

PD Info

Public Domain Music



A reference site to help identify public domain songs and public domain music . . . royalty free music you can use anywhere and any way you choose . . . performance, sing-along, film, video, advertising, business, or personal.

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Sound Recordings

Records, cassettes, CD's, and other music recordings come under a general category called Sound Recordings or Phonorecords. Before 1972, sound recordings were not protected by copyright law, but by a hodge-podge tangle of state laws. This problem was fixed with the 1972 copyright act and extended by the 1998 twenty year copyright extension. Different copyright experts have offered very different complicated explanations, but all agree that all sound recordings essentially are under copyright protection until the year 2067. So here is the one sentence you need to remember:

**Sound Recording Rule of Thumb:
There are NO sound recordings in the Public Domain.**

There are, of course, exceptions to everything, and there really are some PD sound recordings. However, the federal and state laws are so tangled and complicated, it is extremely difficult to do confident sound recording PD research. There are several U.S. web sites claiming that sound recordings made in the United States prior to February 15, 1972, are in the public domain, and there are links to U.S. Copyright Office publications stating: "Sound recordings fixed before February 15, 1972, are not eligible for Federal copyright protection." We have had this reviewed independently by several attorneys across the U.S. Each has confidently and independently told us that between federal and state copyright protection, virtually all sound recordings are protected until the year 2067.

If you choose to believe pre-1972 sound recordings are in the public domain and choose to use them publically, you are subjecting yourself to a high probability of legal proceedings, financial liability, and major legal fees. We consider it absolutely imperative that you consult with an attorney before exposing yourself to this kind of risk. Don't even think about research in this area without major help from an attorney or rights clearance organization.

Royalty Free Music Recordings

There are music recordings and MIDI files available which can easily be licensed as "royalty free music". Mainly used by radio, TV, film, and video professionals, a one time license fee is paid and the music can be used repeatedly without further charge. A few royalty free public domain songs can be

found, but most royalty free music is original and has been composed for use as background music. License fees can be as high as \$150 or more for a 74 minute CD. Licensing terms vary, but once you purchase a license you can usually use the music as many times as you like for any film, video, voice-over, or multimedia project without paying any royalties. Do read all the fine print for there are some very expensive music libraries with an annual fee plus an additional charge for each music use. We offer a large selection of [Royalty Free Music Recordings](#) as low as \$19.95 per CD. To find other royalty free recordings, see our [Links Page](#) or go to your favorite search engine and search "royalty free music" and "royalty-free music".

Record It Yourself

Professional recordings are extremely expensive to make. It can take 40 hours or more to record, mix, and master just one or two songs. You must pay musicians, a producer, a sound engineer, and the studio. Unless you have a big budget and real experience, you will have to find a sound recording to license if you must have a truly professional sound.

However, "good" music recordings can now be made at reasonable prices. There are many small studios which charge \$25 to \$50 per hour. Many individuals have personal analog or digital multi-track systems and know how to use them. These recordings should be good enough for school projects, local cable TV, and other local or non-professional needs. Probably the best way to find out about inexpensive recording is to talk with the musicians at your church or go to a club where local rock bands perform. Teenage bands usually know all the "good and cheap" places to record, and local bands often will make made excellent low cost home or studio recordings.

"Good" recordings can also be made using sequencers and synthesizers or samplers. If you hang-out a while in the keyboard section of your local music store (like Guitar Center or Mars), you can probably meet a number of musicians with home MIDI studios. Many of these guys are willing to work for quite reasonable prices.

Before you make any agreements, be sure to listen to work previously done by both the musicians and the studio. Generally a good musician and good sound engineer are more important than fancy equipment. I have heard work done with a midi-keyboard and 2 track digital recorder that is incredibly good, but you must use your judgment on this. Also have "For Hire" contracts signed BEFORE any recording is done. Young musicians frequently do wonderful work, but if any of the musicians are under legal age, make sure you have a parental release.

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