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5 Big Lessons I Learned After Listening to 250 Albums in Under 6 Months



Matt Fish

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At the beginning of 2023, I made it my mission to listen to 450 albums in a year. Averaged out, that's about 1.25 per day.

Rui Alves

The reason was simple: My music consumption habits were becoming stale and limiting. Despite craving exciting music experiences like a kindergartner craves candy, I'd regressed to a passive model where I was mostly listening to the same four or five playlists over and over again.

I needed to make a change.

Nearly six months into my listening challenge, I can safely say the experience has been enjoyable but also eye-opening. It's taught me some important lessons about the state of music and the music industry, as well as its impact on my life.

In this blog post, I'll share the five biggest takeaways from my journey thus far. Let's get into it!

Music isn't worse than it used to be (but sometimes the mastering and mixing sure are)

One of the most common criticisms of modern music I hear all the time, even from my audiophile friends, is that music in general kinda sucks now. Or, at the very least, it's not as good as it used to be.

With nearly 300 album spins under my belt this year, I gotta say, I'm not feeling this vibe at all. I can understand where those folks are coming from, but, for me, it's just too simplistic an argument. Nostalgia for the "good old

days” of your favorite genre aside, the reality is there’s so much incredible music being made these days. Many people just don’t hear it or dig deep enough to find it.

I’ve listened to albums from all genres, eras, and backgrounds too, not solely new releases. Overall, my read on music quality is that it’s actually come a long way since the 50s and 60s (what most people would refer to as the starting point for modern pop music). It’s way more inclusive and accessible now, thanks to streaming, which is awesome from a discovery point of view.

Decidedly less awesome from an artist compensation point of view, but that’s a discussion for another blog post.

Don’t get me wrong, there are still pervasive issues with modern music, especially what I’d call lowest-common-denominator pop and hip-hop tracks. The most glaring one is the lackluster mastering and mixing, which can be a total buzzkill and ruin the whole listening experience. I wish artists wouldn’t settle for final tracks that sounded so flat and tinny, but hey, maybe my expectations are too high.

Because, at the end of the day, music is a totally subjective experience. We all have different tastes and preferences that dictate whether we file a record as fire emoji good or not. That said, open-mindedness is key to expanding your musical palette — there’s a ton of impressive music out there that can hit us in unexpected ways ... if you’re willing to seek it out.

There’s so MUCH music out there (I didn’t know how much I didn’t know ...)

Captain Obvious statement for sure, but it’s one worth exploring for a second.

Before embarking on this listening journey, I thought I had a good grasp of both the current music scene and your major pillars of essential music history (e.g., classic albums and artists, etc.). 250-plus albums in and I realize just how much more to explore.

With historical material specifically, a major source of delight has been exploring the deep-cut corners of well-known artists’ discographies. Going beyond the greatest hits and enjoying no small amount of hidden gems. It’s resulted in me gaining a deeper or newfound appreciation for acts like (but not limited to): The Cure, Bob Dylan, Bjork, and New Order.

I found myself discovering new genres and artists that I had never heard of before simply by crossing titles off a running list that draws from various “best of” compilations. It was a truly eye-opening experience when it comes to recognizing the true vastness and diversity of music. Even in the genres or eras I consider myself well-versed in, there’s always something new to discover.

Exploring music outside of our comfort zone can be daunting, but it is well worth the effort. Our favorite genres and artists are often just the tip of the iceberg. By taking the time to listen to new genres and artists, we can broaden our musical horizons and gain a greater appreciation for the art form.

For me, this listening journey was a transformative experience. I found myself drawn to new sounds and styles that I never would have considered before. For example, I’m what you’d call a country music noob — it’s just not

something I'd ever really sought out in my downtime. But, by making the expansion of that part of my palette a priority, I've discovered classics and new releases in that mold that are among the best records I've heard this year.

That sense of awe-inspiring discovery is one of the best feelings any music nerd can have.

The album as an artistic statement isn't dead — not by a longshot

In recent years, the proliferation of streaming platforms and playlists has led to the album, as a form of artistic expression, feeling like it's lost its relevance.

However, after spending hundreds of hours listening to albums exclusively, I can confidently say that this is far from the case. While it's true that singles and individual songs have become more important to the music industry as revenue generators and tour ticket sellers, many artists still approach their albums as a cohesive body of work with a specific theme or message.

Some even take it a step further and create fascinating concept albums that tell emotionally gripping stories. From the hilarious (Billy Woods and Kenny Segal's *Maps*) to the ambitious (The Smashing Pumpkins' *Atum*) to the stunningly eerie (Lucy Liyou's *Dog Dreams 狗梦*), 2023 has had a concept album for seemingly every mood and taste you can think of.

And that's in addition to the classic concept albums I finally listened to front to back this year from the likes of the Velvet Underground, Miles Davis, Sons of Kemet, and many more.

The appeal of concept albums as a deeper listening experience should be obvious, as they create a sense of unity and cohesiveness that can't be replicated by simply listening to a few singles. When listened to as a whole, albums can create a singular emotional connection with the listener, allowing them to fully immerse themselves in the message or story.

It's important to note that giving an album the attention it deserves doesn't mean you have to listen to it from start to finish in one sitting. In fact, taking breaks and coming back to an album later can sometimes enhance the listening experience, as it allows you to fully digest the music and reflect on its themes and messages.

So, despite all the talk about the demise of the album in the face of increasing streaming and playlist usage, it's a type of artistic statement that's far from dead. If you're open to giving albums the undivided attention they deserve, instead of streaming another playlist to provide a bit of background noise, you may be surprised by the experience they can offer.

Listening during walks or exercise is bliss

There's no doubt about it: One of the most enjoyable ways to listen to music is during walks or exercise.

Not only does it help pass the time (or certainly make time feel like it's accelerating with you), but it also enhances the overall experience by immersing you in the music and your surroundings. It's an excellent way to disconnect from the world and focus on the music, all while burning those calories.

In fact, studies have shown that listening to music while exercising can actually improve your performance and endurance by distracting you from fatigue and discomfort, allowing you to push yourself further.

Personally, I have found that listening to music while walking or running has helped me clear my mind and provided a much-needed break from the stresses of the day. I can focus on the lyrics, the melody, or another part of the soundscape, which puts me fully in the moment and, most importantly, gets me out of my own head.

Additionally, by incorporating music into my daily routine, I have found that I have become more motivated to exercise regularly, leading to a healthier lifestyle overall. So, the next time you go out for a walk or hit the gym, don't forget to bring your favorite tunes along with you.

Just 30 minutes of listening a day can do a world of good for your mental health

On a related note, let's end with some insight into mental health improvements that come from regular, cathartic music consumption

Finally, it is important to note that listening to music has been found to have numerous benefits for one's mental health. Spending just 30 minutes a day listening to music can lead to a significant reduction in stress, anxiety, and depression.

This is because music has a unique ability to soothe our minds and bodies, helping us to relax and unwind (one of the primary reasons being it helps lower your blood pressure). Additionally, listening to music can be a powerful form of self-care, providing us with an opportunity to connect with our emotions and find comfort in sonic explorations.

Of course, different types of music have different effects on mental health. For example, classical music has been found to improve cognitive function, while upbeat music can boost your mood and energy levels. Listening to music with lyrics that resonate with your life experiences can be a way to feel understood and validated, a hugely important issue for those struggling with mental health.

By taking the time to listen to music that speaks to you, it's much more attainable to reduce stress, connect with your emotions, and find comfort in the sounds you love.

The power of music is a very real thing

Listening to 250 albums in under six months taught me valuable lessons about music and its impact on our lives. I discovered new music and rediscovered the album as an artistic statement. Music has the power to enrich our lives in many ways, and it's important to keep an open mind and explore different sounds and styles.

Incorporating music into your daily routine can also have a positive impact on your mental health. By experimenting with music consumption parameters that suit your lifestyle, you'll likely be pleasantly surprised by the results.

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Music Mental Health Goals



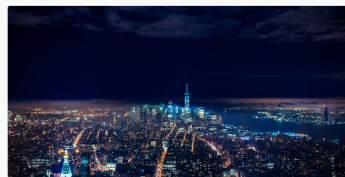
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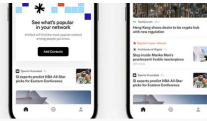
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