

Music sales climb for fourth year, thanks to streaming

Paid subscriptions and video streaming account for 68% of revenue increase

Ilyda Chua

Music sales in Singapore have continued to climb, achieving the highest numbers in over half a decade – despite listeners increasingly opting not to buy music.

Streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music proved the biggest driver of sales, raking in \$15.77 million last year, according to data from Swiss-based International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI).

In particular, paid subscriptions and video streaming saw significant growth, accounting for 68 per cent of the total revenue increase.

On the whole, music sales surged by almost 30 per cent last year, totalling \$27.9 million. This marks the fourth straight year of positive growth since 2014, when a spike in digital revenue helped revive the piracy-hit industry, which suf-

Hitting the high notes

	Physical	Digital (US\$m)	Total	Total % change
2017	0.4	14.8	20.2	▲ 29.7
2016	0.9	11.1	15.6	▲ 17.4
2015	1.7	8	13.3	▲ 3.2
2014	3.2	6.6	12.9	▲ 2
2013	4.1	5	12.6	▼ 13.5

NOTE: Total sales include other music revenues such as synchronisation and performance rights

Source: INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE PHONOGRAPHIC INDUSTRY

STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

ferred four consecutive years of losses between 2010 and 2013.

Apart from streaming, an increase in performance rights income – from \$4 million to \$6.54 million last year – contributed to the rise in total revenue.

But despite the promising figures, the Singapore recorded music industry is still at less than a quarter of its all-time high of \$118.7 million in 1993, said Mr Ang Kwee Tiang, IFPI's regional director for Asia. This is despite the fact that consumption of music is clearly higher than before, he added.

Mr Ang said this could be due to

the “value gap” – between the value created by some digital platforms, like YouTube, from their use of music and what these platforms pay to those creating and investing in music.

In Singapore, music agencies feel the struggle, with many citing live performances and brand endorsements for music artists as their main sources of revenue.

“Streaming doesn't account for much revenue,” said Mr Willy Tan, 39, founder of local agency Aging Youth Records, which manages home-grown artists such as electro-pop singer Jasmine Sokko.

And as listeners increasingly opt to stream rather than buy music, music ownership has taken a nose-dive in past years. Last year, physical sales fell by over half in Singapore, plunging to \$533,000, while digital downloads – which include downloads through digital media store iTunes – performed similarly poorly, falling by 25 per cent to \$1.6 million.

The sole exception to this trend was the vinyl market, which saw significant growth of 9.7 per cent last year. However, it remains relatively small in Singapore, reporting sales of just over \$55,000.

That said, owned music still has its fans among Singaporeans.

Nanyang Technological University (NTU) engineering undergraduate Charis Koh, 24, said the feeling of owning a physical copy is “just different”. “It feels more valuable, more real. It's not just a piece of software, it's a collectible as well,” said Ms Koh, who owns over 50 CDs.

Other users opt to buy music because although subscription costs are initially low, they can add up to substantial amounts over time. Spotify, for example, charges \$9.99 a month for its premium service, while Apple Music charges \$9.98.

“Eventually, it will cost more than platforms which charge a one-time cost, like buying an album on iTunes,” said drummer Marcus Goh, 24, who plays in local math-rock band, Sine.

However, for most, the future still lies in streaming services, citing convenience and cost-effectiveness as reasons for signing up.

“I appreciate the curated playlists that Spotify offers, as well as user-generated ones,” said Mr Aloysius Loh, 23, a philosophy undergraduate at NTU.

“It makes it much easier to discover new artists.”

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Microblogs hard to police and wipe out

FROM B1

have had their photos shared and sexualised on these sites, without many options for recourse.

Lawyers told The Straits Times that these photos shared on Tumblr exist in a legal grey area.

A few areas of the law may apply, including the Copyright Act, the Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA) and the Personal Data Protection Act, but there are conditions, they said.

For example, under the CYPA, “unless the posted material... was obscene or pornographic in nature, complaining to the police or authorities may be futile”, said Mr Gilbert Leong, a senior partner at law firm Dentons Rodyk.

The source of the photos matters too. Consent need not be sought “if the photos were taken off a public source, like the subject's Facebook page”, said Mr Bryan Tan, a partner at Pinsent Masons MPillay.

Copyright holders can, however, invoke intellectual property rights if the photos might be denigrated, Mr Tan added. “Even with consent... the issue of moral rights might be useful as a defence.”

According to Tumblr's community guidelines, posters are prohibited from causing harm to minors and they are not allowed to “solicit anything relating to minors that is sexually suggestive or violent”.

But policing can be difficult as microblogs can pop up as suddenly as they can close down, just like the NP microblogs. It also makes it hard to get a sense of how many microblogs there are or who the posters are. Posts can also go viral, making them hard to wipe out.

Psychiatrists say the posters are harming the people whose everyday photos have been sexualised.

“The emotions... are similar to those being sexually assaulted: a sense of powerlessness, fear, despair and recurrent anxiety,” said Dr Adrian Wang, who runs a private clinic at Gleneagles Hospital.

In the past five years, Dr Lim Boon Leng, a psychiatrist in private practice, has seen “a handful of cases whereby private photos, some lewd, were leaked online and became viral on these sites”.

The patients were “severely traumatised... and they felt deeply embarrassed and guilty over the incident”, he added. They can become depressed and suicidal, especially when they are blackmailed or teased or bullied in school after the photos leaked, said Dr Lim.

But not all patients react negatively, he said. He has seen patients who posted photos of themselves as they were craving attention.

They reflected “low levels of maturity, impulsiveness and narcissism”, and the enjoyment these patients got from their photos going viral in this way “may be predictive of dysfunctional personality traits”, Dr Lim noted.

In Singapore, the trend of commenting on photos or screenshots of girls and boys started from several online forums before they got on to Tumblr, said social media expert, Dr Crystal Abidin.

Dr Abidin also noted that the trend could have latched on to Tumblr because of its free speech policy.

“It's a space that is really diverse... and carves out niche spaces to allow youth to talk about sexuality in a way that they may not be able to (in real life),” she said.

The Education Ministry conducts regular reviews so that sexuality education remains current and relevant to emerging trends, said its spokesman. “Teachers, for instance, are given tips on how to guide students to be discerning about online content, and to exercise care with what they post online,” she added.

At least one person who had her photos misused is speaking out and urging others to do the same.

Ms Gia Lim, a junior college graduate, said a close male friend had sent doctored photos to more than 60 microblogs on Tumblr that hosted porn. He made derogatory comments about how she would perform sexual favours on boys and that she was “easy” or “loose”.

She later got many requests asking her for sexual favours, and unsolicited pictures of male private parts, among other things.

After she posted a video on YouTube about this, Ms Lim said that about 20 women have shared similar experiences with her.

Ms Lim, 20, said the incident left her unable to trust the people around her then.

“I assumed the worst in everyone. I became judgmental, vengeful, and I was creating a lot of stress and fear for myself,” she said.

But after being prompted by her friend to speak out about her experience, she feels it is necessary for society to discuss such issues.

She adds: “Now I have more confidence – I did nothing wrong.”

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Thoughts on strangers posting sexual comments on their photos

CONCEPT OF CONSENT

We clearly didn't ask to be sexualised in our school uniforms. (Sexuality education in school) shouldn't just be about sexually transmitted infections or getting pregnant, but firstly the concept of consent. Society should also be encouraged to speak about such issues.



MS ASHLEY YIP, 19, who is studying in a private school overseas.

FOCUS ON PREVENTION

Counselling is more about managing the aftermath (of such incidents), but the bulk of the discussion should be on prevention, on how we can educate people on basic decency, and in the case of perpetrators, to hold them accountable.



MS CATHERINE ZOU, 19, a junior college graduate.

LEGAL RECOURSE

At the end of the day, the duty of the Government is to protect its citizens. I think even young people can accept laws that will give them legal recourse to such unwanted sexualisation.

But, at the same time, there also needs to be social change about objectifying women and placing unfair gender-related expectations on them, so that people around victims don't shame them.



MR YONG CHANG JUN, 20, a full-time national serviceman.



The Riding For Hope team that will make the 16-day cycling trip through the United Kingdom in July is made up of (from left) Mr Michael Ngu, Mr Tag Sin Siew, Mr Tan Ah Chwee and Mr Tee Lay Kern. They hope to raise \$257,000 from the trip. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

Four friends plan 1,600km ride to raise funds for NKF

Jan Lee

Four friends are embarking on a 16-day, 1,600km cycling trip through the United Kingdom in July to raise funds for The National Kidney Foundation (NKF).

They hope that their initiative, Riding For Hope, can raise \$257,000, signifying their combined age of 257 years, for NKF.

The team comprises leader Tag

Sin Siew, 60, a development manager; Mr Michael Ngu, 62, an architect; Mr Tee Lay Kern, 61, a former IT manager; and Mr Tan Ah Chwee, 74, who is retired.

Mr Ngu, whose legs are immobile due to childhood polio, will make his journey on the handcycle, which is powered by his arms.

Riding For Hope was launched yesterday at the official opening of the Admiralty branch of The Hour Glass-NKF Dialysis Centre, the

first of two dialysis centres sponsored by The Hour Glass, which donated \$2 million to NKF in 2015. The other centre is in West Coast. Minister for Transport Khaw Boon Wan was the guest of honour.

Both branches have 19 dialysis stations and can serve 114 patients.

Therapist assistant Vincent Tan, 51, who used to travel to Bukit Panjang for dialysis, now goes to the Admiralty branch, a mere five-minute walk from his home. “This centre gives me peace of mind since I don't have to rush,” he said.

NKF, the biggest dialysis provider in Singapore serving some 4,300 patients, currently has 34 dialysis centres. Seven more are slated to be set up by 2020.

This comes amid an increasing prevalence of kidney failure. Five people are diagnosed with kidney failure in Singapore daily, up from four a day six years ago.

NKF hopes to increase live organ transplant numbers, which have remained stagnant.

Mr Tim Oei, chief executive officer of NKF, said: “There are some concerns surrounding live kidney transplant. People worry about the effects of the medication and that they cannot work after the transplant. NKF is here to allay those concerns by offering support to donors' medical cost and any loss in income they might suffer.”

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