



Airports use rock stars, rappers to sell their cities

By Harriet Baskas, special for USA TODAY



At the Airport

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When was the last time you really listened to an airport?

Those scolding overhead announcements outlining the dos and don'ts at the security checkpoints may be tune-outs, but some airports offer travelers toe-tapping reasons to tune-in.

Blues and more in Chicago

Since 2008, the [Terminal Tunes program](#) has been offering a wide range of jazz, blues, folk and other genres of recorded

music by local artists on the overhead sound system at Chicago's O'Hare and Midway airports.

GUIDE: [Chicago's O'Hare International Airport](#)

GUIDE: [Chicago's Midway International Airport](#)

Like what you hear? The playlist is searchable online by terminal, month, day and time and currently includes everything from boogie-woogie piano tunes by the legendary [Roosevelt Sykes](#) to a polka played by the Northside Southpaws, a modern-day, left-handed mandolin/guitar duo that performs obsolete ragtime and obscure string-band music.

"Chicago is a world-class music city," said [Gregg Cunningham](#), special projects coordinator for the Chicago Department of Aviation. "But more than 50% of travelers at O'Hare are connecting passengers who never leave the airport. So we look to provide experiences at the airports that reflect our great city."

MORE: [America's got talent, airport edition](#)

Austin atmosphere

In between the 15 live music performances that take place weekly at [Austin-Bergstrom International Airport](#), travelers hear a 24-hour soundtrack of recorded local music drawn from a 2,400-song playlist.

GUIDE: [Austin Bergstrom International Airport](#)

"We add songs frequently to keep the mix fresh and current," says airport music coordinator Nancy Coplin. The playlist isn't posted or streamed on the airport's website just yet, but if someone wants to know more about a song they've heard at the airport Coplin is more than happy to look it up. "It happens quite frequently," she said.

Seattle signs on

It was the Austin airport that inspired the airport-wide local music initiative rolled out at [Seattle-Tacoma International Airport](#) in January, 2012.

GUIDE: [Seattle-Tacoma International Airport](#)

James Kebblas, Seattle's Director of Film and Music and Seattle Port Commissioner John Creighton flew to Austin in 2008 for a meeting. "When we got off the plane, we noticed how much stuff there was at the airport representing the music culture of Austin," said Kebblas. "And we both realized that Seattle, which is also known for its music scene, should be doing this too."

<http://travel.usatoday.com/experts/baskas/story/2012-03-14/Airports-use-rock-stars-rappers-to-sell-their-cities/53514844/1>

It took a while for Sea-Tac's music program to take shape, but eventually PlayNetwork, a Redmond, Wash.-based company that curates music for Starbucks and thousands of other businesses, stepped in to work on the project, pro bono, with the airport, the Seattle Music Commission and other local groups.

The soundtrack created for the airport includes music by Northwest artists spanning multiple decades and genres - everything from pop, rock and folk to urban, jazz, blues and electronic music - and features artists such as **The Posies**, **Nirvana**, **Pearl Jam**, **Heart**, **Alice in Chains**, **Quincy Jones**, **Ray Charles**, **the Dave Mathews Band**, **Jimi Hendrix** and **Kenny G**.

"The final playlist was carefully crafted to ensure we have the right genre and energy level playing during the day," said Nadine Zgonc, PlayNetwork's vice-president of client management. "So there's more chilled-out music in the early morning and a little more up-tempo and jammin' music as the day goes on." The music is turned off completely overnight.

In addition to the airport soundtrack, PlayNetwork created short music videos for the terminal monitors and a multichannel music player available at the airport on the free Wi-Fi, [on the airport's website](#) and through Android and iPhone apps.

Music and messages

Sea-Tac's new soundtrack also extends to the welcome and safety messages heard inside the airport, with many notable Northwest musicians, including **Sir Mix-a-Lot** and Chris Ballew, of the **Presidents of the United States of America**, voicing short announcements.

AUDIO CLIP: [Sir Mix-a-lot's announcement](#)

Jerry Cantrell of **Alice in Chains** reminds travelers that smoking is only allowed outside the building, adding a sympathetic "Bummer, dude" at the end of his recorded message. **John Popper** of **Blues Traveler** squeezes a little [harmonica-playing into his message](#) welcoming travelers to Seattle and urging everyone to "rock out, man. But don't forget your flight." And rapper **Macklemore** plays it straight, welcoming passengers to one of the world's greenest airports and encouraging them to check out the free Wi-Fi, "Where you can listen to some great music created by [Pacific Northwest](#) artists."

AUDIO CLIP: [John Popper's airport greeting](#)

Several other airports around the country also use local celebrities in airport messaging.

At McCarran International Airport in [Las Vegas](#), [videos dating back to 2004 and 2005](#) feature Las Vegas performers such as [Wayne Newton](#), [Rita Rudner](#), [the Blue Man Group](#) and [Carrot Top](#) offering tips for going through the security checkpoint.

GUIDE: [Las Vegas McCarran International Airport](#)

At Nashville International Airport, [Darius Rucker](#), [Phil Vassar](#), [George Strait](#) and [Lady Antebellum](#) are among the country music stars that have recorded what airport spokesperson [Emily Richard](#) describes as "fun and quirky messages." [Andy Williams](#), Clay Cooper and many other entertainers have voiced parking, welcome and other helpful messages (along with promos for their shows) for Missouri's Branson Airport.

GUIDE: [Nashville International Airport](#)

And at Glacier Park International Airport in Montana, travelers waiting in line at the security checkpoint are entertained by a [video by the local band, the Singing Sons of Beaches](#), crooning the TSA's carry-on rules to a jaunty calypso beat.

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