



LISTENING TO MUSIC

A BRIEF HISTORY

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Music is the window to our soul. While that may sound too poetic or hyperbolic, there is history to account for that statement. From the ancient civilizations to modern specimens of art and culture, musical instruments and devices have not existed to facilitate dancing at grand balls or add music to lyrics; they have always been an essential to humankind. The metamorphosis from enormous, almost immobile, music players played by expert musicians to tiny automated machines is remarkable and the transformation seems to ceaseless. Sources of musical entertainments ranged from harps, grand piano, violins, orchestra, opera singers, church-music used to be a social gathering, an event that brought people together. And then the idea changed when this short-lived experience and luxury was brought home, making it an everyday accessory, a friend, a sense of comfort.

In 1877 Thomas Edison's phonograph, also called a gramophone in its late forms, marked the beginning of music emerging from living rooms instead of a concert hall or a church. The essence of harmony and tune and melody became part of a more personal experience, created a more intimate connection with the soul. The old-fashioned record player, in the sense that we know, came into being when Emile Berliner created disc records and a similar machine that played them, naming it the gramophone. On the turn of 19th to 20th century, this device began to replace phonographs. Owning a gramophone was, however, a strictly rich-people affair and the only way the common people had access to it was when in the beginning of the 20th century people could play this contrivance in hotels, bars, and restaurants by inserting coins. The value of the coin was determined by its weight.

This picture for the masses took a turn for the better though with the advent of the wireless technology. Gaining a patent in 1896, Guglielmo Marconi tried to transform wireless telegraphy into a commercial communication. Developments of the radio gained speed during World War II although music was not played till later. The miracle took place on the Christmas Eve of 1906 when Fessenden's transmitting station at Brant Rock, Massachusetts was all astir and sending out words that were not a call for help. The broadcast started at 9 p.m. with a brief speech, followed by an Edison phonograph recording of Handel's "Largo" and a violin

solo performance of "O, Holy Night" by Fessenden along with a few lines from the song itself and a passage from the Bible. And that is how entertainment entered the world of electromagnetic waves - music sounded better than gramophones, it was affordable and there were no class distinctions. Radio transformed the culture of music, making Elvis Presley and The Beatles, among many others, household names.

Prior to these glorious developments, composers would write long, elaborate pieces of music that they would perform in concert halls. Phonographs could only hold a few minutes of music and thus began the redesigning of songs. Although even with shorter pieces, listen



ing to music was still a family or social event. What caused it to become an isolated and personal experience was the introduction of the magnetic tape in 1935, also known as the compact cassette.

Philips invented the Compact Cassette medium for audio storage and two years later, released the Norelco Carry-Corder 150 recorder/player in the U.S. 250,000 recorders had been sold in the US alone by 1966. The 1980s saw the popularity spread further when Sony's Walkman became all the rage. The door to listening to any music anywhere was now wide open for the music lovers of all ages. And then, James T. Russell gave us the compact disc. The granting of Russell's patent application in 1970

paved the way for Sony to come up with their first portable CD player, D-5/D-50 which was available in the market by 1984. With the growing acceptance of compact discs used for almost everything, recording music and videos, cassettes began to fade away. Discmans superseded these personal stereos and the price of CDs dropped dramatically, opening the gates to the digital era of music.

Saehan Information System launched the first MP3 player 'MPMAN' in 1997 in Korea and Diamond Multimedia's 'Rio 100' in the U.S. which later became the predecessors of the many more portable music devices produced by various companies. Triggered by its increasing popularity, companies launched similar devices and they gradually became a cultural phenomenon. More portable than its antecedents, better sound quality, more capacity to accommodate a vast number of music won the hearts of the young and the old.

Apple soon snatched this spotlight in October 2001 with the unveiling of Steve Jobs' expensive portable media player, the iPod, changing the face of the digital music players forever. The offer of a '1,000 songs in your pocket' at the turn of the century was revolutionary. Since then Apple has continued to provide its fans with new and improved iPods every year, transforming from a small device to a more interactive one in all shapes and sizes. This was not only a medium for listening to music; this also became an emblem of fashion. However, the advancement in the area of cellphones proved to be a competition for iPods in the sense that with similar music quality and storage phones provide these days, most people do not require a separate device for music. While that stands to reason, true fans have always sided with the Apple devices and their enthusiasm remains undeterred in the face of the rising newfangled phones.

Music is a form of art and everyone should have access to this wonderful experience. The ways of listening to music, its availability to public has come a long way and with time, it is reaching out to more and more music aficionados everyday. The more accessible music is, the more genres will arise making this art form more versatile and sophisticated.

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