

## Why Pay to Own Music? Sign Up for a Streaming Service – or Listen for Free!

This article shows you how to:

- ✓ How streaming music is taking over from owning it
- ✓ The best places to stream music for free
- ✓ What you get by paying for a music streaming service

The days of owning music are numbered. Rather than buying CDs, or paying for ‘digital’ music to download and keep as MP3 files, the world has shifted towards streaming music instead.

But how does streaming work? What does it cost – and does it have to cost anything at all? In this article, I’ll explain the various ways you can get some music playing on your PC or your mobile phone, the pros and cons of the various services, and the differences between the free streaming services and paid subscriptions.



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## The Pros and Cons of Streaming Your Music

In the old days, we bought music...

In the good old days, if you wanted to listen to something in particular, you had to buy it on vinyl, cassette or CD. Alternatively – and a little less honourably – you might borrow it from someone else who'd already done that and then tape it, or you'd wait for it to be played on the radio with your finger poised over the Record button of your cassette recorder.

...perhaps as digital MP3 files

There were few other ways of listening to music, and no other ways of growing your collection. Then the 21st century dawned and CD sales were overtaken by digital downloads: you'd visit an online MP3 store (such as 7digital.com) and buy individual tracks or whole albums to download and keep as MP3 files. That gave you a certain amount of flexibility – not least because you didn't have to buy the tracks you didn't like – but you were still paying around £10 to add a new album to your collection.

Now 'streaming' has taken over

Then along came 'music streaming', and the whole concept of having your own music collection went out of the window.

You listen to music via the Internet

With music streaming, the music collection belongs to the online service you're using, and it contains millions of tracks. When you want to hear some music, you simply connect to one of these services – on your computer or mobile phone – and listen to their collection.

Play what you like from a library of millions of songs

You don't get to keep any of this music, but that shouldn't matter. In theory, at least, you can always listen to whatever you want to hear, so why clutter up your PC or phone with thousands of MP3 files? Why have the palaver of organising them all so that you can find what you want, and copying them between devices to ensure that your entire collection is always available?

The previous couple of paragraphs covered the ‘pros’ of music streaming, and they really don’t need much more explanation. The best of these services have libraries of over 40 million tracks, from classical, jazz and early rock’n’roll up to the latest releases and chart hits, so you can be fairly certain of finding whatever you want to hear.

Another point in favour of music streaming services is that they pay attention to what you listen to and make recommendations based on your tastes. So, besides allowing you to create your own playlists of favourites, they provide an excellent way of discovering new music.



That brings me to the ‘cons’, and there are a handful of those to consider:

- Every standard-length song you listen to will be 5–10 MB, so if you listen to a whole album (ten tracks, let’s say), that’s a good 70 MB of data being downloaded to your PC or phone. Do that every day and you’ve streamed over 2 GB of data in a month. On your PC, over Wi-Fi, that’s probably no problem: your broadband provider quite likely doesn’t impose any limit on monthly downloads. But your mobile phone contract probably isn’t as generous, and it might allow you less than half that amount of data! If so, you’ll have to be careful how much streaming you do over your phone’s data connection and try to ensure your phone is connected to Wi-Fi when you want to listen to music.
- Unless you’re willing to pay a monthly subscription for a music-streaming service, you’ll have to endure listening to ads between every few songs.
- Free streaming services also limit the number of ‘skips’ you can use – jumping past the current song if you don’t like it in order to hear the next.

**Streaming involves a lot of data!**

**Free services include ads**

**Can’t skip songs you dislike**

No Internet –  
no music!

- Whether it's a free or paid service, there's no escaping the fact that you'll need Internet access! If you're out of reach of the Internet, you're out of reach of your music. (That said, most paid services allow you to download music to play 'offline', so you can get around this problem if you plan in advance.)

## Listen to Your Favourite Radio Stations Online

Stream your  
favourite radio  
shows

Let's start at the most straightforward end of music streaming. You won't be surprised to learn that your favourite radio stations have their own websites. What may surprise you is that most stations also broadcast their programs over the Internet.

All you have to do is point your web browser at the right page and look for a Listen live or Listen (or similar) button to click, usually at the top of the page. To get you started, here are the web addresses of some popular radio stations:

Radio station	Website
BBC Radio 1 (2, 3 & 4)	<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio1">www.bbc.co.uk/radio1</a> (swap 'radio1' to 'radio2', 'radio3' or 'radio4')
BBC Radio 5 Live	<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/5live">www.bbc.co.uk/5live</a>
Classic FM	<a href="http://www.classicfm.com">www.classicfm.com</a>
Heart	<a href="http://www.heart.co.uk">www.heart.co.uk</a>
Jazz FM	<a href="http://www.jazzfm.com">www.jazzfm.com</a>
Magic Radio	<a href="http://www.magic.co.uk">www.magic.co.uk</a>
Planet Rock	<a href="http://www.planetrock.com">www.planetrock.com</a>
Smooth Radio	<a href="http://www.smoothradio.com">www.smoothradio.com</a>

Rather than mucking around with the web browser on your mobile phone to get a radio station playing, you'd probably prefer an easier way! Each of the stations above offers its own app for Android and Apple iOS devices: just visit your phone's app store and search for the radio station by name to find its app (or, in the case of BBC radio, look for the all-in-one BBC iPlayer Radio app).

Alternatively, why not get all your radio stations in one place? Here are two great websites that put dozens of local and national radio stations right at your fingertips:

- **TuneIn Radio** – [www.tunein.com](http://www.tunein.com): click the **Music** button at the top and then click one of the categorised stations on the page that opens to begin listening to it. If you prefer, click **Local Radio** at the left, then click a nearby town to see an immense list of nearby stations. (To listen on your phone, there's a TuneIn Radio app available for both Android and iOS.)
- **UK Radio** – [www.uk-radio.co.uk](http://www.uk-radio.co.uk): this much-simpler website offers around 50 popular radio stations: just click the logo of the station you want to hear. While the music plays, the list of stations remains in a panel at the left to let you switch quickly between them with a click.

**Multiple radio stations in one place**

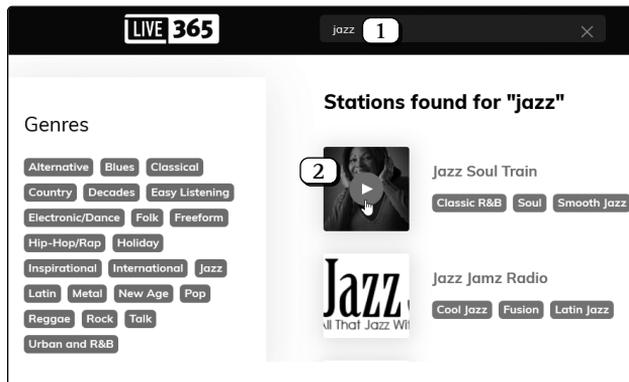
## Pick a Style: Create Your Own Radio Station

The trouble with traditional radio is that you're at the mercy of the DJ: the music won't necessarily be to your taste, and there may be an awful lot of chatter in between! If you want to be sure of hearing the type of music you like, try one of these instead, both of which have their own Android and iOS apps available:

**Hear only the type of music you like**

Pick a station based on music genre

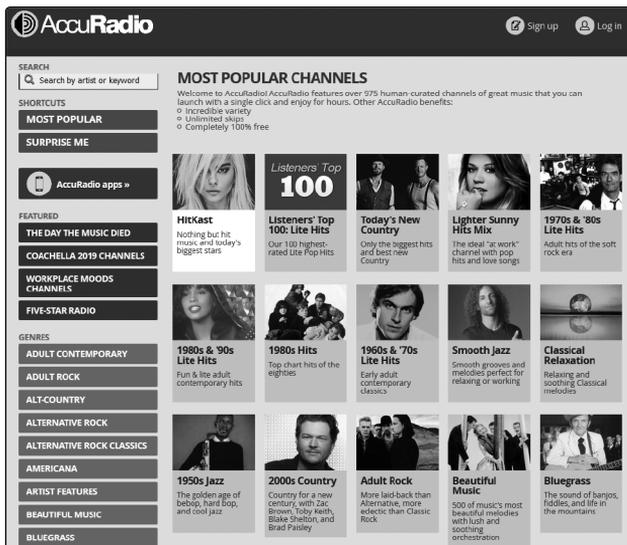
- **Live 365** – [www.live365.com](http://www.live365.com): click in the search box at the top of the page (1), type a music genre (such as jazz, pop, classical, blues or easy listening) and press (Enter). This takes you straight to a search results page listing Internet radio stations from all over the world that play exactly that style of music. Click the picture (and 'Play' arrow) (2) beside a station that seems suitable. While the station plays, you can click your browser's Back button to go back to the list: the music continues playing.



Pick your favourite music channel

- **AccuRadio** – [www accuradio.com](http://www accuradio.com): this isn't really radio at all, although it has that feel about it. At AccuRadio you listen to 'channels' with names like 1950s Jazz, Classical Relaxation, or Today's New Country. You'll find a little selection of these channels on the front page (and you might like to click one to play it), but you'll find hundreds more by clicking the 'Genres' in the list to the left: just pick your favourite genre and then click a channel that seems to fit the bill. The volume and pause/resume buttons are at the bottom of the screen and there's also a 'Skip this song' button which - usually

– you can use as often as you like. The one thing you can't skip is the occasional advert which plays between every few songs.



## Top Choices for Free Music Streaming

When people talk about streaming music, they're often referring to something that takes the place of having your own music collection. However, the free streaming services tend not to be quite that flexible. Whether you'll like these services or not really depends on how choosy you are!

As an example, if you want to listen to the *Bridge Over Troubled Water* album by Simon and Garfunkel, you'll probably be disappointed. However, if you simply want to listen to music by Simon and Garfunkel and similar artists, perhaps discovering something new along the way, these free services should be right up your street.

Free streaming has limitations

### Last.fm – [www.last.fm](http://www.last.fm)

If you are the choosier type, Last.fm probably comes closest to what you're hoping for, in that you can pick a particular album and (with some caveats) listen to it.

Search by artist  
or composer...

When you arrive, click the 'Search' (magnifying glass) icon on the bar at the top of the page, then type the name of an artist or composer into the search box in the top-left corner and press **(Enter)**. This takes you to a page showing matching artists, popular albums by those artists, and popular tracks by those artists.

...and click an  
album to play

A good next step is to click the artist you intended. From there you can find your way to that artist's albums and tracks, and play one by clicking it. As it plays, you'll see a page containing brief information about the artist and links at the top to their track, albums, photos and similar artists.

The screenshot shows the Last.fm interface. At the top, there is a music player for 'All I Have To Do Is Dream' by 'The Everly Brothers'. Below the player is a 'Top Tracks' section for the artist, showing a list of 10 tracks with their respective play counts. The tracks are ranked from highest to lowest play count.

Rank	Track Name	Play Count
1	All I Have To Do Is Dream	720
2	Bye Bye Love	439
3	Wake up Little Susie	315
4	Cathy's Clown	223
5	Crying in the Rain	143
6	Walk Right Back	120
7	All I Have To Do Is Dream - 2006 Remastered Version	119
8	(Til) I Kissed You	103
9	Down in the Willow Garden	98
10	Let It Be Me	80

Last.fm gathers  
music from  
YouTube

Now to those caveats. Last.fm finds its music at YouTube, which is no bad thing in itself – there are countless songs at YouTube and Last.fm provides the useful service of organising them into albums. Indeed, as a song plays, you'll see a little YouTube video window in the bottom-right corner of the browser window. However, this means that not

all tracks from an album are necessarily available, and those that are may not be the versions of those tracks you expect – they might be live versions or re-recordings, for instance.

Nevertheless, when you want to hear something in particular, Last.fm is a good place to look for it. There's a lot more to discover about it that makes it a good way to discover new music too, particularly if you sign up for a free account. There are Last.fm apps available for both Android and iOS devices.

## Spotify Free – [www.spotify.com](http://www.spotify.com)

If you're content to listen just on your PC, Spotify Free is a perfect choice for the choosy listener. As one of the longest-running music-streaming services, Spotify has an immense library and – crucially – it allows you to listen on demand: you can choose particular songs or albums to play. You can also create playlists of your favourite tracks or try 'radio stations' built around a particular artist to help you discover new music.

To do any of this, you first have to sign up for a free account by clicking the **Get Spotify Free** button when you arrive. Although you can listen via the website, my recommendation is to download the Windows app and use that instead: visit the address below to download and install it: [www.spotify.com/uk/download/windows](http://www.spotify.com/uk/download/windows)

Since you're getting all this for free, you'll have to put up with hearing ads play every so often between songs (and seeing ads in the Windows app encouraging you to upgrade to a Premium subscription), but that's a small price to pay for what is, essentially, unlimited free music on your PC.

For mobile users, although there are Android and iOS apps available, they don't let you choose particular tracks or albums to play. They do offer an excellent way to discover

**Hear whatever you like (but only on your PC)**

**Download the Spotify app**

**Spotify Free is supported by ads**

**Free mobile apps are more restrictive**

new music, create playlists and listen to those created by others, but you'll hear ads every so often and you'll be limited to skipping 6 songs per hour.

Jango – [www.jango.com](http://www.jango.com)

Start a personal  
'radio station'

Jango works like a personal radio station, designed to give you some of your favourite music combined with similar tunes you might not have heard before. As always with a free service, although you can skip a track you don't like, you have a limited number of skips per day.

Enter your  
favourite artist  
or genre

When you arrive, click in the box containing the words Enter any Genre or Artist and either type an artist name (as I have below) or a genre such as 'country' or 'pop' or 'classical'. In the drop-down list that appears, pick one of the pre-made 'radio stations' to start listening. If you entered a genre, every track should match that genre; if you entered an artist name, you'll hear tracks by that artist as well as tracks by similar artists.



Alternatively, start by clicking the words **Browse over 800 curated playlists** at the bottom: you'll then see a long list of music genres which, when you click one, leads to a large collection of playlists in that style. If you like Jango, apps are available for Android and iOS.

**Browse genres and playlists**

## Deezer Free – [www.deezer.com](http://www.deezer.com)

Like Jango, Deezer aims to play the type of music you like and introduce you to more of the same. You begin by choosing 'Deezer Free', signing up for a free account, then selecting one or more genres and artists you like when prompted. From there you can listen to playlists based on your tastes, or browse by genre or artist to set some music playing.

**Tell Deezer what you like...**

The more you use Deezer (and the more you click the little heart icons beside tracks and albums you like), the better it gets to know your tastes, and the **Hear This** page gives you ever-more relevant recommendations to help you discover something new.

**...and receive personal recommendations**

You'll have to put up with the odd advert, as always, and Deezer's free account doesn't let you listen on a mobile device.

## **Paid Services: Take a World of Music Wherever You Go**

You'll have noticed that all the free streaming services are limited in some way – or in several ways. If you want to remove those limitations, you have to be willing to pay.

**Stream what you like for £9.99 per month**

How much? Well, how does £9.99 per month sound? With just the odd exception, that's the price settled upon by all the major streaming services for their 'unlimited' music subscriptions. Looked at another way, for the cost of buying one album each month, you have access to over 5 million albums.

Huge libraries,  
no ads

All these services boast libraries of 40–50 million songs, and that's growing by the day. You can listen as often as you like, and for as long as you want (assuming as always that you have Internet access and a sufficiently generous data allowance), effectively treating the service's music collection as if it were your own.



Despite these immense collections, you can't be entirely certain that your chosen service will have everything you want to play. For instance, some obscure artists and albums may not be included, and some artists and record companies don't allow their music to be streamed (although that's becoming much less of an issue as streaming increasingly takes the place of selling).

#### Amazon Music – [music.amazon.co.uk](https://music.amazon.co.uk)

I mentioned that there were odd exceptions to the £9.99 price point, and Amazon is one of them. Yes, their full-strength service (Amazon Music Unlimited) does cost £9.99, but there are two cheaper options:

2 million songs  
included with  
Amazon Prime

- Amazon Prime Music: if you're an Amazon Prime member, this is included with your membership. It offers a comparatively-small library of just 2 million songs, but that's the only notable difference between Prime Music and Music Unlimited. If that small library is too much of a drawback, Prime members can upgrade to Music Unlimited for £7.99 per month, a £2 discount over the full price.

Cheaper  
subscriptions for  
Amazon Echo  
devices

- Single Device Plan: if you have an Amazon device (an Echo, Echo Dot or Echo Show), this gives you access to the full Amazon Music Unlimited service for £3.99 per month, but with one caveat: you can only listen through that Amazon device.

Let's assume that it's the full service, Amazon Music Unlimited, you're interested in. The best way to start is with Amazon's free 30-day trial. When you arrive at the web page noted above, click any album as if you were hoping to play it (which, as a non-subscriber, you can't) and you'll see a pop-up banner inviting you to start your free trial. Click that, sign into your Amazon account and you're ready to go. If you decide you don't like the service, just cancel your trial within 30 days before you're billed for the next month.

With either Music Unlimited or Prime Music, there are Amazon Music apps available for Windows as well as Android and iOS devices, so you're not forced to use your web browser to listen. All these apps allow you to download and save music to your device so that you have something to listen to 'offline' (i.e. when you have no Internet connection or want to avoid using mobile data).

**Apps available for Windows, Android and iOS**

## Google Play Music – [play.google.com/music](https://play.google.com/music)

If you use an Android phone, perhaps you're already using the built-in Play Music app to play your own collection? For the usual £9.99/month you can use this app to stream from a library of 40 million songs, or for £14.99/month a Family Plan can be shared with up to five other people.

**A good choice for Android users**

Helpfully, too, Play Music offers the first 30 days free, so you can give this service a try to see what you think before committing yourself. After arriving at the page above, sign into your Google account, then click **Individual** or **Family** according to the type of subscription you want.

**Try it free for a month**

Besides the Android app, there's also an app for iOS. Sadly for Windows users, you're limited to visiting the Play Music website – there's no desktop app available.

### Apple Music – [www.apple.com/apple-music](http://www.apple.com/apple-music)

#### A 3-month trial

A remarkable point in favour of Apple's service is that it offers a 3-month free trial. Thereafter, it continues at the usual price of £9.99/month or there's a £14.99/month Family subscription that gives access to up to six people.

#### Apps for iOS, Android and Windows

If you use an Apple (iOS) device, the Music app is built in, and for Android devices you'll find an Apple Music app in the Play Store. For Windows users, rather oddly, there's no equivalent app, but you can access the service from the free Apple iTunes app ([www.apple.com/uk/itunes](http://www.apple.com/uk/itunes)).

### Unsure where to start?

#### Try the trials and see which you prefer

With similar pricing and similar-sized libraries, it's not easy to know which service to opt for. The differences tend to come down to which app you like best, whose additional features you value most, or how easy you find the service to use. A good way to start is to choose the most convenient service and try its free trial: the Google offering if you use an Android phone, Apple's if you have an iPhone, or Amazon's for its Windows app.



Remember that if you don't like the service you decided to try, you can cancel, enjoy the rest of your trial risk-free, then start a trial of another one. At worst, you're forced to endure several months of free music streaming while you decide which you like best!

#### Or try a free service's Premium subscription

Or perhaps you've tried one of the free services mentioned earlier in this article, such as Spotify or Deezer, and liked it? Each of these offers a 'Premium' subscription (at £9.99/month, of course!). Both Spotify and Deezer will give you a 30-day trial: as always, if you're not convinced it's worth paying for, just be sure to cancel the trial before your first payment is taken.