
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Is music getting faster?



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello. Welcome to 6 Minute English, I'm Neil.

Rob

And hello, I'm Rob.

Neil

Today we're discussing music and the idea that songs are becoming faster. What music do you like, Rob?

Rob

Oh me? I like rock music. It has good vocals and it's loud! How about you, Neil?

Neil

Well, I like anything and I prefer streaming my music actually. No old-fashioned CDs to buy and load up – it's easier to play and you can play it anywhere! And **streaming** is where you listen or watch music or videos directly from the internet as a continuous stream.

Rob

Did you know that some people believe that streaming music online is actually changing the songs people write? And it might be leading to songs getting faster.

Neil

Well, that's what we're discussing today. Let's hope it doesn't happen to this programme, otherwise we might become Three Minute English! But before it does, let's get on with our question for everyone to answer. In 2017 Luis Fonsi's summer hit Despacito officially became the most streamed song of all time. Do you know approximately, how many times it was streamed? Was it:

- a) 1.6 billion times,
- b) 3.6 billion times, or
- c) 4.6 billion times?

Rob

I know the song was popular but 4.6 billion sounds too big – so I'll go for a) 1.6 billion.

Neil

OK. Well, we'll find out later in the programme. But now back to our discussion about how music producers are adapting their songs for modern technology. Researchers have found long instrumental introductions to pop songs have become almost extinct.

Rob

Of course the aim of many pop songs is to be enjoyed by many – to be popular - but they also need to be a **commercial success** – they need to make money.

Neil

Brendan Williams, a music producer and professor of music technology can explain what he thinks influences the songs. Here he is speaking on BBC Radio 4's You and Yours programme...

Brendan Williams

I think that, you know, one of the things that's **driving** this, there are a number of things. They're all radio, they're all singles designed for radio **playlists**. Radio playlists are extremely important factors in judging the success of a track and obviously do feed into the kind of commercial success of a track.

Neil

So, he mentions that radio playlists are important factors. A playlist is a list of songs that a radio station plans to play. And he says that radio playlists affect the commercial success of a song.

Rob

By the way he called a song a track – that's a recorded piece of music. And notice how he used the word **driving** which means having a strong influence. So getting a song played on the radio is important and it has to be made in a way that will suit the radio station's playlist.

Neil

Now, we know there are thousands of songs out there to listen to – and plenty of ways to listen to them – so how can record companies get someone to listen to their particular song?

Rob

Well, have a listen to Brendan Williams again to see what he thinks...

Brendan Williams

... But then there's the influence of streaming services like Spotify, where if a track isn't played for at least 30 seconds then it doesn't **register** a play and Spotify...

Presenter: And if we don't hear the vocals then we might not carry on listening. Is that the theory?

Brendan Williams: Absolutely, yeah, yeah. That's the theory – it's to get through... I guess to get into the meat of the song to hear the lyrical content and get through to that first chorus.

Rob

Well, it seems songs no longer have an 'intro' – the instrumental piece of music that's played before the singing begins. In the old days, radio DJs – disc jockeys who played the records – loved to talk over that bit! Now we need to get to the lyrical content – that's the lyrics or the words of the song - as soon as possible.

Neil

So, the theory, or idea, is to present listeners with vocals and a chorus more quickly, as it will make them want to continue listening! That's because if a song isn't streamed for more than 30 seconds, it doesn't **register** a play – it doesn't get measured or recorded as a play – so it doesn't make money.

So a song needs to hook the listener in quickly – in other words it needs to attract their attention and be easy to remember – another word for this is **catchy**. Do you have any favourite **catchy** songs, Rob?

Rob

Oh, I do, I do. It's got to be Happy by Pharrell Williams. A very **catchy** song.

Neil

Well, something that is always catchy in this programme is our quiz question. Earlier I mentioned that in 2017, Luis Fonsi's summer hit Despacito officially became the most streamed song of all time. Did you know approximately, how many times it was streamed? Was it:

- a) 1.6 billion times,
- b) 3.6 billion times, or
- c) 4.6 billion times?

Rob

And I went for a staggering 1.6 billion times.

Neil

Well, it's not staggering enough, Rob. It was actually streamed 4.6 billion times.

Rob

Amazing. That's a number that we can only dream of for this programme – or is it?! Well Neil, shall we download to our memory, some of the vocabulary we've learnt today?

Neil

Streaming describes the activity of listening or watching music, radio or videos directly from the internet as a continuous stream.

Rob

Something that is a **commercial success** is popular and makes lots of money – like a new computer game or pop song.

Neil

A good pop song, Rob – not something annoying like Gangnam Style.

Rob

Well, that was a huge commercial success because it was **catchy** – a word that describes something that attracts attention and is easy to remember.

Neil

We also mentioned a **playlist** – that's a list of songs that a radio station plans to play. And we also use the same word – **playlist** – to describe a list of songs you compile yourself on a streaming service.

Rob

We also heard the adjective **driving**, which in the context of our discussion means having a strong influence.

Neil

And we mentioned the verb to **register**. If you **register** something you record, count or measure it. Like every download of this programme is registered. But how do we download this programme, Rob?

Rob

By going to our website at bbclearningenglish.com.

Neil

And we have an app too – download it for free and stream all of our content!

Rob

Bye for now.

Neil

Bye.

VOCABULARY

streaming

describes the activity of listening or watching music, radio or videos directly from the internet as a continuous stream

commercial success

something that is popular and makes lots of money – like a new computer game or pop song

catchy

something that attracts attention and is easy to remember

playlist

list of songs that a radio station plans to play or list of songs you compile yourself on a streaming service

driving

(here) having a strong influence

register

record, count or measure something – like the download of a file