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The consolidation of the "hot AC" format contrasted with the near-demise of most other AC formats: Beginning with the 2005-2007 economic downturn and eventual recession most stations went for the more chart-based CHR, along with the top 40, urban and even Latino formats. Diminishing physical record sales also proved a major blow to the AC genre. The early 1990s marked the softening of urban R&B at the same time alternative rock emerged and traditional pop saw a significant resurgence. This in part led to a widening of the market, not only allowing to cater to more niche markets, but it also became customary for artists to make AC-friendly singles. Termed "the acoustic equivalent to Prozac", soft adult contemporary, a more adult-oriented version of AC, was born in the late 1970s and grew in the early 1980s. WEEI-FM in Boston was the first station to use the term "soft rock", with ad slogans such as, "Fleetwood Mac ... without the yack" and "Joni ... without the baloney". The vast majority of music played on soft AC stations is mellow, more acoustic, and primarily solo vocalists. The urban AC stations resemble soft AC rather than hot AC; they play predominantly R&B and soul music with little hip-hop. This is reflected in many of the urban AC radio stations' taglines, such as "Today's R&B and classic soul", "The best variety of R&B hits and oldies" and "(City/Region)'s R&B leader". Urban AC's core artists include Luther Vandross, Trey Songz, Patti LaBelle, Toni Braxton, Whitney Houston, Aretha Franklin, Frank Ocean, Craig David and Mariah Carey. This format often includes dance-pop (such as upbeat songs by Madonna, Cher, Gloria Estefan and Kylie Minogue), power pops (mainly by boybands such as Backstreet Boys and Westlife), and adult-oriented soft rock music that are ballad-driven (typically by Aerosmith[citation needed], The Eagles, Sting, Toto and The Moody Blues). Generally, Hot AC radio stations target their music output towards the 18-54 age group and a demographic audience of both men and women. Contemporary Christian music (CCM) has several subgenres, one being "Christian AC". Radio & Records, for instance, lists Christian AC among its format charts. There has

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been crossover to mainstream and hot AC formats by many of the core artists of the Christian AC genre, notably Amy Grant, Michael W. Smith, Kathy Troccoli, Steven Curtis Chapman, Plumb, and more recently, MercyMe. In 1996, Billboard created a new chart called Adult Top 40, which reflects programming on radio stations that exists somewhere between "adult contemporary" music and "pop" music. Although they are sometimes mistaken for each other, the Adult Contemporary chart and the Adult Top 40 chart are separate charts, and songs reaching one chart might not reach the other. In addition, hot AC is another subgenre of radio programming that is distinct from the Hot Adult Contemporary Tracks chart as it exists today, despite the apparent similarity in name. Adult contemporary R&B may be played on both soft AC stations and urban AC. It is a form of neo soul R&B that places emphasis on songcraft and sophistication. As the use of drum machines, synthesizers, and sequencers dominates R&B-rooted music, adult contemporary R&B tends to take most of its cues from the more refined strains of 1970s soul, such as smooth soul, Philly soul and quiet storm. Classic songwriting touches and organic-leaning instrumentation, often featuring string arrangements and horn charts, were constants. One big impetus for the development of the AC radio format was that, when rock and roll music first became popular in the mid-1950s, many more conservative radio stations wanted to continue to play current hit songs while shying away from rock. These middle of the road (or "MOR") stations also frequently included older, pre-rock-era adult standards and big band titles to further appeal to adult listeners who had grown up with those songs. Adult contemporary traces its roots to the 1960s easy listening format, which adopted a 70-80% instrumental - 20-30% vocal mix. A few offered 90% instrumentals, and a handful were entirely instrumental. The easy listening format, as it was first known, was born of a desire by some radio stations in the late 1950s and early 1960s to continue playing current hit songs but distinguish themselves from being branded as "rock and roll" stations. Billboard first published the Easy Listening chart July 17, 1961, with 20 songs; the first number one was "Boll Weevil Song" by Brook Benton. The chart described itself as "not too far out in either direction". Hard rock had been

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established as a mainstream genre by 1965. From the end of the 1960s, it became common to divide mainstream rock music into soft and hard rock, with both emerging as major radio formats in the US. Soft rock was often derived from folk rock, using acoustic instruments and putting more emphasis on melody and harmonies. Major artists included Barbra Streisand, Carole King, Cat Stevens, James Taylor and Bread. Anita Baker, Sade, Regina Belle, and Luther Vandross are other examples of artists who appeal to mainstream AC, urban AC and smooth jazz listeners. Some soft AC and urban AC stations like to play smooth jazz on the weekends. In recent years, the Smooth Jazz format has been renamed to Smooth AC, as an attempt to lure younger listeners. Although dance-oriented, electronic pop and ballad-oriented rock dominated the 1980s, soft rock songs still enjoyed a mild success thanks to artists like Sheena Easton, Amy Grant, Lionel Richie, Christopher Cross, Dan Hill, Leo Sayer, Billy Ocean, Julio Iglesias, Bertie Higgins and Tommy Page. No song spent more than six weeks at #1 on this chart during the 1980s, with nine songs accomplishing that feat. Two of these were by Lionel Richie, "You Are" in 1983 and "Hello" in 1984, which also reached #1 on the Hot 100. Since the mid-2000s, the mainstreaming of bands like Wilco and Feist have pushed indie rock into the adult contemporary conversation. In the early 2010s, indie musicians like Imagine Dragons, Mumford & Sons, Of Monsters & Men, The Lumineers and Ed Sheeran also had indie songs that crossed over to the adult contemporary charts. In the 1980s, lush jazz-R&B fusion (George Benson, Patti Austin, Al Jarreau) and stylish crossover R&B (Anita Baker and Luther Vandross, New Edition and Keith Sweat) were equally successful within the mainstream. In the 1990s and early 2000s (decade), artists as sonically contrasting as R. Kelly, Leona Lewis (mainly ballads) and Jill Scott both fit the bill, provided the audience for the material was mature. By riding and contributing to nearly all of the trends, no one has exemplified the style more than Babyface, whose career thrived over 20 years as a member of the Deele (Two Occasions), a solo artist (Whip Appeal, When Can I See You), and a songwriter/producer (Toni Braxton's Breathe Again, Boyz II Men's I'll Make Love to You). The amount of crossover between the AC chart and the Hot 100 has

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varied based on how much the passing pop music trends of the times appealed to adult listeners. Not many disco or new wave songs were particularly successful on the AC chart during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and much of the hip-hop and harder rock music featured on CHR formats later in the decade would have been unacceptable on AC radio. A notable pattern that developed during the 2000s and 2010s has been for certain pop songs to have lengthy runs on AC charts, even after the songs have fallen off the Hot 100. Adrian Moreira, senior vice president for adult music for RCA Music Group, said, "We've seen a fairly tidal shift in what AC will play". Rather than emphasizing older songs, adult contemporary was playing many of the same songs as top 40 and adult top 40, but only after the hits had become established. An article on MTV's website by Corey Moss describes this trend: "In other words, AC stations are where pop songs go to die a very long death. Or, to optimists, to get a second life. Modern adult contemporary can be a variation of hot AC, and includes modern rock titles in its presentation. In 1997, Mike Marino of KMXB in Las Vegas described the format as reaching "an audience that has outgrown the edgier hip-hop or alternative music but hasn't gotten old and sappy enough for the soft ACs." The format's artists included Alanis Morissette, Counting Crows, Gin Blossoms, Bon Jovi, Train, No Doubt, The Script, The Cranberries, Lifehouse, Sarah McLachlan, Sara Bareilles, John Mayer, Jewel, and Ingrid Michaelson. Unlike modern rock, which went after 18-34 men, this format appealed to women. Another big impetus for the evolution of the AC radio format was the popularity of easy listening or "beautiful music" stations, stations with music specifically designed to be purely ambient. Whereas most easy listening music was instrumental, created by relatively unknown artists, and rarely purchased, AC was an attempt to create a similar "lite" format by choosing certain tracks (both hit singles and album cuts) of popular artists. Other popular names for the format include "Warm", "Sunny", "Bee" (or "B") and (particularly in Canada) "EZ Rock". The format can be seen as a more contemporary successor to and combination of the middle of the road (MOR), beautiful music, easy listening and soft rock formats. Many stations in the soft AC format capitalize on its appeal to office

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workers (many of them females aged 25-54, a key advertiser demographic), and brand themselves as stations "everyone at work can agree on" (KOST originated that phrase as a primary tagline, and other soft AC stations have followed suit). Hot adult contemporary radio stations play a variety of classic hits and contemporary mainstream music aimed at an adult audience. Some Hot AC stations concentrate slightly more on pop music and alternative rock to target the Generation Z audience, though they include the more youth-oriented teen pop, urban and rhythmic dance tracks. The Hot 100 and Easy Listening charts became more similar again toward the end of the 1960s and into the early and mid-1970s, when the texture of much of the music played on Top 40 radio once more began to soften. The adult contemporary format began evolving into the sound that later defined it, with rock-oriented acts as Chicago, The Eagles, and Elton John becoming associated with the format. With the mixture of radio friendly AC tunes with some rock and pop fare also landing on the pop charts, mainstream songs won over many critics in the need to define AC, and appeared to change the tolerance and acceptance of AC music into mainstream day to day radio play. Part of the reason why more and more hot AC stations are forced to change is that less and less new music fits their bill; most new rock is too alternative for mainstream radio and most new pop is now influenced heavily by dance-pop and electronic dance music. Initially, the vocalists consisted of artists such as Frank Sinatra, Doris Day, Johnny Mathis, Connie Francis, Nat King Cole, Perry Como, and others. The custom recordings were usually instrumental versions of current or recent rock and roll or pop hit songs, a move intended to give the stations more mass appeal without selling out. Some stations would also occasionally play earlier big band-era recordings from the 1940s and early 1950s. In 1989, Linda Ronstadt released *Cry Like a Rainstorm, Howl Like the Wind*, described by critics as "the first true Adult Contemporary album of the decade", featuring American soul singer Aaron Neville on several of the twelve tracks. The album was certified Triple Platinum in the United States alone and became a major success throughout the globe. The Grammy Award-winning singles, "Don't Know Much" and "All My Life", were both long-running #1 Adult

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Contemporary hits. Several additional singles from the disc made the AC Top 10 as well. The album won over many critics in the need to define AC, and appeared to change the tolerance and acceptance of AC music into mainstream day to day radio play. A large portion of music played on this format are either considered oldies or recurrent. It often deals with modern romantic and sexual relationships (and sometimes other adult themes such as work, raising children, and family) in a thoughtful and complex way. Soft AC, which has never minded keeping songs in high rotation literally for years in some cases, does not appear necessarily to be facing similar pressures to expand its format. Soft AC includes a larger amount of older music, especially classic R&B, soul, and 1960s and 1970s music, than hot AC. In addition to Celine Dion, who has had significant success on this chart, other artists with multiple number ones on the AC chart in the 1990s include Mariah Carey, Phil Collins, Michael Bolton, Whitney Houston and Shania Twain. Newer female singer-songwriters such as Sarah McLachlan, Natalie Merchant, Jewel, Melissa Etheridge and Sheryl Crow also broke through on the AC chart during this time. In its early years of existence, the smooth jazz format was considered to be a form of AC, although it was mainly instrumental, and related a stronger resemblance to the soft AC-styled music. For many years, artists like George Benson, Kenny G and Dave Koz had crossover hits that were played on both smooth jazz and soft AC stations. Radio stations played Top 40 hits regardless of genre; although, most were in the same genre until the mid-1970s when different forms of popular music started to target different demographic groups, such as disco vs. hard rock. This evolved into specialized radio stations that played specific genres of music, and generally followed the evolution of artists in those genres. After 1965, differences between the Hot 100 chart and the Easy Listening chart became more pronounced. Better reflecting what middle of the road stations were actually playing, the composition of the chart changed dramatically. As rock music continued to harden, there was much less crossover between the Hot 100 and Easy Listening chart than there had been in the early half of the 1960s. Roger Miller, Barbra Streisand and Bobby Vinton were among the chart's most popular

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performers. Unlike the majority of 1980s mainstream singers, the 1990s mainstream pop/R&B singers such as All-4-One, Boyz II Men, Rob Thomas, Christina Aguilera, Backstreet Boys and Savage Garden generally crossed over to the AC charts. Latin pop artists such as Lynda Thomas, Ricky Martin, Marc Anthony, Selena, Enrique Iglesias and Luis Miguel also enjoyed success in the AC charts. Another format, rhythmic AC, in addition to playing all the popular hot and soft AC music, past and present, places a heavy emphasis on disco as well as 1980s and 1990s dance hits, such as those by Amber, C&C Music Factory and Black Box, and includes dance remixes of pop songs, such as the Soul Solution mix of Toni Braxton's "Unbreak My Heart". Over the years, AC has spawned subgenres including "hot AC", "soft AC" (also known as "lite AC"), "urban AC", "rhythmic AC", and "Christian AC" (a softer type of contemporary Christian music). Some stations play only "hot AC", "soft AC", or only one of the variety of subgenres. Therefore, it is not usually considered a specific genre of music; it is merely an assemblage of selected tracks from musicians of many different genres. Adult contemporary tends to have lush, soothing and highly polished qualities where emphasis on melody and harmonies is accentuated. It is usually melodic enough to get a listener's attention, and is inoffensive and pleasurable enough to work well as background music. Like most of pop music, its songs tend to be written in a basic format employing a verse-chorus structure. In response to the pressure on Hot AC, a new kind of AC format cropped up among American radio recently. The urban adult contemporary format (a term coined by Barry Mayo) usually attracts a large number of African Americans and sometimes Caucasian listeners through playing a great deal of R&B (without any form of rapping), gospel music, classic soul and dance music (including disco). Urban AC is a form of AC music geared towards adult African-American audiences, and therefore, the artists that are played on these stations are most often black, such as Des'ree, whose album *I Ain't Movin'* was massively popular amongst both African American audience as well as the wider national audience. A format called quiet storm is often included in urban adult contemporary, and is often played during the evening, blending the urban AC and soft

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AC styles of music. The music that is played is strictly ballads and slow jams, mostly but not limited to Black and Latino artists. Popular artists in the quiet storm format are Teena Marie, Freddie Jackson, Johnny Gill, Lalah Hathaway, Vanessa L. Williams, Toni Braxton, and En Vogue among others. The soft AC format may soon be facing the demographic pressures that the jazz and big band formats faced in the 1960s and 1970s and that the oldies format is starting to face today, with the result that one may hear soft AC less on over-the-air radio and more on satellite radio systems in coming years. Much of the music and artists that were traditionally played on soft AC stations have been relegated to the adult standards format, which is itself disappearing because of aging demographics. Some soft AC stations have found a niche by incorporating more oldies into their playlists and are more open to playing softer songs that fit the "traditional" definition of AC. Adult contemporary music (AC) is a style of music, ranging from 1960s vocal and 1970s soft rock music to predominantly ballad-heavy music of the present day, with varying degrees of easy listening, pop, soul, rhythm and blues, quiet storm, and rock influence. Adult contemporary is rather a continuation of the easy listening and soft rock style that became popular in the 1960s and 1970s with some adjustments that reflect the evolution of pop/rock music. Adult contemporary is heavy on romantic sentimental ballads which mostly use acoustic instruments (though bass guitar is usually used) such as acoustic guitars, pianos, saxophones, and sometimes an orchestral set. The electric guitars are normally faint and high-pitched. However, recent adult contemporary music may usually feature synthesizers (and other electronics, such as drum machines). Soft rock reached its commercial peak in the mid-to-late 1970s with acts such as Toto, England Dan & John Ford Coley, Air Supply, Seals and Crofts, America and the reformed Fleetwood Mac, whose *Rumours* (1977) was the best-selling album of the decade. By 1977, some radio stations, like New York's WTFM and NBC-owned WYNY, had switched to an all-soft rock format. By the 1980s, tastes had changed and radio formats reflected this change, including musical artists such as Journey. Walter Sabo and his team at NBC brought in major personalities from the AM Band to the FM Band taking the format from a

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background to a foreground listening experience. The addition of major radio stars such as Dan Daniel, Steve O'Brien, Dick Summers, Don Bleu and Tom Parker made it possible to fully monetize the format and provide the foundation for financial success enjoyed to this day. On April 7, 1979, the Easy Listening chart officially became known as Adult Contemporary, and those two words have remained consistent in the name of the chart ever since. Adult contemporary music became one of the most popular radio formats of the 1980s. The growth of AC was a natural result of the generation that first listened to the more "specialized" music of the mid-late 1970s growing older and not being interested in the heavy metal and rap/hip-hop music that a new generation helped to play a significant role in the Top 40 charts by the end of the decade. Much of the music recorded by singer-songwriters such as Diana Ross, James Taylor, Carly Simon, Carole King and Janis Ian got as much, if not more, airplay on this format than on Top 40 stations. Easy Listening radio also began including songs by artists who had begun in other genres, such as rock and roll or R&B. In addition, several early disco songs, did well on the Adult Contemporary format. The "soft" AC format has reinvented in the late 2000s/early 2010s as a result of its declining relevance, adopting a more upmarket, middle-of-the-road approach, with a selection of "oldies" (usually from the 1960s/70s onwards), primarily rock, jazz, R&B and pop music. Newer songs are more often (but not limited to) "easy listening" fare, this amount varying depending on the age of the station's target demographic. Artists contributing to this format include mainly soft rock/pop singers such as, Andy Williams, Johnny Mathis, Nana Mouskouri, Celine Dion, Julio Iglesias, Frank Sinatra, Barry Manilow, Engelbert Humperdinck, and Marc Anthony. In recent years it has become common for many AC stations, particularly soft AC stations, to play primarily or exclusively Christmas music during the Christmas season in November and December. While these tend mostly to be contemporary seasonal recordings by the same few artists featured under the normal format, most stations will also air some vintage holiday tunes from older pop, MOR, and adult standards artists - such as Nat King Cole, Bing Crosby, Dean Martin, The Carpenters, Percy Faith, Johnny Mathis and Andy

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Williams - many of whom would never be played on these stations during the rest of the year. Mainstream AC itself has evolved in a similar fashion over the years; traditional AC artists like Barbra Streisand, the Carpenters, Dionne Warwick, Barry Manilow, John Denver, and Olivia Newton-John found it harder to have major Top 40 hits as the 1980s wore on, and due to the influence of MTV, artists who were staples of the Contemporary Hit Radio format, such as Richard Marx, Michael Jackson, Bonnie Tyler, George Michael, Phil Collins, and Laura Branigan began crossing over to the AC charts with greater frequency. Collins has been described by AllMusic as "one of the most successful pop and adult contemporary singers of the '80s and beyond". However, with the combination of MTV and AC radio, adult contemporary appeared harder to define as a genre, with established soft-rock artists of the past still charting pop hits and receiving airplay alongside mainstream radio fare from newer artists at the time. These Christmas music marathons typically start during the week before Thanksgiving Day and end after Christmas Day, or sometimes extending to New Year's Day. Afterwards, the stations usually resume their normal music fare. Several stations begin the holiday format much earlier, at the beginning of November. The roots of this tradition can be traced back to the beautiful music and easy listening stations of the 1960s and 1970s. By the early 1970s, softer songs by artists like The Carpenters, Anne Murray, John Denver, Barry Manilow, and even Streisand, began to be played more often on "Top 40" radio and others were added to the mix on many AC stations. Also, some of these stations even played softer songs by Elvis Presley, Linda Ronstadt, Elton John, Rod Stewart, Billy Joel, and other rock-based artists. AC radio stations may play mainstream music, but they will exclude hip hop, dance tracks, hard rock, and some forms of teen pop, as they are less popular amongst the target demographic of these radio stations, which is intended for an adult audience. AC radio often targets the 25-44 age group, the demographic that has received the most attention from advertisers since the 1960s. A common practice in recent years is that many adult contemporary stations play less newer music because they also give ample airtime to hits of the past, so the de-emphasis on new songs slows

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the progression of the AC chart. A more elaborate form of urban AC is the rhythmic oldies format, which focuses primarily on "old school" R&B and soul hits from the 1960s to the 1990s, including Motown and disco hits. The format includes soul or disco artists such as ABBA, The Village People, The Jackson 5, Donna Summer, Tina Charles, Gloria Gaynor and the Bee Gees. Rhythmic oldies stations still exist today, but target African-Americans as opposed to a mass audience. While most artists became established in other formats before moving to adult contemporary, Michael Bublé and Josh Groban started out as AC artists. Throughout this decade, artists such as Nick Lachey, James Blunt, John Mayer, Bruno Mars, Jason Mraz, Kelly Clarkson, Adele, Clay Aiken and Susan Boyle have become successful thanks to a ballad heavy sound. Much as some hot AC and modern rock artists have crossed over into each other, so too has soft AC crossed with country music in this decade. Country musicians such as Faith Hill, Shania Twain, LeAnn Rimes and Carrie Underwood have had success on both charts. A popular trend in this era was remixing dance music hits into adult contemporary ballads, especially in the US, (for example, the "Candlelight Mix" versions of "Heaven" by DJ Sammy, "Listen To Your Heart" by D.H.T., and "Everytime We Touch" by Cascada). Adult contemporary has long characterized itself as family-friendly, but edited versions of "Perfect" by P!nk and "Forget You" by Cee Lo Green showed up in the format in 2011.