

Music Has Its Destiny

on collecting audio in a digital age

Jeremy A. Smith
Oberlin Conservatory Library
jeremy.smith@oberlin.edu

BUSINESS

The Death of Music Sales

If CDs are "dead," so is iTunes.



Lucas Jackson/Reuters

8.3k

1.5k



DEREK THOMPSON | JAN 25, 2015

CDs are dead.

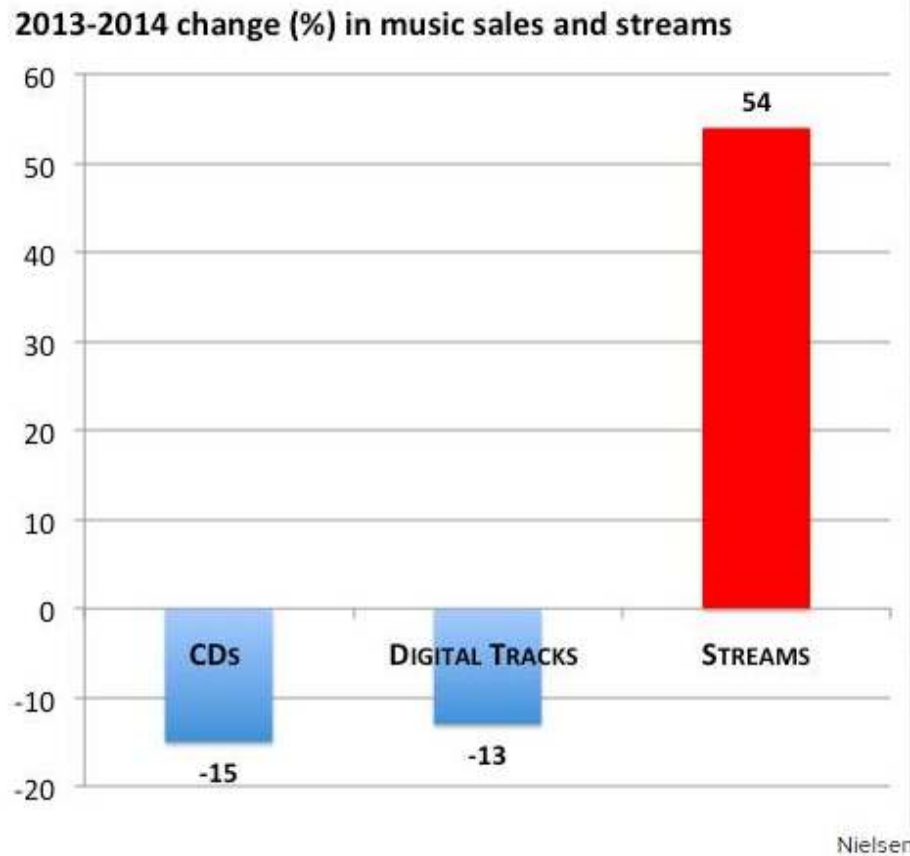
That *doesn't seem* like such a controversial statement. Maybe it should be. The

“digital music sales are lying in the adjacent grave”

dead:
“a formerly popular thing that is now withering at a commercially meaningful rate”

Derek Thompson, “The Death of Music Sales” *The Atlantic* (Jan 25, 2015)
<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/01/buying-music-is-so-over/384790/>

The *Death* of Purchased Music



dead:
“a formerly popular
thing that is now
withering at a
commercially
meaningful rate”

Derek Thompson, “The Death of Music Sales” *The Atlantic* (Jan 25, 2015)
<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/01/buying-music-is-so-over/384790/>



How has the shift to digital downloads
and streaming access impacted:

(1) record collectors and

(2) their relationship to audio archives?



James R. and Susan
Neumann Jazz Collection
at Oberlin College



“The Brazilian Bus Magnate Who’s
Buying Up All the World’s Vinyl
Records”

New York Times Magazine
(August 8, 2014)



(1) As digital downloads eclipse CD sales, and as streaming services eclipse them both, what becomes of collectors?

(2) How might these changing conceptions of collectors and collections impact the future holdings of audio archives and music special collections libraries?

History of Collectors and Collecting

Douglas Rigby and Elizabeth Rigby, *Lock, Stock, and Barrel: the Story of Collecting*
(Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1944)

Francis Henry Taylor, *The Taste of Angels: A History of Art Collecting from Ramses to Napoleon*
(Boston: Little Brown, 1948)

History of Collectors and Collecting

record collectors “are variously associated with: longing, desire and pleasure; ritualistic, near-sacred and repetitive acquisition; passionate and selective consumption; stewardship and cultural preservation; and obsession and linked pathologies such as completism, accumulation and a preoccupation with collection size; . . . consumer culture taken to excess.”

Roy Shuker, *Wax Trash and Vinyl Treasures: Record Collecting as a Social Practice* (Ashgate: 2010), p. 6.



Five Observations

(1) access, sharing, and participating become more important than owning

- music as a product vs. music as a service

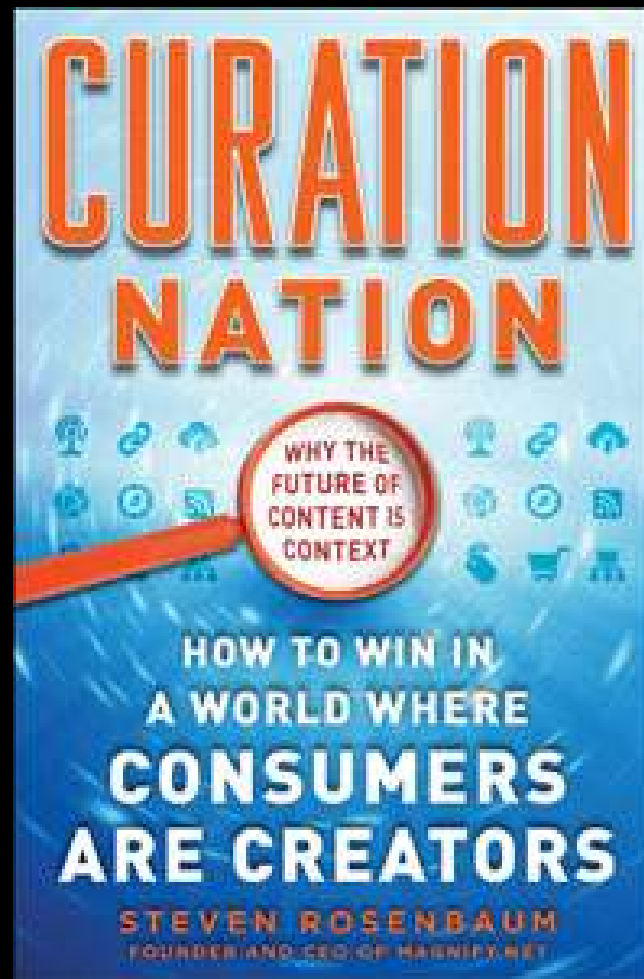
Maria Styven, "The Intangibility of Music in the Internet Age" in *Popular Music and Society* 30/1 (February 2007), pp. 53-74.

- "in cyberspace, people collect lists rather than objects"

Tom McCourt, "Collecting Music in the Digital Realm" *Popular Music and Society* 28/2, May 2005, pp. 249-252 at 251.

Five Observations

(1) access, sharing, and participating become more important than owning



Five Observations

- (1) access, sharing, and participating become more important than owning
- (2) distribution becomes both easier and more difficult

Five Observations

(1) access, sharing, and participating become more important than owning

(2) distribution becomes both easier and more difficult

(3) broad communication of best practices for digital preservation becomes even more essential

Marcus Boon, "Meditations In An Emergency: On the Apparent Destruction of my mp3 Collection" in *Contemporary Collecting: Objects, Practices, and the Fate of Things* ed. Kevin M. Moist and David Banash (Scarecrow, 2013), pp. 3-12.

Five Observations

- (1) access, sharing, and participating become more important than owning
- (2) distribution becomes both easier and more difficult
- (3) broad communication of best practices for digital preservation becomes even more essential
- (4) the tactile cannot be replaced

Five Observations

(4) the tactile cannot be replaced



Five Observations

- (1) access, sharing, and participating become more important than owning
- (2) distribution becomes both easier and more difficult
- (3) broad communication of best practices for digital preservation becomes even more essential
- (4) the tactile cannot be replaced
- (5) the thrill of the hunt lives on

David Hayes, "Take Those Old Records off the Shelf": Youth and Music Consumption in the Postmodern Age" *Popular Music and Society* 29/1 (Feb 2006), pp. 51-68.

Five Observations

- (1) access, sharing, and participating become more important than owning
- (2) distribution becomes both easier and more difficult
- (3) broad communication of best practices for digital preservation becomes even more essential
 - (4) the tactile cannot be replaced
 - (5) the thrill of the hunt lives on

Two Predictions

(1) audio archives will no longer acquire commercial recordings

- "the celestial jukebox"

- the material included in streaming services will more and more come to define the extent of what counts as commercially-available recorded documentation

Two Predictions

(1) audio archives will no longer acquire commercial recordings

(2) audio archives will be frustratingly and provocatively partial, fragmented, and incomplete (just like all of our archives have always been)

“The interplay between a *bit* of access and large sections of inaccessibility are precisely what makes the past intriguing, mysterious, and potentially revelatory.” (Sterne, p. 59)

Jonathan Sterne, “The Preservation Paradox in Digital Audio” in *Sound Souvenirs: Audio Technologies, Memory and Cultural Practices* ed. Karin Bijsterveld and Jose van Dijck (Amsterdam University Press, 2009), pp. 55-65.

Music Has Its Destiny

on collecting audio in a digital age

"Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting"
by Walter Benjamin (1931)

Pro captu lectoris habent sua fata libelli:

"According to the capabilities of the reader, books have their
destiny"

"Not only books but also copies of books have their fates. . . .
I am not exaggerating when I say that to a true collector the
acquisition of an old book is its rebirth"



Music Has Its Destiny

on collecting audio in a digital age

Jeremy A. Smith
Oberlin Conservatory Library
jeremy.smith@oberlin.edu