

## MEASURING SUCCESS

## The Charts

Dopo la Seconda Guerra Mondiale, la musica popolare prese il sopravvento sulla radio, spinta dall'emergere di un nuovo gruppo demografico e di consumatori: gli adolescenti. Le classifiche si trasformarono in rivelazioni di superstar.

**T**opping<sup>1</sup> the charts<sup>2</sup> is the holy grail<sup>3</sup> for most recording artists, an indication of their popularity with the music-buying public. The first music chart appeared in 1913 in the US entertainment magazine *Variety*. At a time when recorded music was not yet available for sale and even radios were scarce<sup>4</sup>, this weekly chart was based on sales of sheet music<sup>5</sup> in New York City. That same year, *Billboard*<sup>6</sup> magazine published its own similar chart, and in 1936 it released<sup>7</sup> the first pop chart based on record sales.

## SCANDAL

Early *Billboard* charts also incorporated radio airplay<sup>8</sup> as data. However, some corrupt record label executives bribed<sup>9</sup> radio DJs to play their songs! This practice became known as a 'payola' — a portmanteau<sup>10</sup> of 'pay' and Vitrola, the name of a popular record player. It was outlawed<sup>11</sup> following an FBI investigation in the late 1950s.

## DIAMOND DISC

The UK did not release its own chart until 1952, when the editor of music magazine *NME*<sup>12</sup> telephoned a few record shops to ask what songs were popular that week. The result, the UK's Official Charts, was a massive success. As pop music boomed,



# MBER E



## CHART RECORDS

US singer Elvis Presley holds the record in the UK charts with twenty-one #1 hits, while The Beatles achieved nineteen in the US. Whitney Houston holds the record for the most consecutive US chart toppers, with seven, while Mariah Carey has spent ninety-one weeks in the top spot. Drake's 431 weeks on the Hot 100 is by far the longest of any artist.

the record industry also began to recognise their artists' achievements<sup>13</sup> with a system of certification. The first Gold Disc was presented in the US in 1958 to Perry Como for half-a-million sales of *Catch A Falling Star*. A UK Gold Disc is awarded<sup>14</sup> for a hundred thousand sales. Higher sales qualify for a Platinum or even a Diamond Disc.

## EVOLUTION

Pop Music Chart Day is now celebrated every 4 January, and the USA's Billboard Hot 100 (singles) and Billboard 200 (albums) remain the music industry's best-known charts. With the evolution of technology and the decline of physical sales, however, the charts have changed. Now largely based on downloads and streaming, some songs linger<sup>15</sup> for over a year, and old songs strangle<sup>16</sup> the charts at Christmas time! Ed Sheeran's *Perfect* spent 191 weeks on the UK chart, and both Mariah Carey's and Wham!'s Christmas tracks hit number one decades after their release.

## FAIR PLAY

This means that some artists miss out<sup>17</sup> on being listed on the charts, despite being popular. As a result, some countries are imposing new rules, including banning<sup>18</sup> songs more than eighteen months old from the charts. In 2017, after an Ed Sheeran album release placed<sup>19</sup> nine of his tracks in the top ten singles chart, the UK changed its rules<sup>20</sup>, allowing only three songs by an artist in the Top 100. ☒

EXERCISES IN  
**Work It Out!**

## DEFINING SONG

A 2019 viral social media post claimed<sup>21</sup> that the song that was No.1 on your 14th birthday defines your entire life. Is this true for you?



SCAN, READ  
& LISTEN

01

LOWER INTERMEDIATE B1

## GLOSSARY

- 1 **to top:** essere in cima
- 2 **charts:** classifica
- 3 **holy grail:** sacro graal
- 4 **scarce:** scarse
- 5 **sheet music:** spartiti
- 6 **billboard:** manifesto, cartello
- 7 **to release:** pubblicare
- 8 **airplay:** trasmissione via radio
- 9 **to bribe:** corrompere
- 10 **portmanteau:** parola composta
- 11 **to outlaw:** dichiarare furori legge
- 12 **NME:** *New Musical Express*
- 13 **achievements:** successi
- 14 **to award:** conferire
- 15 **to linger:** restare
- 16 **to strangle:** scalare
- 17 **to miss out:** non riuscirci
- 18 **to ban:** proibire
- 19 **to place:** collocarsi
- 20 **rules:** norme
- 21 **to claim:** affermare



THE  
CHARTS

► Read and decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F).

	T	F
1) The first music chart appeared in 1913 in the US.		
2) It was based on sales of recorded music in New York City.		
3) The <i>Billboard</i> magazine charts also incorporated radio airplay as data.		
4) In the late 1950s, <i>Billboard</i> magazine was outlawed following an FBI investigation.		
5) The first music chart in the UK appeared in 1952.		
6) At the beginning the UK's music charts didn't meet with public opinion approval.		
7) The first Gold Disc was awarded to Perry Como in the US in 1958.		
8) In the UK, a Gold Disc is awarded for 100,000 sales.		
9) A Platinum Disc in the UK is awarded for sales higher than 100,000.		
10) Pop Music Chart Day is celebrated each year on January 4th.		
11) The best-known charts are the USA's <i>Billboard</i> Hot 100 (albums) and <i>Billboard</i> Hot 200 (singles).		
12) Ed Sheeran's <i>Perfect</i> spent 191 weeks on the US chart.		
13) In the UK only three songs by the same artist are allowed in the Top 100.		



USEFUL EXPRESSIONS

by far

di gran lunga, indubbiamente