
The CHUM Chart Book presents 2,200 recording artists and 6,700 song titles that have appeared on Toronto radio station CHUM’s "Top Fifty Records of the Week" between May 27, 1957 and December 31, 1983. The text is divided into two sections. The "Artist Selection" (pp. 1–204) contains an alphabetical list of performers, with their hit tunes arranged chronologically—displaying the month, year, and total number of weeks on the CHUM chart, the peak charted position, and the record label and number of each charted disc. The "Index of Sing Titles" section (pp. 205–317) features an alphabetical listing of all CHUM-charted recordings. The remainder of the book offers specialty information, including a chronological listing of all #1 records from 1957 ("All Shook Up" by Elvis Presley) thru 1983 ("Say Say Say" by Paul McCartney and Michael Jackson), a list of charted LP and EP cuts (songs that were not released commercially as singles), and the most frequently charted artists (Elvis Presley, The Beatles, Connie Francis, Paul Anka.....) who placed at least ten tunes on the CHUM charts. This resource guide is handsomely bound, clearly printed, and easy to understand.

What interesting facts or trends are revealed by the statistics in The CHUM Chart Book? James Brown, Macon, Georgia’s powerhouse hitmaker and the undisputed godfather of soul, with ninety Billboard-charted "hot 100" songs between 1958 and 1977, placed only nine tunes on the CHUM chart. Other U.S. artists who were similarly shortchanged in respect to Canadian popularity included Ray Charles, Wilson Pickett, Jerry Lee Lewis, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, Kenny Rogers, Jimmy Reed, Sam Cooke, Aretha Franklin, and Charlie Rich. In contrast, Ronnie Hawkins, who compiled only three Billboard "Hot 100" hits, place eleven songs on the CHUM chart. There also appear to be considerable fewer novelty tunes charted in Toronto, with such comic forces as Buchanan and Goodman, Allan Sherman, and Stan Freberg barely represented. However, several CHUM disc jockeys did achieve the Canadian chart recognition while never gaining American Billboard listing.

Does Ron Hall’s compilation of chart data have any significance beyond the offices of radio station CHUM? Do the CHUM charts actually reflect the musical tastes of listeners and record buyers throughout southern Ontario? Will collectors who utilize chart and survey information perceive any major variations between popular music in Canada and hit songs in the U.S.? Could any major city in the U.S.A. validly offer the popularity charts (or the play lists) of its top radio station as the barometer of the nation’s musical interest? These questions cannot be answered here. Yet they constitute the secondary framework for investigation of a primary issue: What is popular music?
The documentation of record chart listings is an interesting phenomenon. Wisconsin analyst Joel Whitburn is the dean of survey surveyors. His Record Research, Inc. data factory churns out Billboard-based information from 1940 to the present on numerous styles (pop, country, easy listening, disco, and black contemporary) and speeds (33 1/3, 45, and 78 rpm) of recordings. Across the Atlantic, British hit charts from Record World, Melody Maker, Record Retailer, Record and Tape Retailer, Music Week, and Record Mirror have provided statistical data for books by Clive Solomon, Charles Miron, Jo and Tim Rice, Paul Gambaccini, and Mike Read. Yet all national song charting remains suspect. Why? It is subject to the pressure and influence of major recording company propaganda; it relies upon urban-oriented reporting of commercial sales; and it lacks the ability to reflect the meaning and long-term impact of particular artists or songs.

What alternatives exist to national surveys of weekly record popularity? Ron Hall's The CHUM Chart Book offers a localized or regional profile of hit songs over a quarter of a century. One wonders what 1957–1983 charts from radio stations in New York City, Chicago, Detroit, Memphis, Los Angeles, New Orleans and San Francisco would reveal. A particularly hardnosed, materialistic viewpoint about identifying top recordings was expounded by Peter E. Berry in his 1977 study "...And The Hits Just Keep On Comin'." He contended that the only accurate barometer of a song's value is commercial merit. Berry eschewed survey charts from trade journals and radio stations in favor of "audited" gold records certified by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). Regrettably, Berry overlooked the fact that RIAA statistics are either unavailable for some labels or simply unreliable for much of the 1950–1970 period. So much for objectivity, consistency, and validity.

The other end of the vinyl ranking spectrum -- the subjective, personal analysis of individual recordings -- is even less satisfying as a means of assessing the impact and value of particular releases. Most record collectors, for instance, tend to respond more favorably to scarcity and rarity rather than popularity. So do many music critics, who prefer to laud particular vocal or instrumental innovations, trend-setting or trend-defying performances, and other imaginative artistic strides. Obviously, there is no way to assess the song popularity system through the behaviors or interests of either esoteric collectors or technically-oriented music buffs.

If objectivity is impossible and subjectivity is of little value, how should the popularity of contemporary recordings be defined? Realism demands the use of multiple perspectives. Whitburn and Hoffmann offer consistent, longitudinal national trade journal data; the RIAA compiles statistics of the sales of vinyl commodities; and radio station chart lists reflect regional involvement in, reaction to, or rebellion against mass market trends. The CHUM Chart Book provides American and British music
researchers with a new and potentially valuable Canadian perspective on contemporary songs. If nothing else, it is an intriguing tool for examining the Toronto reaction to such diverse Canadian-born international singing stars as Bryan Adams, Gordon Lightfoot, the Guess Who (and Burton Cummings), Joni Mitchell, the Diamonds, Paul Anka, Helen Reddy, Leonard Cohen, and Anne Murray. One would hope that the appearance of the CHUM chart compilation and the availability of computer technology/speed printing might stimulate several major U.S. radio stations to examine their own historical definitions (and survey charts) of popular music. This desire is academically self-serving, of course. It is far more beneficial to scholars, archivists, collectors, and teachers of popular culture to have appropriate song chart guides than to either record industry moguls or commercial radio station managers. For this reason alone, The CHUM Chart Book must be acknowledged as a delightful, surprising, and helpful survey discography. (Copies may be obtained from: Stardust Productions, Suite 28, 1730 Albion Road, Rexdale, Ontario M9V 1C1 Canada.)

Beyond Ron Hall's new publication, readers interested in chart list discographies may wish to consult the following studies:


Frank Hoffmann (comp.), The Cash Box Rhythm and Blues Singles Charts. Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, in press.


Frank C. Tharin, Jr. (comp.), *Chart Champions: 40 Years of Rankings and Ratings*. San Francisco, California: Chart Champions, 1980.


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