

Buying and Listening to Music Online

Music recordings changed dramatically around 1980 with the introduction of the Compact Disk (CD). “Streaming music” was pretty much The Radio until the early 1990s.

When music is stored digitally, it is stored as a string of numbers. The sound wave is represented numerically, and that data can easily be transmitted, stored, and played back. The higher the sampling rate (how many numbers per second of music) the better the reproduction and larger the music file.

We “consume” music for lots of reasons – for background music, to listen to specific songs and specific artists, to learn about new music, to learn about music history and cultural history. Each use may be best served with different kinds of services and different listening and searching methods .

You can go a long way with just a web browser, a fast connection, and a modern computer. There may be other software that will find useful, and you may need to sign up for services and supply credit card information if you use a service that requires payment.

Radio has been available for many years – its advantages are good programming and interesting personalities - someone else decides what to play, and that can often introduce you to new music and ideas.

With streaming music, your computer connects to a “music stream” and the music plays until you turn it off, just like on the radio. You need a fast connection (DSL, cable, satellite). The music isn’t saved on your computer.

iTunes from Apple (free download at www.apple.com/itunes) has a “Radio” section that connects with online music streams (at no charge). Some are real radio stations; some are “internet” radio stations. They’re divided into categories like “country” and “classical”. The numbers on each stream indicate the sampling rate of the stream; lower numbers are better on slower connections.

You can also visit radio station websites; many “broadcast” on the web, either in real time or by offering programs with a shift in time. You can also visit websites of specific radio programs; they sometimes have their programs online. You usually can’t download the music, but you can listen to it as a music stream.

Streaming music services offer customizable streams of music; again, usually not for download. Some services connect to purchase information for specific songs. Often if you subscribe (for a fee) you can avoid advertising.

- Pandora (www.pandora.com) allows you to create your own “stations”, configuring a mix of music related to your selections.
- Grooveshark (www.grooveshark.com) lets you choose specific artists and songs; with an account you can share lists and music interests.
- Last.FM (www.last.fm) allows creation of “radio stations” and for a fee allows for iPhone/Android playback

Be wary of searching for *free mp3 downloads*; you will find lots of sketchy sites that link to scams, viruses, and other sketchy sites.

- Archive.org (www.archive.org) features lots of free music including concerts and archival recordings (and an entire Grateful Dead category!) You can listen in real time or download files. They feature a nice library of 78s and cylinder recordings.
- Classic Cat (www.classiccat.net) links to sites offering classical music downloads.
- Jamendo (www.jamendo.com) features small labels and independent artists who upload their own recordings with Creative Commons licensing; you can stream all and download many.

There are many for-fee sites that allow you to stream or download – you usually pay a monthly fee for the privilege and the downloads are sometimes tied to their player and/or time limited.

- Magnatune (www.magnatune.com) Features lots of independent music for a monthly fee.

- Rhapsody (www.rhapsody.com) offers streaming and offline-listening.

When you purchase music online as a download you can do it over a slower connection if you have to. You can often preview the selections, and most major labels make their music available on the bigger services.

- iTunes (www.apple.com/itunes) lets you download purchased music; you need an Apple account to make purchases (but it is available on PCs as well). Purchases are in AAC format (very high quality) and can be converted to other formats. Your account information is embedded into your downloads.
- Amazon (www.amazon.com) allows purchases of mp3 music files through the Amazon online store. They have their own downloader application.

You can also purchase music directly from music artists by visiting their websites – that way you know they are getting the money! More and more artists are making their music available directly.

Music in the Cloud services are fairly new – your music purchases are stored on remote servers that allow you to connect to listen or to download items you already own. iTunes Match and the Amazon Cloud Player are two examples.

Tips for listening and buying music online:

- Check to see if your favorite radio stations are online
- Be careful about download sites
- Read the terms of use before signing up for services
- Make sure that services can connect to your devices
- Be sure that you back up your music purchases

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