

## **SWEDISH MUSIC MIRACLE SHOWS IT'S TIME TO GET OUR STREAM-AGE KICKS**

(Brian Boyd, The Ticket, 25/1/2013)

We have lift-off! Music sales showed double-digit growth in 2012 and revenues are back to the same levels as 2004. If this sales upsurge continues – and it looks like it will – then we will soon be back to the “glory days” of pre-Napster CD sales.

True, all of this only applies if you live in Sweden. But what is being dubbed the “Swedish music miracle” – actually reversing the decline in musical sales – could easily be imitated throughout the EU and beyond. And Sweden is not just slowly pulling its way out of the worldwide music sales slump – it’s flying. Sales last year were up a huge 14 per cent.

You have to dig into the figures a bit to understand this anomaly. In keeping with its reputation as an early adapter, the country saw digital sales overtaking physical sales a good two years ago. In 2012, digital music sales accounted for 60 per cent of all music sales in the country, and 90 per cent of these digital music sales came from streaming.

Granted, Sweden is the home of Spotify, But it’s also the base of The Pirate Bay, whose political wing is the third biggest political party in the country in terms of membership. They also have two MEPs so the culture of free/illegal downloading is ingrained. But Spotify and other streaming services, with their “freemium” models, have successfully wrestled many pesky downloaders away from the illegal sites.

Such is the buoyancy now that label bosses, such as the head of Universal Sweden, can say that “music fans are now listening to more music than ever – and entirely legal. This means that revenues are increasing, artists are getting paid and we (as a label) are investing in new talent.”

According to the head of Sony Sweden, “one of the most gratifying consequences of is that it gives us the opportunity to sign more artists and record more new music than ever.”

We’ve been banging on for years about how streaming is the only viable, fair-to-all future for the recorded music industry. Still, even with these remarkable Swedish figures there is still a hostility to streaming services among musical heavyweights.

Name and shame time: in the past or present, Coldplay, Adele, Rihanna and Taylor Swift have refused to play along with Spotify for what one can only suspect are financial reasons.

There are still those who believe that going up on Spotify will cannibalise your CD sales (and the most money for the artist is in CD sales) and that Spotify simply doesn’t pay a high enough royalty rate.

Yes, there was that tweet from a musician last year, to wit: “Got paid £8 for 90,000 plays. Fuck Spotify.” But that’s because not enough people are using the service and the industry itself is hardly falling over itself in promoting streaming services.

Once a critical mass is attained – and once all mega-artists have a presence – rates will duly increase. Those 90,000 plays will generate a lot more income as users increase.

Streaming services may only bring in a single-digit percentage of the music industry’s revenues but with CD sales in free-fall and streaming services now seriously eating into the pay-for-your-digital-download market (iTunes et al) that single digit percentage is heading ever upwards.

Let's get Swedish, let's get streaming. We're waving, not drowning.

**Article source:**

<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/music/swedish-music-miracle-shows-it-s-time-to-get-our-stream-age-kicks-1.966374>