

Using Music Charts To Find Out What's Hot

Want to know what's popular? The music charts will tell you. This includes album sales charts, which measure retail album sales, and radio airplay charts, which measure how often songs are included in radio playlists. These charts are created by the music industry, which uses them to measure the commercial success of music being promoted and sold within the industry system. Beyond their use as an industry scoreboard, music charts can be used to:

- Identify new artists and music to try out
- Learn what other people are listening to
- Stay on top of trends in popular music
- Stay current with the music celebrities du jour and who's "on top"

There are charts for singles and charts for albums. There are charts for major genres of music, and charts for specific countries. The most recognized sales charts in the United States are the Billboard charts. Another kind of chart, the Gracenote Digital charts, measures the number of times that Internet-connected people play a given song using their music player software. This is arguably a better way to measure popularity because it measures the tracks people choose to play, whereas sales charts simply measure purchase transactions. Think of all the albums that collect dust after a single playing. Likewise, radio airplay charts measure popularity based on how often radio programmers choose to play music, not the actual preferences of the listeners.

Chart Sites of Note

- **Billboard Charts** - <http://www.billboard.com/billboard/charts/index.jsp>
These charts track sales of U.S. albums and singles by genre. Also provided are charts of top grossing concerts and top videos. A "heatseekers" chart lists best selling titles by artists who have yet to have a Top 100 album. A fee-based version, aimed at music industry people, provides more detailed charts. A weekly top 100 countdown show, *Billboard Radio*, is webcast from this site. Historical Billboard charts are available on both the Napster and iTunes Music Store services.

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- **Gracenote Digital Top 10** - <http://www.gracenote.com/music/topten.html>
The Gracenote Digital Top 10 lists the most frequent played albums on the Internet, aggregated weekly from over 30 million listeners worldwide using the Gracenote CDDB® Music Recognition Service. Additional charts cover the following categories: Rock, Urban, World, Country/Folk, Electronic/Dance, Jazz, Soundtrack and CCM/Gospel music. The Gracenote Top Digital 20 is available as a weekly free e-mail newsletter.
- **U.K. Charts** - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/chart/top40/index.shtml>
Charts in the following categories are provided: Singles, Albums, Compilations, Rock, R&B, and Indie. The most recent U.K. top 40 countdown show is recorded and available for listening.
- **Mobile Beat Top 200** - <http://www.mobilebeat.com/top200.asp>
Consult this list to see what working disc jockeys in the U.S. are getting the most requests for. Based on a yearly poll conducted by *Mobile Beat* magazine, this list shows what music is getting played at weddings, parties, and other events being serviced by the “mobile DJ.”

Other Sources of Chart Information

The following directory pages provide links to charts from all over the world:

- **Google Listings** - <http://directory.google.com/Top/Arts/Music/Charts>
- **Yahoo Listings** - <http://dir.yahoo.com/Entertainment/Music/Charts>

About Chart Watching

Although there are plenty of music aficionados who aren't particularly interested in what the masses are buying, there is in chart watching something that appeals to deep-seated human impulses. Popular music charts and the commentary and radio countdown programs that accompany them have an element of drama and soap opera to them. Who's on the rise? Who's falling? Who are the Cinderellas and one-hit wonders? Charts record in black and white the trajectories of artists' careers—their milestones, their high-water marks, and their commercial legacy. As such, chart performances become part of pop music history and are followed in much the way that box scores, win-loss records, and batting averages are followed by baseball fans—at least to those who are drawn to the numbers.