

New iPod Shuffle speaks Greek

APPLE has introduced a new version of its iPod Shuffle that is half the size of its already tiny predecessor.

In Australia it's also twice the price - \$129 rather than \$65, which has Doubleclick wondering if Apple Oz might be about to jack up the prices of all iPods.

The big thing about the new Shuffle is that that it talks. Technology dubbed VoiceOver speaks your song titles, artists and playlist names. It's just as well, because you'd never find them otherwise, given some of the inevitable shortcomings of this tiniest iPod.

The new iPod Shuffle is truly small: less than the size of an AA battery, or about three matchsticks. It has an aluminium case that looks like a silvered stick of chewing gum.

There's a built-in stainless steel clip so you can attach it to your shirt, a handbag strap, a headband or maybe a hank of hair: the Shuffle is "ultra-wearable" according to Apple publicity.

Inside there's 4GB memory: enough for about 1000 songs. The previous model in basic trim had just 1GB.

Alas, when you design an object the size of three matchsticks, it's damn

hard to find a spot for the screens, buttons, dials or click-wheels that owners of portable music players expect to use to control their music.

So Apple has built the controls into the earphone cord. Run your fingers down it and you'll find an area with three clickable spots: two to control volume, and a centre area that acts as a play-pause button.

Operating this centre controller is hardly intuitive. You click twice to go to the next track, and three times to go back.

If you hold it down, a voice will tell you the name of the song you're listening to. It speaks 14 languages, including Italian, two kinds of Chinese, Japanese, Greek, Turkish and Czech. Release the central area after hearing a beep and VoiceOver utters the names of your playlists. Click when you hear the one you want.

This sounds complicated -- and it is -- but it is an improvement over the previous iPod Shuffle, which had no way to display or control playlists.

Be warned, though, the supplied Apple earbuds are currently the only devices on which you can listen. Mislay

them and you lose your music, at least until you buy another pair from Apple. Doubleclick is not a fan of earbuds: the sound quality is usually poor and the rotten little things are always popping out of our ears.

This new iPod Shuffle is an ingenious little thing, but perhaps too clever by half and we think doubling the price is a bit rich.

The older Shuffle model, which will take most headsets, is still available, but only from the online Apple Store. It's still only \$65, and you get your choice of five colours. The new model comes only in silver or black.

Or you might prefer to step up to the 8GB iPod Nano, which has a click-wheel and screen to watch videos and play games. For the moment it's still \$149, just \$20 more than the Shuffle -- and well worth it, we reckon.

DOUBLECLICK'S recent items about the Amazon.com Kindle and other e-book readers, and their suitability or otherwise for the Australian market, has brought a blaze of emails from readers interested in this subject.

Several, including former television

journalist and longtime reader Geoffrey Luck, tell us all is not lost for Kindle buyers who manage to import this natty reader to Australia despite a current Amazon ban on exports. Certainly Aussie users will not be able to connect to Whispernet, the wireless service that keeps US Kindle owners connected to books on Amazon servers. But, as Luck and others explain, users can download the books over the internet to a PC, then transfer to the Kindle via USB.

Petros Demetriou, general manager of Melbourne-based DADirect, says his company markets a number of e-book devices in Australia, including the Hanlin eBook Reader (\$569), Booken CyBook (\$599) and Iliad Book edition (\$1099). More info at www.dadirect.com.au

Chris from Hove, South Australia, is a happy Cybook user. He bought his from Dymocks in Sydney. "The reader is so light and easy to hold and very, very clear," he says, noting that he won't be going back to printed books. Others report good experiences with the Sony Reader, imported from US online sources.

Xenophon to run ad against Chinalco

POLITICAL pressure against Chinalco's \$30 billion investment in Rio Tinto is rising with the independent senator Nick Xenophon planning to film his own television commercial next week opposing the bid. Senator Xenophon's commercial will be funded by Ian Melrose, the Melbourne businessman and activist who paid for two advertisements released yesterday featuring the Nationals senator Barnaby Joyce.

And today in the Herald Peter Costello has intensified his campaign against the takeover, saying the price paid would "look exceptionally low when the global economy recovers and the Australian dollar appreciates".

The issue is before Treasury's Foreign Investment Review Board which has another 90 days before handing a recommendation to the Treasurer, Wayne Swan, to make the final decision.

A government source said yesterday that those advocating blocking foreign investment were hypocritical to also be concerned about jobs.

Rio Tinto has threatened to sack 2000 workers should the bid be knocked back yet Senator Joyce vehemently opposes Labor's emissions trading scheme because he says it will cost thousands of mining jobs. "You can't on the one hand complain about jobs and on the other hand oppose foreign investment," the source said. The Senate Economics Committee will inquire into the issue but all specific references to Chinalco and the FIRB were deleted from the terms of reference. The Greens leader, Bob Brown, wanted the Chinalco deal and the role of the FIRB specifically examined but this was rejected by Labor and the Coalition.

Instead, the committee will inquire into "the international experience of sovereign wealth funds and state-owned companies, their role in acquisitions of significant shareholdings of corporations, and the impact ... of such acquisitions".

Committee sources said these terms would still enable questioning about Chinalco. The committee will report by June 17, the same time the FIRB must hand its recommendation to Mr Swan.

Tsiolkas wins literature prize

*CHRISTOS Tsiolkas's explosive novel, **The Slap**, has won the 2009 Commonwealth Writers' Prize for South East Asia and the Pacific.*

The pound stg. 1000 (\$2150) regional prize, which was announced in Sydney, puts Tsiolkas in contention for the main pound stg. 10,000 prize and an audience with the Queen.

The Commonwealth Writers' Prize, to be awarded to one of eight regional winners in May, carries considerable prestige, second only to the Man Booker Prize in Commonwealth countries.

Tsiolkas's book was up against Helen Garner's *The Spare Room*, Tim Winton's *Breath*, Joan London's *The Good Parents*, Aravind Adiga's *Between The Assassinations* and New Zealander Paula Morris's *Forbidden Cities* in the regional category.

"Competition is a weird thing in the arts -- how do you judge between such different writers?" Tsiolkas said before the ceremony.

The real reward, he said, was being acknowledged in such accomplished company. And, he added, "It's nice to know Mum and Dad will be proud of this."

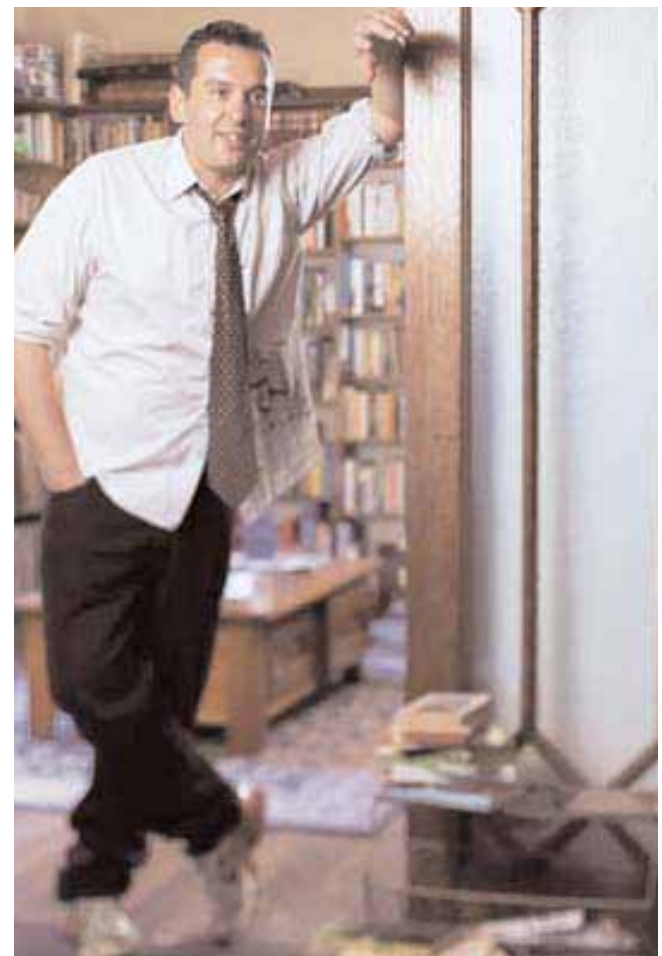
In the three months since it came out in November, *The Slap* has sold 35,000 copies, according to publisher Allen & Unwin.

But Tsiolkas said books could not be written with sales or prizes in mind. "I wanted to write a contemporary novel set in my suburban world," he said.

The Slap is about the ramifications of a man slapping someone else's child at a backyard barbecue.

The Australian's reviewer, Venero Armanno, wrote of it: "It's often said that the best politicians are those who can instinctively divine the zeitgeist of their country's centre. For the ones who can't, I would place *The Slap* as mandatory bedside table reading."

The Commonwealth Writers' Prize, which is



Christos Tsiolkas who was awarded the prestigious Commonwealth Writer's Prize in the South East Asia and Pacific category says he may ask the Queen for the Parthenon Marbles back if he wins the Commonwealth Prize. PHOTO: JOHN TSLAVIS

chaired by an Australian, Nicholas Hasluck, was established in 1987 to reward the best authors writing in English across the Commonwealth.

New Zealand author Mo Zhi Hong won the regional prize for best first book for *The Year of The Shanghai Shark*.

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