

Amazon ropes in streaming holdout Garth Brooks

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Amazon spent \$2.67 billion in 2015 on their own series and shows

Amazon's new streaming service on Wednesday announced an exclusive deal with country superstar Garth Brooks, the top-selling artist to have resisted the fast-growing music format.

The retail giant, which launched its Amazon Music Unlimited service last month with a cut-rate price for owners of the company's speakers,

started with a new single by Brooks and will eventually stream his entire catalog.

Brooks, whose stardom in the 1990s expanded the demographic map for country music, has sold more albums than any solo artist in US history, with Elvis Presley in second place.

The deal with the 54-year-old could help Amazon make inroads with US listeners who have yet to discover streaming such as older music fans outside of major urban areas.

Sweden's Spotify is the world's leader in streaming—which offers unlimited, on-demand music online—and has pursued an open model of making as many songs as possible available.

Upstarts Apple Music and Tidal, led by rap mogul Jay Z, have emphasized original content and exclusives by artists who mostly appeal to a younger, more international audience than Brooks.

The country singer has long resisted not only streaming but Apple's iTunes—which opened in 2003 after Brooks was already an established star—insisting that he wants to sell albums rather than individual tracks.

Brooks, in an interview with music industry journal *Billboard*, said that Amazon was "very sweet" in giving him flexibility on how he wanted to enter streaming.

He said he spoke to rivals but an Apple Music deal would have brought him into iTunes, while Spotify did not have a way to sell his work.

As for retail behemoth Amazon, "They said, 'It's your music, you tell us how you want it sold,'" Brooks told *Billboard*.

Brooks said he saw the deal as fluid and rejected suggestions he was trying to reach a new audience.

"Here's the thing that I sit with that makes me sleep well at night: We've had a great run and we have never streamed, so if this never happens, I'm good," he said.

Streaming has been rapidly growing, leading the global music industry last year to post its first substantial profits since the start of the internet age.

In the United States, the number of subscribers to streaming services more than doubled in the first half of 2016 alone but at 18.3 million there is likely plenty of room for growth.

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