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Latin Music Ahead of the Beat in the US

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By Steve Mort, Voice Of America News

United States," he says.

The Museo Del Disco CD store in Miami claims to stock the most complete Latin music collection in the world -some 40,000 titles. Hinsul Lazo is the stores' owner. He says recent Hispanic immigrants are more likely to buy CDs than download music online. "They're not as technologically driven as other nationalities because they're still behind on the educational side of technology."

Nielson Soundscan, a company that tracks CD sales in the U.S., says Latin music purchases rose 5.2 percent in 2006, while overall CD sales fell almost five percent.

But Sanchez predicts competition from Internet retailers will eventually hurt Latin CD sales as Hispanics download more online. "In the same period of time that Soundscan sales were up 5.2 percent, shipments of Latin music for the same year, 2006, were actually down 21% from the year before. And I think you're going to see a continued downward trend in shipments of CDs," says Sanchez.

Latin music storeowners, such as Hinsul Lazo, agree. He worries about selling the 180,000 CDs in his warehouse. He says most of his customers are over 40, so he is increasingly working with eBay, Amazon and other web sites to reach younger Hispanics.

"We've got a certain product line that no one has got, so as long as we stay on top of the ball we shouldn't have a problem." Lazo says he is selling more CDs to larger retail chains that are keen to cash in on the Latin music market.

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Sales of Latin music CDs are on the rise in America. Industry figures show that while overall demand for compact discs is declining, sales at U.S. stores stocking CDs from Central and South America are growing. And facing tough competition from online retailers, many mainstream shops are now offering Latin music in an effort to boost their bottom line. Steve Mort reports from Miami.

Mega 98.1 is a Latin music radio station based in Florida, it caters to the state's growing Hispanic population and, according to the station's Michelle Gonzalez, its audience is on the rise. "It's only going to keep growing and, you know, the growth is tremendous and as long as we keep putting out and producing good quality products and competing with the general market, we're going to be right there."

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Professor Rey Sanchez of the University of Miami says the boom in Hispanic radio, combined with a growing Latino population with a traditional love of music, are reasons why U.S. Latin music sales are up.

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