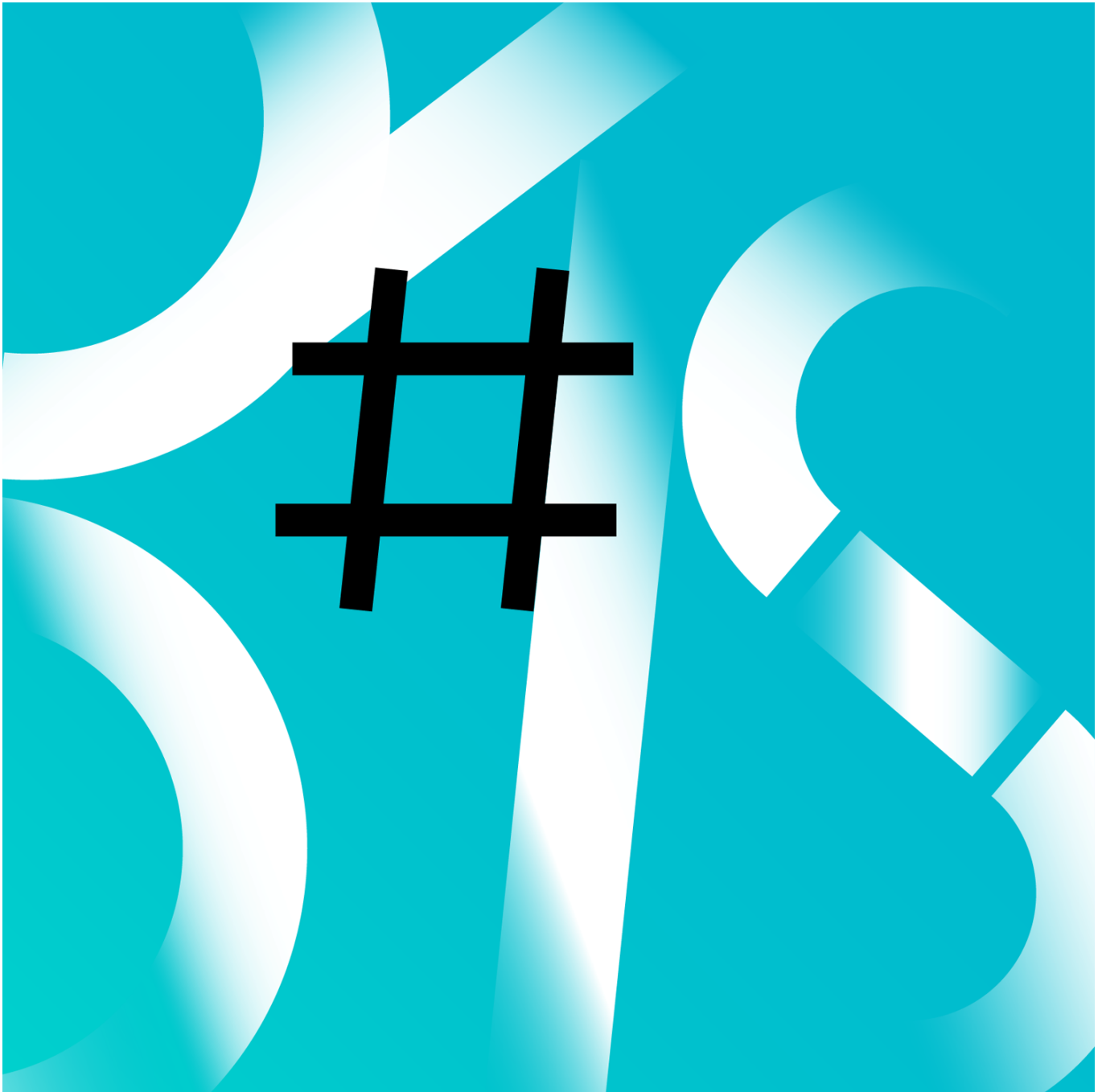


#31 s



2 trillion songs have been streamed online [in 2015](#). These are four times as much as 2014 and the numbers of streamed music will multiply in 2016 again. Streaming has become the most important way to distribute music by all means. But how does that affect the music itself?

Thus far every distribution channel left imprints in the structure of music and songwriting. The diameter and playback speed of vinyls shaped the formats of music and its perception: singles, EPs and long player with 23 minutes playing time per side. Although music production is not bound to these standards set by physical sound carriers anymore, the formats of popular music remain surprisingly solid. Three and a half minutes playing time are still the formal core of pop music and the requirement for a successful song.

The American songwriter and lecturing professor Mike Errico [speculated in a much-noticed article in 2015](#), which consequences streaming could have for the shape and structure of pop music. Streaming does not limit playing time and format at all, but it does set a narrow economic frame. There is a value gap yawning between the worldwide success of streaming and the people who actually produce music: While Spotify created more than 2 billion \$ revenue in 2015, music creators earn between 0.2 and 0.8 cent per streamed song. Errico's strikingly simple thesis: Since streaming providers cash out the royalties for a song after 30 seconds of playtime, streaming might bring out 30 second pop songs.

The economic mismatch between providers and musicians as Errico's thesis have been addressed by several artists so far: The London based band "The Pocket Gods" released an [album featuring 100 songs with 30 seconds length](#) last year in order to criticize the music industry and streaming royalties - Which earned them the official world record for the digital album with the most tracks. "Sleepify" (2014) by US indie band "Vulfpeck" was a critique of Spotify's business model. The ten album tracks between 31 and 32 seconds length [contained nothing but silence and should be played in continuous loop](#) to rise the meager royalties by a collective playback-crowdfunding. The [web service "Eternify"](#) worked similar: Users entered the name of an musical act and the embedded Spotify player would repeatedly play his songs in 30 second intervals. Spotify stopped both campaigns.

We want to explore the musical aspects of the economic 30 second boundary inspired by those projects, with whom we stay in contact too. We asked our network of musicians to write tracks that are exactly one second longer than required in order to find out, how this formal limitation would affect the music itself. The sampler #31s is the result of this experiment and an artistic contribution to make music streaming and its consequences subject of discussion.

The playlist reveals that the length of 31 seconds can differ. Some works place an autonomous composition within 31 seconds, a complete arrangement. Others appear fragmentarily, still others concentrate on a formal aspect. While "Lilabungalow" scaled a classical requiem down to a 31 second piano piece, "DIN Martin" decided to use their 31 seconds for the perfect intro, a more functional piece of music. Most of the tracks are characterized by a piecemeal impression: They sound as if they were part of something (seemingly) larger, like a segment of a pattern.

The reason therefore is not alone that our ears are calibrated for longer playing times. The listening impression of the works indicates to musical relations of Spotify's "freemium" model: #31s is reminiscent of pre-listening options on iTunes or Amazon. Functional musical formats like drop ins, jingles or digital musical libraries are related to #31s - more than the art song or the pop song. #31s shows indeed that 31 seconds can also be enough time to unfold complexity and innovativeness. But this does not work as shortcut, it requires more energy and concentration than 0.002 \$ are worth. Altogether 31 seconds are not enough time to actually formulate a musical thought. The value of music does not end after 31 seconds, it increases.

Playlist & more Info
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