MUSIC
IN
AMERICAN LIFE

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Personal Music Devices

Private music experiences help shape the contour of our memories by adding a sound track to our lives. Music provides us with a source of happiness, with personal music devices being the instrument of that happiness. Personal music devices have undergone a wide range of technological advances and continue to be an ever-evolving presence in our musical experiences.

One of the first examples of a personal music device was the "music box," a wooden box that was outfitted with pretuned metallic components that would play songs. In 1863 inventor F. B. Fenby pioneered a device that would later be known as the "phonograph." Initially patented under the name "Electro-Magnetic Phonograph," the design detailed an apparatus that could record a series of sounds onto paper tape.

In 1877 noted inventor Thomas Edison invented what we know to be the modern phonograph. What made the phonograph so important was that it introduced the idea that music could be listened to in the comfort of one's home without needing to be in a live setting. A newfound industry was born that offered ensembles and other performance organizations the opportunity to have their music be heard through the recorded music medium.

While the preliminary concepts of recording sound were being developed, the "player piano" came into prominence. This was a piano that played itself and contained a mechanism that operated it via preprogrammed, perforated paper or metallic rolls. Although the advent of recorded sounds and a weakened economy eventually led to its decline, the player piano continues to appeal to antique dealers and students of Americana.

Along with the arrival of recorded music came the gramophone record, or "record." A record is an analog recording standard that consists of a completely level sphere with an etched spiral groove starting near the margin and ending near the middle of the disc. Each groove represents a song, and a needle or "stylus" is placed along one of the spiral grooves to amplify the sound through the speaker.

Several types of records exist, including the LP (long play), EP (extended play), 45, and 78, the numbers referring to the rotational speeds in revolutions per minute (rpm). Polyvinyl chloride was used in the production process, so records are often referred to by the shorthand "vinyl."

Another music experience that developed concurrently was the "jukebox." Created by Louis Glass (1864–1936), it was initially known as the "nickel-in-the-slot" phonograph, and it premiered on November 23, 1889, at the Palais Royal Saloon in San Francisco. The jukebox provided the experience of listening to music in a social setting at a reasonable price. The one downside of the jukebox at this time was that the customer had to listen to the music through a pair of earphones that were akin to a stethoscope. Yet the jukebox became a hit, and within twelve months there were fifteen jukeboxes installed at local bars around the San Francisco Bay Area. Jukeboxes spread in popularity across the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. They were the first device that allowed listeners to control music being played in diners, bars, and restaurants, and they often had the newest songs before they were available for purchase by the general public. Jukebox owners sometimes had devices attached to the jukeboxes to count how many times a song was played, allowing them to make decisions about which records to keep and which to remove from the device.

The technology of recorded sound continued to grow by leaps and bounds. A subculture of faithful music fans

Should You Always Have to Pay for Your Music?

Statements by a twenty-year-old student and intern for radio network NPR, Emily White, who wrote honestly in an NPR blog in June 2012 about not paying for the thousands of songs she has on her iPod (because people copied music and gave it to her), led to hundreds of comments and discussions across the Internet about the ethics of this practice. She admitted that she felt bad about not supporting musicians by buying their work or going to their concerts and noted that others of her generation feel the same way. She thinks that musicians should somehow be paid, and that the best solution is a large, fee-based catalog of music, something like Spotify, the digital music streaming service, which could also be synced to various devices. She wants to support musicians, but also wants the means of doing so to be convenient.

David Lowery, who teaches music business courses at the University of Georgia and is himself a musician and founder of the bands Camper Van Beethoven and Cracker, wrote a lengthy response in a blog, noting that people who avoid paying for music stored on MP3 devices are simply financially supporting the giant corporations who make the devices (Apple and other MP3 players) or the telecommunications corporations who provide the networks that stream music (cable companies, ATT, Verizon, etc.), to the exclusion of the actual creators of the music. He also points out that contrary to popular belief, recording companies do pay royalties to musicians as well as providing the venues for recording the music. He notes that many struggling musicians are poor, as consumers avoid paying for CDs or digital files or tickets to performances. Other issues he raised are that by limiting themselves to the convenience of buying from a mega-source of music, listeners miss out on finding the many musicians who may not be in the streaming resource.

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began to emerge, known as "record collectors." These collectors began by collecting pieces of vinyl as a hobby, whether for potential historical or for personal reasons. Record collecting became especially commonplace among specific genres such as jazz and rock.

The satisfaction with record collecting may be specific to the individual, but a common thread that can be seen throughout the culture is personal joy. Music has the power to convey a sense of happiness and glee to the collector, and the ownership of that happiness can be a fulfilling part of one's life. The personal connection to the music and the object itself can be a beautiful and personal experience for the collector.

The idea of collecting vinyl brings up the important topic of music as an artifact. Vinyl in its sheer size can display more information for the listener to absorb than can cassette tapes and compact discs. The listener can pore over the lyrics and the artwork on the album cover in a way that those who collect cassette tapes and CDs may not understand. Equal importance is placed on the music that is enclosed and on the document, the packaging, and the art that represent the music.

The portability of music took a major step forward in 1954 when the Industrial Development Engineering Associates (IDEA) introduced the Regency TR-1, the first portable transistor radio. Included in its design was a rudimentary gold dial that played through a small monophonic amplifier along an analog AM frequency. The portable music device was marketed to younger people, who in turn could use it in a myriad of situations, whether in public with friends or in their own homes.

Postwar technologies continued to soar in 1962, when Henry Kloss (1929–2002) developed the first portable stereo. Entitled the KLH Modell 11 Portable, it was the first stereo to be outfitted with transistors and featured an amplifier, record player, and two speakers, which folded into a boxlike apparatus. Shortly after that, Philips released the Norelco Carry-Corder 150 Portable Cassette Recorder, in 1965. It was originally designed for recording real-time audio situations. The cassette itself could record forty-five minutes of sound on a single ⅛-inch tape. Philips also released the battery-powered Carry-Corder 150 Cassette Recorder, which introduced the idea that music fans could record live music for their own personal use.

On January 1, 1964, the 8-track tape player went into production; it became a major player in both the idea of a private music experience and the evolution of the personal music device. It was the creation of William P. Lear (1902–1978), the developer of the Learjet business plane. In the previous year, Lear had become a distributor for automobile dealer Ear Muntz's Fidelipack 4-track players, intending to install them in his planes. Dissatisfied with the system, he began to develop his own version. An improvement that he made from Muntz's design was incorporating a new tape head, which would allow him to double the number of tracks on the same tape width and increase the playing time from forty to eighty minutes.

As a result of Lear's innovation, the Ford Motor Company agreed to install 8-track players in its cars beginning in 1965, and the RCA Victor company agreed to make its catalog available on 8-track cartridges, which provided opportune exposure for RCA artists. The response from the public was much larger than expected. In the first year Ford installed sixty-five thousand players, and both General Motors and Chrysler began to offer 8-track players in their models. The success of these players in the auto market motivated manufacturers to offer home and portable 8-track machines in the late 1960s. The 8-track became the preeminent module for the car audio format in the early 1970s.

As a result of 8-tracks being built into automobiles, driving began to offer people a private music experience. Now consumers could listen to the music they wanted as opposed to searching for music on the radio. In addition, people now had mobility for their music collections and could choose the music they wanted to live their lives by.

As technology continued to advance, several portable music devices tried to gain a foothold in the marketplace, without success. In the 1970s inventor Andreas Pavel (1945–) created the Stereobelt, a precursor to Sony's Walkman. Pavel tried to sell his device to several companies, but received numerous negative comments, including that a person would not want to wear headphones while walking around in public. Upon the creation of the Walkman, Pavel spent many years in court suing Sony for infringement; the dispute was finally settled out of court.

With interest expanding as commercially available music devices were becoming commonplace, a new subculture emerged known as "tapers." Tapers record a live concert from within the audience to trade the music with other music fans. Popularized by fans of the band the Grateful Dead, tapers are an interesting group of people whose sole mission is to advance the popularity of the artist within the fan base. Not only are they archiving the live history of a group, but they are creating a personal music experience that they in turn share with others.

As iconic as several of these personal music devices are, none is more so than the boombox. Coming into prominence in the late 1970s, it was also known as the boogie box and was designed to provide first-rate sound quality that was comparable to that of a stationary stereophonic unit. Boom boxes quickly became popular among inner-city youths; consequently, the disparaging term "ghetto-blaster" is often used to describe the boom box. Early pioneers of hip-hop saw the boom box as a symbol of strength that gave them a closer and more personal connection to the music.

A benchmark in the technology and innovation of personal music devices was the Sony Walkman TPS-L2 Portable Cassette Player, introduced in 1979. What made the Walkman a truly groundbreaking piece of technology was its size; it was slightly larger than the dimensions of a cassette tape. The lightweight nature of the device made it more portable than the personal music devices that came before it.

In the early 1980s compact discs (CDs) presented superior clarity of sound to that of the cassette tape. Made of polycarbonate plastic, the CD was a more efficient means of archiving and replaying digital data. Eyeing a new trend, Sony introduced the D-50 Portable CD Player only a year after CDs hit the market. The apparatus was barely larger than a CD itself and offered a superior audio experience for the listener.

In the early 1990s Sony tried to take the idea of miniaturization it had pioneered with the Walkman and fuse it with the superior audio quality of the CD by inventing the Minidisc player. The disc itself was contained in a plastic cartridge similar to the casing of a 3.5-inch floppy disc. A major difference between Minidiscs and cassette tapes and CDs was that the Minidisc used rewritable magneto-optical storage to store the data. Though it enjoyed nominal success in the United States, the idea of a new format when CDs were still phzing out cassette tapes proved a bit much for the marketplace to handle at the time, and they have since lost relevance.

As companies became savvier with technology, the portability of music became easier. A major development was the MPEG-Audio Layer III format, better known as MP3, in 1998. The MP3 is a digital programming format that compresses data for consumer audio storage. In the summer of 1998 the SaeHan Eiger Labs released the MPMan F10, the first commercially available MP3 player. This platform has since become the primary audio device for many because of the lack of external audio information needed. Music is now available for purchase and for free on the Internet.

A major breakthrough in the aesthetic criteria and usability of the personal music device occurred in 2001, when Apple released the iPod. The original design combined a 5 gigabyte hard drive and an accessible interface.

The convergence of a keen marketing campaign with the market's need for a unified MP3 player has made the iPod an unparalleled success and the premiere MP3 device in the world, although other MP3 devices are available. Apple's iTunes database of music, movies, television shows, games, audible books, and other items is the largest commercial offering over the Internet.

The latest sensation in portable music is the smartphone, a mobile phone that combines the functions of a camera, portable media player, and Internet-capable device into one media platform. The inclusion of Internet capabilities along with other social media right at people's fingertips allows people to share their musical tastes with the world with the touch of a finger. Tablet technology continues to be a formidable platform, with the success of Apple's iPad serving as a benchmark for not only the future of portable music devices but our personal music experiences.

See also: Album Art; Grateful Dead; Jazz; Psychology of Music; Record Collecting; Recording Industry; Rock 'n' Roll (Rock); Vinyl Records

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