

Music sales soar in U.S. as streaming takes over market

By Shaun Tandon, Agence France-Presse on 01.08.18

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A woman uses the iPhone application of Swedish music streaming service Spotify on March 7, 2013, in Stockholm, Sweden. The Nordic country is at the forefront of a global recovery in music sales driven by streaming music services such as Spotify. Photo by: AFP PHOTO/JONATHAN NACKSTRAND

Music sales grew at a robust pace for a third straight year in the United States in 2017 as listeners kept flocking to streaming outlets, an industry monitor said Wednesday.

Analytical firm BuzzAngle Music said that consumption in the world's largest music market jumped 12.8 percent in 2017, well outpacing the 4.2 percent growth seen a year earlier.

On-demand streaming services led by Spotify are quickly replacing downloads on platforms such as iTunes, which shook up the music business a generation ago.

BuzzAngle Music found that nearly three times as many songs were streamed on an average 2017 day in the United States — 1.67 billion — than the 563.7 million tracks that were downloaded over the entire year.

Audio streaming grew overall by more than 50 percent in 2017 from the previous year.

In more good news for the industry, BuzzAngle Music said that 80 percent of audio streams came through subscription sites, as the music business encourages listeners to pay monthly rates rather than seek out songs for free online.

The growth reflects a reversal of the long rut in music sales following the rise of the internet.

But not everyone is cheering, with many artists complaining that they are seeing little of the profit.

Wixen Music Publishing, which owns rights to songs by artists such as Neil Young and The Doors, last week filed a \$1.6 billion suit against Spotify, arguing that the Swedish company failed to seek proper licenses in its rush to build its catalog of 30 million songs.

And in a recent Twitter thread that drew wide attention among artists, Geoff Barrow of English trip-hop group Portishead said it was "almost impossible to make a living" through Spotify for musicians who do not figure out how to "work the system well."

Spotify counters that it has provided a rare source of growth and helped bring new audiences to artists, who increasingly make their living off concerts rather than recordings.

Spotify faces a growing number of rivals including the streaming services of tech giants Apple and Amazon, as well as Paris-based Deezer and rapper Jay-Z's Tidal.

While sales of full albums kept dropping in 2017, there was one big exception — vinyl.

Album sales on vinyl grew by 20 percent, keeping up the revival of the classic format that has been embraced anew by hardcore fans and collectors.

Vinyl buyers disproportionately bought rock and older titles.

The top-selling vinyl title of the year was a soundtrack to the superhero film "Guardians of the Galaxy," which was first released in 2014 and featured songs by music legends such as David Bowie and Marvin Gaye.

The taste of vinyl lovers was sharply different from mainstream choices. Pop superstar Taylor Swift's "Reputation" was by far the top-selling album of 2017, selling nearly 1.9 million copies, according to BuzzAngle Music.

Swift maximized sales by keeping "Reputation" off streaming services for its first three weeks — an increasingly unusual commercial strategy that only stars with a dedicated fan base can pull off.

Sales of cassettes — which have also found a renewed following, in part for their kitsch appeal — more than doubled in 2017, but at fewer than 100,000 copies, the format remains minuscule in the overall market.

The U.S. sales are in line with global trends. The International Federation of the Phonographic Industry will release worldwide figures in the coming months.

Quiz

- 1 Read the following sentence from the article.

On-demand streaming services led by Spotify are quickly replacing downloads on platforms such as iTunes, which shook up the music business a generation ago.

Which sentence from the article BEST supports this idea?

- (A) Analytical firm BuzzAngle Music said that consumption in the world's largest music market jumped 12.8 percent in 2017, well outpacing the 4.2 percent growth seen a year earlier.
- (B) BuzzAngle Music found that nearly three times as many songs were streamed on an average 2017 day in the United States — 1.67 billion — than the 563.7 million tracks that were downloaded over the entire year.
- (C) In more good news for the industry, BuzzAngle Music said that 80 percent of audio streams came through subscription sites, as the music business encourages listeners to pay monthly rates rather than seek out songs for free online.
- (D) Spotify counters that it has provided a rare source of growth and helped bring new audiences to artists, who increasingly make their living off concerts rather than recordings.

- 2 Read the following selection from the article.

Vinyl buyers disproportionately bought rock and older titles. The top-selling vinyl title of the year was a soundtrack to the superhero film "Guardians of the Galaxy," which was first released in 2014 and featured songs by music legends such as David Bowie and Marvin Gaye.

Which of the following conclusions can be drawn from the selection above?

- (A) While vinyl has become popular again, it is a small group of artists from decades ago whose music sells best on vinyl, indicating it is still a niche market.
- (B) Vinyl's popularity increased dramatically in 2017 because more artists are publishing their music on vinyl to boost sales as an alternative to music streaming.
- (C) Vinyl made a comeback in 2017, but the artists whose vinyl sales are most impressive were popular decades ago, indicating older generations are most interested in vinyl.
- (D) While the popularity of vinyl increased dramatically in 2017, vinyl sales only make up a small portion of the music sales in the United States.

- 3 Read the following two details from the article.

And in a recent Twitter thread that drew wide attention among artists, Geoff Barrow of English trip-hop group Portishead said it was "almost impossible to make a living" through Spotify for musicians who do not figure out how to "work the system well."

Spotify counters that it has provided a rare source of growth and helped bring new audiences to artists, who increasingly make their living off concerts rather than recordings.

Select the option that BEST explains how these details develop a CENTRAL idea of the article.

- (A) Both details highlight the impact of music streaming's popularity on the livelihood of musicians in the United States.
- (B) Both details provide examples of arguments opposing music streaming as the predominant way artists should make their living.
- (C) Both details contribute to the idea that streaming services have helped increase music sales in the United States over the last year.
- (D) Both details reflect the differing views between artists and streaming services about how musicians should be compensated for songs streamed.

4 Read the following CENTRAL idea statements.

1. *The internet fundamentally changed the way people enjoyed music because people were able to access music online for free.*
2. *Streaming services have skyrocketed in popularity far outpacing music downloads.*
3. *Music streaming services are experiencing more competition than ever as musicians and business titans aim to make big profits.*
4. *Superstars have boosted their album sales by choosing not to stream their albums, but this is not a feasible choice for an up-and-coming artist.*

Which two options accurately reflect the CENTRAL ideas of the article?

- (A) 1 and 3
- (B) 1 and 2
- (C) 2 and 4
- (D) 3 and 4