

Monday, February 14, 2005

Best Chocolate Ice Cream Ever!

This isn't a very high-tech toy, but it makes the best chocolate ice cream in the world. It's a relatively inexpensive Cuisinart ICE device which has a fancy bowl with some sort of liquid jelly inside that freezes and holds its cool temperature for a while. And there isn't much to making ice cream. I have made all kinds, but my current favourite is this recipe I put together:

2 whole eggs
1.5 cups of heavy cream
1 cup of butter milk
1 pinch of salt
4 tablespoons of sugar
1 block (8-10 ounces?) of Trader Joe's broken Ghiradelli dark chocolate
1 block (8-10 ounces?) of Trader Joe's broken Ghiradelli milk chocolate
2 drops of almond extract

Heat up the butter milk in a pot and add the chocolate. Keep stirring and make sure it doesn't burn, although the slightly burnt flavour, if you do happen to burn it, adds character to the ice cream. Once melted into a smooth ganosh-like consistency, stir in the sugar, salt and the almond extract and remove from the heat and let it sit for a bit.

In a clean bowl, whip the eggs for about 3 minutes, add in the cream and whip for another minute or 2. Finally pour the warm chocolate mixture into your whipped eggs and cream mixture and put the bowl in your fridge for an hour or two to cool it down. Trying to make ice cream right away with a warm starting point doesn't work very well. You can stick it in the freezer to speed it up a bit too. When it is cool, take your freezer bowl out and put it on the motor thing and pour your mixture into the bowl. Wait 20-25 minutes and you will have something resembling soft-ice. It's very good at this point, but another 3-4 hours in the freezer and it is perfect.

The secret is of course the pound+ of good chocolate or so that went in which is about double the chocolate of any of the suggested recipes I have seen. Not much sugar is needed because I use half milk chocolate. If you are using all dark or bittersweet, you'll need more sugar. I like the combination of the slightly salty butter milk and chocolate. You can use regular milk and/or lighter cream. However, the fat in the cream is what gives you that rich smooth ice cream taste and texture. If you want to add nuts or fruit, do it right at the end of the 25 minutes and just let them stir in for 30 seconds. If you put them in at the start they tend to clog things up. This toy makes excellent frozen drinks and soft sherberts as well.

Posted by Rasmus in Food at 15:03

Friday, February 11. 2005

TiVo ToGo Annoyances

I put in my request weeks ago to get onto the priority list to get the new TivoToGo-enabled software on my Tivos. It finally arrived a couple of days ago. I wanted to write something up on it as soon as possible, but unfortunately it has taken me 3 days to get anywhere with it, and I still don't have a DVD with my shows on it. There were a number of problems.

The Tivo needed a reboot before it would work and since it was in the middle of recording something I didn't want to reboot it. That meant I couldn't do it the first night.

After a reboot the Tivo Desktop software was able to connect to my Tivo. Unfortunately it takes close to an infinite amount of time to transfer stuff. I have 7 episodes of "24" recorded at best quality I want to put on a DVD. That translates to about 15G of data I needed to transfer. I have a USB wired adapter plugged into a WRT54G and then an 802.11g connection to another WRT54G sitting next to a Windows box. This combination got me a transfer rate of about 1G/hour which means transferring my 7 episodes took over 15 hours.

Ok, a day later all the episodes came across. I grabbed the trial copy of Sonic MyDVD Studio 6.1 which is what Tivo suggests we use to create our dvds. I had configured my TiVo Desktop to stick my shows on E:\tivo since I didn't have room on my C drive. Unfortunately there is no provision in MyDVD to change the directory it looks for tv shows in. You can browse to the files and add them manually, but then you don't get the same ui screen that shows which shows are available. A quick register hack fixed that, but you can't expect Joe User to hack his registry for something this simple.

The MyDVD UI for adding shows is horrible. It doesn't show the episode information at all, so I had my list of 7 episodes all titled "24" with no clue as to which was which. So you are probably better off browsing to them and adding them manually than using the button designed for this.

MyDVD has absolutely no TiVo integration. I am sure that I read at some point that the dvds you create would have a Tivo-like navigation menu. No such thing exists in MyDVD. There isn't even a TiVo theme for the top DVD menu. They could at least have added a JPG with a TiVo logo or something. Nothing.

When I finally did start the burn process MyDVD told me it was building the menus. I had read it was slow, so I went to bed. 7 hours later it was still building the menus. So I left it another 12 hours. No progress. The thing isn't hung. There is a cancel button that works fine and asks me if I am sure I want to cancel since cancelling could take a "long" time!

So as far as I can tell burning a DVD simply isn't working for me. Who knows what the problem may be. Conflict with something else that is installed perhaps? This is Windows, you can never really be sure why something doesn't work. Unfortunately the OSX TiVo Desktop 2.0 is not available yet so I can't do this on my Powerbook yet. At this point it looks like my only real option is to work around MyDVD and use something like this hack to convert the .tivo files to mpeg2. In the long run that's probably much more useful anyway. The .tivo files have a playback password on them you have to remember which seems to me to be DRM run amok. Not that I have a VCR, but if I did, it wouldn't have a password option. This is no different.

Another annoying thing is that the recorded shows have a thin strip of white on black noise at the top. Looks to be too organized to be noise actually. Closed captioning data or something? Guess I may need to edit the stream to cut that out and also to snip out the commercials so I can fit more on a dvd.

I'll update this if I ever get my shows onto a dvd that works. At this point I am having a hard time disagreeing with the TiVo Deathwatch. I'll probably be looking for an alternative soon.

Update: Ok, I finally managed to burn a working DVD from the MyDVD software. After a ctrl-alt-del to kill off the running process that had been going for almost 24 hours, I restarted it, reloaded the project and it actually worked. Still took a couple of hours to sit and chew on the 2 .tivo files I had fed it, but the final DVD works. It still has the noise at the top which is distracting, but the quality is ok. So all in all, out of the 8 hours of "24" which was supposed to be my test case, eliminating the hung MyDVD and other delays and extrapolating from the 3 hours I have managed to burn so far, it will

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end up taking somewhere between 20 and 24 hours to create the 3 DVDs assuming I am right there at each user-interaction point ready to click or switch dvds and assuming no hung processes or crashes. I think the upper range my patience will tolerate is 8 hours to burn 8 hours of content. For it to be something I would use often it would need to be at least 3x or 4x, as in 15-20 minutes for every hour of content.

By the way, don't get me wrong, I love my TiVo. I have played a little bit with alternatives, and for the core functionality of scheduling and recording shows nothing I have seen beats it. But the alternatives are catching up and my expectations are high.

Posted by Rasmus in Audio/Video at 14:32