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## Best sites for music albums

Short of free food and free beer, free music is one of the sweetest phrases you can hear. But getting free tunes doesn't have to mean finishing on the RIAA's most sought-after list. These five sites will make it easy for you to fatten your music collection with tracks that creators and recording labels are giving away - all in DRM-free MP3 format. An extra bonus: None of these sites require an email address or any record type. What's the catch? Well, don't expect to find much top-40 material here; the four main labels are still quite tight with their properties. But this isn't really a trap: Saying goodbye to Mariah Carey and Madonna means greeting independent artists (some of whom have been in business so long) who will complete their best-performing list. Some audio player manufacturers will happily give you music, on the condition that you buy your product first. The German company Venzero is a little more generous, having launched the Venzero Mixtape: a rotating collection of MP3 tracks by exquisite bands that anyone can download. Or at least that's the theory. Since the launch of the Venzero Mixtape, the company has changed the lineup only once. The nine tracks that make up the current mixtape are a pleasure to hear, however, so even if Venzero never moves to pick up where he left off, he still comes out ahead. My favorite brick-and-mortar record stores -- I can tell you that because they still have a lot of vinyl - not only do they offer a wide variety of music, but they also have staff who can talk intelligently about what they offer. Even when I walk in just to say hi, I usually end up coming out with a new CD and new knowledge. The closest experience to this in the online world is Epitlonki, where you don't get just free music -- you get free schooling too. The site features extensive writings on all featured artists (including links to similar acts), real-time audio, and at least one free MP3 per album. Unfortunately, Epitonic hasn't really been updated for nearly two years. But the site has enough content that you can still spend hours, if not days, exploring new musical avenues. Page 2 Like other independent music labels, Mush Records has artists covering plenty of stylistic terrain (they describe its range as electronic instrumental, underground hip-hop, downtempo, abstract hip-hop, experimental, indie-rock, jazz-based grooves, turntablist compositions, electronic pop, saturated folk, left field, dreamy things, more hip-hop versions, and again and again). And Mush isn't afraid to give away music and videos for free, as the company expects visitor interest to be piqued enough for me to spend a few dollars on a CD. Unlike Epitonic, Mush Records separates areas where you learn about the artists from which the media are downloaded. On the one hand, it makes the music discovery a little less organic. On the other hand, the extensive archive of articles written about its artists gives a look at his work. Either way, a collection of more than 70 free tracks is nothing to sneeze at. If you're a musician, iSound seems like a dream come true: the site provides tools for artists to create their own pages to promote and sell their music online. If you're a music fan, iSound seems like a potential nightmare - you'd expect to have to go through a lot of questionable material to find a gem. Both perceptions are accurate, but what separates iSound from similar online services are three features that allow music fans to quickly zero in on what they like. First is a search tool that finds bands based on their similarity to three artists you enter; second is a list of the 200 most popular tracks; and third is an icon that tells you if a band has any downloadable MP3 before clicking through its page. Using these tools I easily accumulated more hits than Masses. The two main reasons I love going to concerts are the feeling of camaraderie (I'm surrounded by people who are in the same music, although I run the risk of a Coke spill on my shirt) and the opportunity to hear my favorite songs performed outside of a studio environment, sometimes arranged in new and creative ways. The next best thing to be there is a concert recording, but relatively few bands make recordings available for sale, and many bootable hints are a kind of iffy sound. Then there are the bands who don't mind exploring the gray area in between. The Live Music Archive presents recordings of high-quality concerts by bands that are great with the non-commercial distribution of their performances. Dive into the extensive list, and you'll find names like Robyn Hitchcock, Billy Bragg and the godparents on sanctioned boot legs, the Grateful Dead. This story, 5 Groovy Sites for Free Music Downloads was originally published by PCWorld. Note: When you buy something after clicking the links in our articles, we may earn a small commission. Read our affiliate links policy for more details. When it comes to music, album art is a big part of the fun. But what if you have hundreds of albums without cover art? Read on to see how you can trace the right art for each. Album Art Downloader Let's use a free app called Album Art Downloader. It has an unconventional interface, but works very well. To get started, click the link, download the app and install it. Preparing your Music Library for this tutorial to work, you'll need a very neat, neat music library. Each album must reside in its own subfolder, and all files should have correct metadata so that Album Art Downloader knows what to look for. If your house is in order, but if you need some help getting there, check out our previous post showing How to Clean and Fix Your Music Library with MusicBrainz Database. Once your library is all neat, move on to the next step. Looking for album art now it's time to run Album Art Downloader. Here's what you're supposed to see running the application for the first time: This is the search window. His job is to help find the art of the cover of a single album, using a myriad of sources. Album Art Downloader does not have its own cover art database on the web; instead, it uses numerous plugins to search existing databases, starting from massive libraries such as Amazon, Cd Baby, Google Images, to darker sources such as RevHQ and Psyshop. By default, it also searches local files, which are not very useful. So the first thing we're going to do is scroll down to the bottom of the list and turn off local file search: Feel free to turn off any other sources you don't think you'll need in the process, so we've turned off Take2 and Yes24 above. From our experience, Amazon and Google Images are usually enough to track most albums. Another thing you should do at this point is to set the Sort for Area list box as shown in the screenshot above. This would ensure larger images float at the top of search results. Now that we're all ready, it's time to point Album Art Downloader to our music collection and tell you what you should get. Go to File &gt; File Browser &gt; New or press Ctrl+N. The file browser is a separate window; that's what's weird about the Album Art Downloader interface -- it uses many separate windows popping up all over the place. Once you get used to that, the application is very easy to use. Point the File Browser at your music library (C:\Users\ezuk\Music above) and click the Large Search button. Album Art Downloader will go through its entire music library fairly quickly, looking for the artist's name, album name, and whether or not the album already has artwork. Click Select all albums with missing artwork, and then click Get ArtWork for selection. Album Art Downloader will now appear three separate search windows in parallel. Don't be alarmed: The app is only trying to save time. Since searching across multiple image databases tends to take some time, working in parallel is efficient: while you're busy sorting through the results of the first search, the other two are already retrieving images. When you're done with your first search, the second search is ready for you. We started sifting through the first. Thumbnails are lowercase, but you can click and hold a thumbnail to create a full-size version of the file. You can also drag the line next to each tile to make the tiles larger. Once you've crawled the correct album art to a good resolution, double-click the thumbnail or single-click the floppy icon. A file named folder.jpg (or .png, as may be the case) will be saved the folder containing the album. You're done! Close the search window and a new one will appear, searching for the next album. Do not wait for this window to be filled with images; just switch to one of the other two windows waiting for you, choose the correct image, save, and close. Rinse, turn, repeat. At no time will your library be full of beautiful high resolution works of art! Art!

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