

## Free On-Demand Services

Promotional on-demand services let you download or play music in order to generate interest in an artist's music. The music is freely provided in the hope that it will stimulate music sales. Though the free content is limited—usually only a track or two from a given album—these sites should not be overlooked as tools for discovering new music. Use them to sample entire songs from an artist or to troll for interesting new music. The price is right!

Major record labels promote their music through large Web portals like Yahoo (<http://launch.yahoo.com>), AOL/Netscape (<http://channels.netscape.com/ns/music>), and MSN (<http://music.msn.com>). On these sites you can download and play singles from new albums; watch videos and listen to Internet radio; and read news, interviews, gossip, and trivia. If you're looking to browse free downloads from popular artists, try Artist Direct (<http://listen.artistdirect.com>), where you can browse available songs by genre, listed in order of popularity. Free downloads can also be had at Amazon.com, where there is a FREE DOWNLOADS section in the music store.

### MP3.com and Its Successors

Other Web sites cater to smaller acts and aspiring artists who wish to promote their music. Though lacking in music by big-name artists, these sites contain a greater variety and quantity of free music, including music from less commercial genres like classical, jazz, and world music. Until recently, the foremost of these sites was MP3.com, considered the granddaddy of all digital music sites. At its height, it provided access to more than a million songs, more than any fee-based music service. The band playing at the club down the street probably had music on MP3.com. Unfortunately, the service was shut down this last December by its owner, Vivendi Universal. The Web publisher CNET bought the rights to the name, but not the music archive, and has relaunched MP3.com (<http://mp3.com>) as an information-only Web site. At the same time, CNET has setup an area for artists to load their music on its Download.com site (<http://music.download.com>). This site, however, is only a shadow of the former MP3.com, containing just 29,000 songs (as of this writing), and lacking in the reviews, ratings, and charts that MP3.com once had.

A better claimant to the mantle of successor to MP3.com is the GarageBand service (<http://www.garageband.com>). Not only does this site have a lot more music, 186,000 songs (as of this writing), but it contains reviews, ratings, and charts to help you sort through it. It has a radio feature which allows you to play the highest rated songs by genre, complete with links to reviews and artist information (see figure 15.1). What's more, GarageBand has negotiated to get access to most of the original MP3.com music archive. The catch is that the artists whose material used to be on MP3.com have to sign-up to get their music moved to the new site, which means it may be a while before GarageBand catalog approaches the size of the original MP3.com. RealNetwork's RealPlayer software is required to use this service.

Figure 15.1. GarageBand Radio



Another contender to fill the void left by the closure of MP3.com is Besonic (<http://www.besonic.com>), a German-owned site containing 80,000 tracks from over 44,000 artists and a wide range of genres. At this site, listeners can use charts, ratings, and reviews to help decide what to listen to. The charts are broken down by genre and nation, and songs can be played or downloaded. One nice feature is the ability to launch a playlist with an entire chart (top 50 tracks) into your music player. Registered users can also rate music and use message boards to communicate with the artists and with one another.

# Giantpath.com

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Another major site is Vitaminic (<http://www.vitaminic.com>), whose Italian owners assure us the site has nothing to do with vitamins. Instead, it provides a large collection of songs for downloading and streaming. Here you can find Italian ska and German hip hop on the menu, along with lots of other music from European artists.

Amid the din of artists clamoring for attention on these sites, there is the real problem of how to find the best music. Charts based on popularity are relied on heavily, though some sites—like GarageBand—use a rating process. One service, Epitonic (<http://www.epitonic.com>), has tackled the quality problem by featuring only music that passes the critical review of its editors. Though their catalog is much smaller than the other services discussed here, it is a great place to discover new music.