass easily, but when her cellphone started blasting a hit by the Black Eyed Peas and she couldn't turn it off -- she opted for less explicit ring tones.

"It was *My Humps* and it started playing very loudly while I was on line at Walgreens, and I couldn't turn it off and everyone was looking at me," Kufahl, 18, of Fort Lauderdale, said of her fateful cellphone faux pas.

The lyrics include the lines:

What you gon' do with all that junk?

All that junk inside your trunk?

I'ma get, get, get, get, you drunk

Her cellphone now features a generic ring tone for all callers -- and tamer pop tunes for select friends.

"After that, I am not having anything that is embarrassing, distracting, loud, or annoying," Kufahl said.

But most people are not like Kufahl, said cellphone expert Howard Melamed, president and CEO of CellAntenna, a Coral Springs company specializing in cellphone technology.

"Cellphones have evolved from being the No. 1 personal communication device to becoming the No. 1 personal rude device," said Melamed, who also writes about cellphone industry trends.

Melamed points out that cellphones are now marketed as a personal extension of one's personality and tastes.

"The industry now urges consumers to select certain colors, designs, multimedia accessories, and a variety of ring tones," Melamed said.

"But it has come at a terrible public cost. People -- intentionally or unintentionally -- now draw attention to themselves every time their cellphone rings. How many times have you been in a public place or a meeting when someone's cellphone rings -- usually playing a pop tune or a strange noise -- then you are subjected to listening to their very private conversation?" he said.

Nikki Johnson, 42, a clerk at the Broward County Courthouse from Wilton Manors, said that someone in her office always blasts a loud circus tune from her cellphone -- driving everyone in the office nuts.

"It plays loud and too long -- like 25 seconds nonstop," said Johnson, who complained that her co-worker will not change her tune.

"Of course, people stop working and then try to find her -- to let her know that her cellphone is ringing."

Johnson opts for a short jazz melody played at a very low volume.

"I don't want to be rude," she said.

RUDENESS RISING

Nick Nihoff, 34, a tile and kitchen cabinet installer from Hollywood, said that as more features are added to cellphones, people are becoming ruder still.

"People talk on their phones when driving, they will interrupt their face-to-face talks with you to answer their cellphones, and now they have loud, annoying tones," said Nihoff, who described cellphones as a "leash" on which everyone can find you at any time.

The most annoying tune he heard?

"Someone I know has the theme to some superhero cartoon show on their phone -- which they play loudly," said Nihoff, who said he uses a tone no one plays anymore: an old-fashioned phone ring.

Nancy Moles, 43, a court clerk from Sunrise, keeps her ring tone set low. It features the light, silly theme music from the film *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*. She said it is less intrusive than tones she's had in the past, which ranged from spooky Halloween tunes to music from Green Day.

"My daughter, however, uses different hit songs to identify the different people who call her," said Moles, who admitted that pop songs she doesn't care for can get on her nerves.

Melamed said the biggest problem with annoying cellphone tones is the cost of productivity at work.

"What happens when cellphones ring at the workplace? People stop working and disturb those around them and staff meetings get interrupted," Melamed said. `` This is why we have a policy against audible cellphone tones and using cellphones at work -- which all companies should do."

But Melamed says that there is something even worse than hearing annoying cellphone tones: Not hearing them.

`` Kids faced with parents and teachers who want their cellphones off -- including the often audible vibrate function -- now have high-pitch cell tones that people aged 30 and over can't hear."

GENERATION GAP

Melamed said his 22-year-old daughter has downloaded a text message ring tone called "mosquito teen repellent" that has the same pitch of a mosquito buzz. The invention was recently showcased on National Public Radio.

"I will see her suddenly grab her cellphone -- and I swear I do not hear a thing," said Melamed, who just turned 50. `` It makes me feel real old."