From Plex to Jellyfin Media Server

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I've used the Plex Media Server for over a decade. It's been my primary way to catalog and watch my movie and TV show collection. Plex can neatly organize media, fetch metadata and movie posters, and keeps track of what and how far you've watched your media files. It can also transcode and stream media in multiple multimedia codecs to ensure compatibility with all types of devices and screen sizes.

It's been great, but Plex recently went in an unwanted direction. It keeps insisting I sign up and login through their web portal instead of using the front end for my local Plex server. Recently, I opened up Plex and couldn't find my own content. My

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media content had been pushed aside into a submenu while the app promotes its own streaming media and premium services instead.

I just wanted a media server to be the hub for my own media collection. I'm sure that getting paid is a better business model for Plex. The parts of Plex I used have remained virtually unchanged for almost a decade. I'm not interested in Plex's incredibly tiny movie catalog (in my region) or its premium membership offerings. Plex is becoming something I'm not interested in. It was time for a change.

I had a brief fling with the Emby Media Server before I decided to move from Plex to Jellyfin. Emby used to be a free and open-source media server alternatives to Plex. Jellyfin is a fork of Emby at the point where the software went commercial. However, the Emby web player and apps feel far less polished than Jellyfin. Emby has added some extra features behind a premium monthly subscription. Fearing another Plex, I decided against using Emby in favor of Jellyfin.

Jellyfin is very similar to what Plex Media Server used to be. It offers the same media cataloging, automatic metadata and art downloading, keeps track of what I've watched, and has the same transcoding capabilities as Plex. It has apps and a web player you can connect to your local media server. Jellyfin is pretty much a drop-in replacement for Plex Media Server's core functionality.

Jellyfin gets its metadata from a variety of online sources such as The Movie Database (TMDb). I'll go into more details on metadata retrieval and your media library privacy in a later article.

The Jellyfin Android TV app is slightly worse than Plex's, but they're both dreadful to navigate with a remote control. Neither apps do a good job with subtitles and subtitle customization. Instead of the apps, I watch media via the Jellyfin web player instead of in a web browser on my home theater computer (HTPC).

A notable difference fro Skip to main content fin web player uses larger interactive elements and text. The Jellyfin web player is easy enough to use, but I can't claim it's very intuitive. It takes a few minutes to get familiar with it. Probably due to its free software heritage, Jellyfin supports custom stylesheets ("UserCSS"). I've used

this feature to great effect and increased the size of a few key buttons and text labels.

I've also used custom stylesheets to make subtitles just ever so slightly larger than the default. I'll never understand why all TVs and multimedia apps insist on only three subtitle text size presets: tiny, small, or humongous. Where's the "The TV is just slightly too far away. Please increase the text size by like 5–10 %. (I don't need glasses!)" option?

My only remaining issue with Jellyfin is that the server doesn't inhibit the system idle state while it's playing media. That is to say, the server may suspend to save energy — cutting off mid-stream — because it doesn't think anyone is using it. Jellyfin lives on my HTPC and I definitely want to remain powered down for most of the day when it's not in use. I've opened a feature request to get this fixed. However, I might be able to work something out with the Jellyfin plugin API.

I migrated away from Plex just a week before its much over-publicized "security issues" last month. I just want to go on the record and say that my decision had nothing to do with this incident. The "security issue" boiled down to Plex not behaving ideally on mismanaged and insecure network configurations. In my opinion, Plex isn't to blame for security errors in network configurations made by inexperienced network administrators.

I can't think of any features from Plex that I miss in Jellyfin. I especially don't miss the video playback issues I've had with Plex when rewinding videos. Overall, I'm happy with Jellyfin as a replacement for Plex. ∎

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