

为什么流行歌曲通常都是 3 分钟左右?

Why are so many pop songs roughly three minutes long?

你可能已经注意到，现在的流行歌曲通常都是 3 分钟甚至更短。其实这一惯例源于上世纪初，这背后有什么历史原因呢？



[Photo/Pexels]

No matter where you usually hear today' s top hits—the radio, Spotify, a mixtape on your Sony Walkman—you' ve probably noticed that they tend to be around three minutes long.

无论你习惯上哪听歌——在收音机、流媒体音乐服务平台还是在随身听上——你应该能注意到现在的流行歌曲通常都是三分钟左右。

As Vox explains, the custom dates back to the early 20th century, when shellac records first appeared in the market. The rates at which these records spun varied, but 78 revolutions per minute (RPM) quickly became the norm. The most popular record sizes were 10 inches—which could hold about three minutes of music

per side—and 12 inches, which held roughly four to five minutes per side. To get radio stations to broadcast their music and get people to buy it, musicians pretty much had to accommodate those time limits.

Vox 公司解释道，这一惯例源自 20 世纪早期，当时虫胶制作的黑胶唱片（粗纹唱片）刚刚在市场上出现。这些唱片的转速各有不同，但是每分钟 78 圈的转速很快便成了业内标准。最流行的唱片大小是 10 英寸（25.4 厘米）和 12 英寸（30.48 厘米），前者每一面可以播放 3 分钟音乐，后者每一面可以播放四到五分钟音乐。为了让电台播放以及让人们购买他们的唱片，音乐人基本上都必须迎合这些时间限制。

The late 1940s saw the birth of the 45 RPM record: a smaller, cheaper disc made of vinyl that couldn't manage much more than three minutes of music per side. Long-playing records (LPs) were introduced around the same time, but it was much easier for radio stations to play single tracks from 45s—which hordes of listeners then went out and bought. While 10-inch 78s had originated the three-minute trend, 45s really helped make it a necessity for radio singles throughout the mid-20th century.

20 世纪 40 年代晚期 45 转的唱片诞生了，乙烯基塑料制作的更小更廉价的黑胶唱片每一面只能播放三分钟左右的音乐。大概在同一时间密纹唱片也上市了，但是电台播放 45 转的单声道唱片要容易得多，大批听众在听过电台的音乐之后就会去购买这种唱片。尽管 3 分钟的潮流是由

78 转的 10 英寸唱片引发的，但是 45 转的唱片却让 20 世纪中叶的电台单曲不得不控制在 3 分钟以内。

There were definitely exceptions to the rule. Bob Dylan' s 1965 song "Like a Rolling Stone" runs more than six minutes, and fans overwhelmed radio stations with calls demanding the full version. It worked: "Like a Rolling Stone" became an unlikely radio hit. If you wanted to hear the full six minutes, you could buy the LP.

当然，肯定也存在例外。鲍勃·迪伦 1965 年的歌曲《像一块滚石》时长超过 6 分钟，粉丝们纷纷打电话要求电台播放完整版本。结果奏效了，这首歌意外成为电台的热门歌曲。那时候如果人们想听 6 分钟的完整版，就可以购买密纹唱片。

As music technology evolved over the years, from records to cassette tapes to CDs, three minutes didn' t fall out of fashion as the de facto estimate for pop songs. According to Classic FM, this is partly because radio stations could fit more commercials into a program if the songs stayed relatively short. Record labels may have favored shorter singles, too, since longer songs didn' t mean fatter royalty checks. It' s also likely that pop music listeners just preferred concision; after all, it' s what the last several decades had taught them to expect. As Thomas Tierney,

director of the Sony Music Archives Library, told Mashable, “it’s embedded in our DNA.”

过去这些年音乐技术不断进步，从唱片到磁带再到光盘，然而 3 分钟作为流行歌曲实际长度的标准并没有过时。据 Classic FM 电台介绍，一部分原因是如果歌曲相对较短，电台就能在节目中插播更多商业广告。唱片公司应该也青睐较短的单曲，因为时间长的单曲并不能给他们带来更多版税。不过也可能是因为流行歌曲的听众就是喜欢简短的歌，毕竟，过去几十年他们已经养成了这种听歌习惯。索尼音乐资料图书馆馆长托马斯·蒂尔尼告诉博客网站 Mashable 说：“这已经根植于我们的 DNA 中了。”

Today, many tracks come in under three minutes long. Justin Bieber’s “Ghost” is just two minutes and 33 seconds, and Lil Nas X’s “THATS WHAT I WANT” is a tidy two minutes and 23 seconds.

如今，许多单曲时长都不到三分钟。贾斯汀·比伯的《幽灵》只有 2 分钟 33 秒，李娜叉的《这就是我想要的》只有 2 分钟 23 秒。

Shorter attention spans and social media’s influence might explain the trend toward brevity, but it’s not the only factor: The compensation model matters, too.

人们的注意力持续时间变短以及社交媒体的影响或许可以解释流行歌曲为什么越来越短，但是除此之外，还有报酬机制的因素。

"Instead of getting paid by physical sales, you' re getting paid in a stream, which only counts if someone listens to 30 seconds of a song," songwriter Charlie Harding told The Verge. "It actually makes sense if you can have more songs streamed at a time, which means that you want to pack your album full of much shorter songs."

作曲人查理·哈尔丁告诉 The Verge 网站说：“现在不是依照唱片销量，而是依照流量来收费，一首歌收听时间达到 30 秒才能计入流量。这样一来，你会想在流媒体平台上一次播放更多歌曲，这意味着你会在专辑中收录更多短歌。”

In other words, success is now less about sales and more about number of streams. Today' s pop stars are making music that reflects the shift—not unlike how 20th-century musicians learned to work within the confines of the original three-ish-minute limit.

换言之，如今一张唱片成功与否，与销量关系没那么大，而流量则重要得多。现在的流行歌手在制作音乐时也会反映当下形势的变化，这与 20 世纪的音乐人学着在 3 分钟的原有限制内创作并无不同。