

Music Streaming

Music streaming is on the rise: in 2015 in the UK fans played 26.8bn songs on audio-streaming services alone, with another 26.9bn streams of music videos on services like YouTube. Here are the top four:

Spotify (Price: Free or £9.99 a month)

It's perhaps no surprise that [Spotify](#) is the most well-rounded streaming service: it launched in 2008 and has been steadily improving since then. Many of the new features added in the last year or two have focused on helping you discover music. Playlists are key to that: Spotify has a wide range that are updated with new songs every week, but it also has a deep catalogue of playlists created by outsiders: labels, media, musicians and fans. Follow a few, and you'll have a regular supply of new tunes.

On mobile, Spotify's *Now* feature suggests playlists based on your habits and the current time of day, while its Running mode will play you tracks that match your jogging pace. It has added audio and video podcasts as well as YouTube-style short-form video shows recently, although the jury is out on whether people want to watch Spotify as well as listen to it.

Spotify has better social features than its rivals, with the ability to add friends and see their playlists and listening, as well as a built-in messaging system to ping music back and forth. Creating and sharing your own playlists is easy too.

Apple Music(Price: £9.99 a month)

Apple Music launched with great expectations in the summer of 2015, but early gremlins involving people's iTunes collections and unflattering comparisons with Spotify drew criticism. Even so, Apple raced to 10 million paying subscribers six months after launch – a milestone it took Spotify nearly six years to reach – so Apple Music is starting to catch on. It's also much better than its harsher critics claim.

Its programmed playlists are a strength, with a deep collection of playlists from Apple's own staff and guest curators that mines some refreshingly-unusual niches. The introductions to specific bands' back catalogues are particularly good.

The more you use Apple Music, the more it gets to know your tastes, serving up album and playlist suggestions in its *For You* section with relatively few clunking-great misfires. The way it integrates your existing iTunes collection, now that the early bugs have been fixed, is good too.

Google Play Music(Price: £9.99 a month)

Google's biggest music-streaming service is YouTube, but its audio-only *Google Play Music* is building its own following. The service has a neat, stripped-down design: plenty of white space in contrast to Spotify's darker design. Searching artists, albums and tracks is easy, as is creating your own playlists.

There's a good introduction feature that asks you for your favourite genres and artists, which will help tune Google Play's recommendations for playlists, albums and radio-style stations. The playlists and stations are good, based – like those on rivals – around specific genres, themes and activities.

More stereotypical is the lack of many social features beyond the ability to share your playlists on social networks. As with Apple Music, what your friends are listening to and recommending is something you'll have to find elsewhere.

For anyone using Google's cloud-music storage service, Google Play Music works seamlessly with that: you can upload your downloads collection – most easily by dragging and dropping it in the Chrome web browser – with space for up to 50,000 songs.

Deezer(Price: Free or £9.99 a month)

Until Apple Music's 10m milestone, Deezer was the second biggest on-demand streaming service. It's the one with the widest global reach, and has signed up many of its users through deals with mobile operators bundling it into mobile contracts. Deezer does all the basics well, and has improved on the recommendations side, albeit not as rapidly as Spotify. The service promotes playlists from its own editors, outside labels and other curators, organising them by genre.

Its Mixes feature is useful too, blending the songs you like with its own recommendations. These radio-style stations are based on genres and themes, like its rivals: Happy Hour, Sad Songs and Cosy Fireplace among more standard themes.

Deezer works on Sonos and Chromecast, and will play through your Apple TV from its iOS app too. If it has a unique selling point in 2016, it might be its push into non-music content.

It has a good collection of news and entertainment podcasts, for example, and has even moved into football – the first music-streaming service to do so. In the UK, Germany and 14 other countries, you can listen to live match commentary provided by radio partners like TalkSport.