



Your Short Cut to Knowledge

Using Microsoft® Windows Media® Player 11

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Introducing Windows Media Player

These days, a personal computer does more than just browse the Web and help you organize your finances. Many people are using their PCs as digital media players—to store, play back, and even record music and movies. You can use your PC to listen to your favorite compact discs, tune in to radio broadcasts from around the world, watch movies on DVD, and record your own custom music collections.

You can perform all these digital media functions with a single program—Windows Media Player (WMP). Windows Media Player is an all-in-one playback and recording program that lets you play CDs and DVDs, rip CD tracks to your hard disk, burn CDs from music stored on your hard disk, play back music you've ripped or downloaded from the Internet, even copy music to your portable music player.

The latest version of WMP, Windows Media Player 11, is now available, and it's the best version yet. In fact, many critics consider WMP 11 to be the single best media player program available today. Read on to find out why—and how to use it.

Important Changes to Windows Media Player 11

Windows Media Player 11 is available for both Windows XP and the upcoming Windows Vista operating system. (In fact, Windows Vista comes with WMP 11 built in.) The program is functionally identical in both versions; the difference is only in the use of the Vista Aero glass interface.

If you're still using an older version of Windows Media Player, you can download the latest version, for free, from Microsoft's website. Just go to www.microsoft.com/windows/windowsmedia/player/11/ and follow the instructions there.

The History of Windows Media Player

Windows Media Player started life as Media Player (no Windows prefix), a simple media player utility built in to the Windows operating system. This initial version of Media Player was released in 1991, as part of then-new Windows 3.0.

Various permutations of Media Player found their way into subsequent versions of Windows, but it wasn't until 1998, and the release of Windows 98, that Media Player became a freestanding application—and gained the title Windows Media Player. This

SECTION

Mastering the Windows Media Player Interface

- 1 Navigation pane
- 2 Contents pane
- 3 List pane

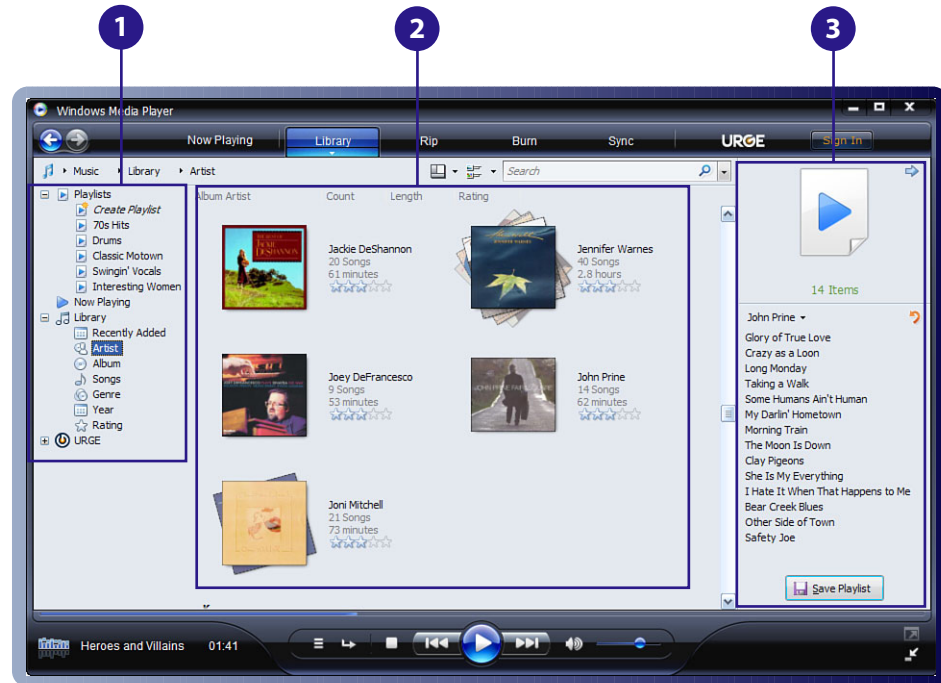


Figure 9 *Windows Media Player's Library tab.*

Skin Mode and the Mini Player

Remember, however, that the contents of the WMP window differ from tab to tab. Not all tabs display the same panes.

Skin Mode and the Mini Player

Windows Media Player provides several different display options. Not only can you resize the WMP window, as you can any Windows application, but you also can display it in the compact Skin mode—or as a Mini Player on the Windows taskbar.

Switching to Skin Mode

The default display mode for WMP is the Full mode. If you'd rather display the player without all the extraneous controls, you can switch to Skin mode. As you can see in Figure 10, Skin mode focuses your attention on the video/visualization window. Some controls are shrunk and others are hidden. You switch to Skin mode by clicking the Switch to Skin Mode button at the lower right of the WMP window.



Figure 10 *Windows Media Player in Skin mode.*

tip

Whether you're in Full or Skin mode, you can manually resize the main WMP window. When you resize the main window, the size of the video/visualization window also changes. All you have to do is use your mouse to grab any side or corner of the window, and then drag it to a new size.

Changing Skins

If you don't like the default look and feel of WMP in Skin mode, you can change it. WMP lets you change its basic interface by applying new "skins." A skin is a complete interface that includes the window frame and background and all the controls. In fact, some skins have fewer controls than the default WMP interface.



Figure 11 WMP with the Quicksilver skin.

To give you an idea of how different skins can change the way WMP looks and feels, check out Figures 11 and 12, and compare these two skins to WMP's default skin in Figure 10. Changing skins is a great way to put your personal stamp on your media player.

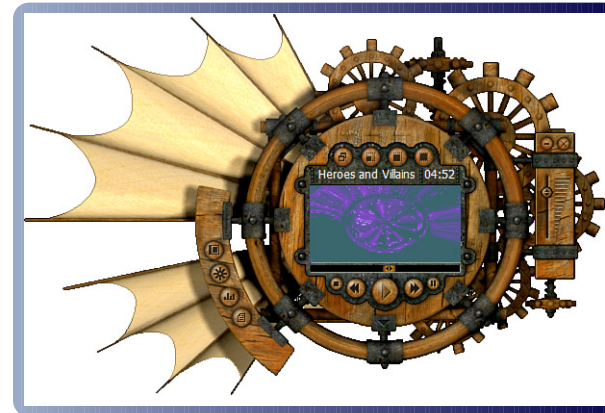


Figure 12 WMP with the DaVinci skin.

Skin Mode and the Mini Player

To change skins, follow these steps:

1. With WMP in Full mode, press the Alt button and select View, Skin Chooser.
2. When the Skin Chooser window appears, select a skin from the left-side list. The skin you choose is previewed in the right-side window, as shown in Figure 13.
3. Click the Apply Skin button. WMP now switches to Skin mode with the new skin applied.

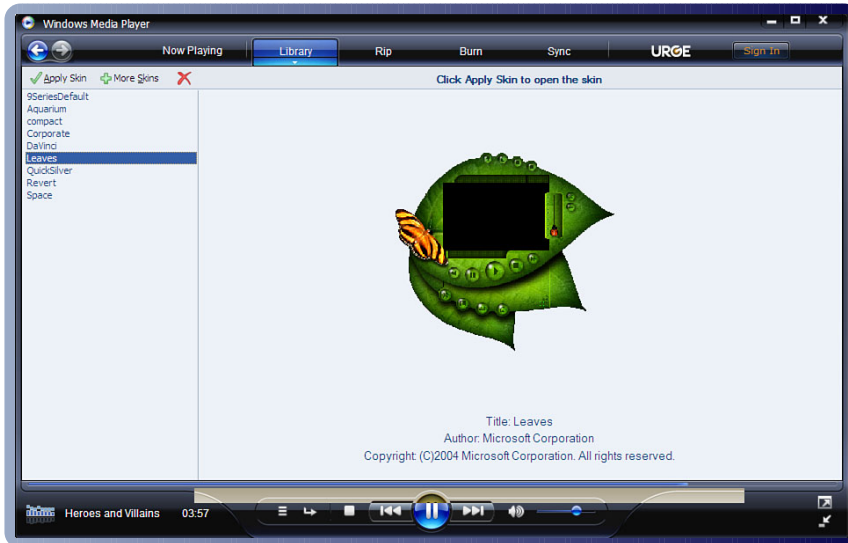


Figure 13 Choosing a new skin for Windows Media Player.

Windows Media Player includes a fair selection of skins built-in, but you can find a lot more skins available online. Just go to the Skin Chooser window and click the More Skins button. WMP launches Internet Explorer and connects to the Skins page on the Windows Media website. Pick a new skin and follow the onscreen instructions to download it to your system.

note

Any older skins designed for Windows Media Player 10 should also work with Windows Media Player 11.

Adding the Mini Player to the Windows Taskbar

WMP 11 offers one more display mode, called the Mini Player. This is an ultra-compact display that runs from the Windows taskbar, as shown in Figure 14.

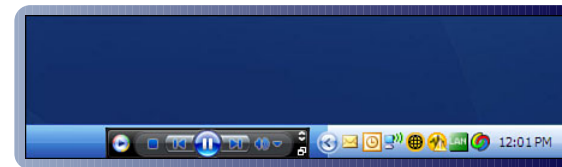


Figure 14 The Mini Player on the Windows taskbar.

To enable the Mini Player, right-click an empty area of the Windows taskbar to display the pop-up menu, and then select

Playing Music with Windows Media Player

Toolbars, Windows Media Player. when enabled, the Mini Player displays any time you minimize the WMP window.

The Mini Player offers the basic playback controls and volume and mute controls. You also can display basic song information and a seek slider (by hovering your cursor over the Mini Player), display a small Video and Visualization window (by clicking the button in the upper-right corner of the Mini Player), or return to Full Display mode (by clicking the Restore button in the lower-right corner).

Playing Music with Windows Media Player

Windows Media Player is, first and foremost, a full-featured audio player. You can use WMP to play audio files that you've ripped from CD or downloaded from the Internet, or to play back songs from a normal audio CD.

Playing CDs

Playing a CD is easy; playback should start automatically when you insert a CD into your PC's CD drive.

If CD playback doesn't start automatically, click the Library tab; the CD should be listed in the Navigation pane, as shown in

Figure 15. Highlight the CD title and you'll see the list of CD tracks in the Contents pane; click the Play button to begin playback.



Figure 15 *Playing a CD from the Library tab.*

Playing Digital Audio Files

To play back a digital audio file, you first have to load that file into the player. You do this by clicking the Library tab, navigating to the song you want to play, and then either double-clicking the

Playing Music with Windows Media Player

song title or selecting the song and clicking the Play button. (More on the Library in a few pages.)

You can also play back an entire album by selecting Album from the Navigation pane, navigating to the album, and then clicking the Play button. Same thing with playing back all the songs by a particular artist or in a particular genre; select either Artist or Genre in the Navigation pane, navigate to the artist or genre you want, and then click the Play button.

Stopping and Starting

The Play button is just one of the transport controls located at the bottom of the WMP window. You start playback by clicking the Play button, or pause playback by clicking the Pause button. (It's the same button—it says Play when playback is paused or stopped, and Pause when a song is playing.) You stop playback completely by clicking the Stop button.

Moving Back and Forth

You don't have to play an entire song from start to finish. The Seek slider, located above the transport controls, indicates where you are in a song. You can use your mouse to move the slider anywhere in the song, and playback resumes from the point you selected.

When you're playing a digital audio file, you can also fast forward or rewind a song by clicking and holding the Previous and Next buttons in the transport panel. This doesn't work when playing a CD, however, just with songs stored on your hard disk.

The Previous and Next buttons, when single-clicked, move you one track back and one track forward, either on a CD or in your current list of audio files. If you're playing a album from your hard drive, you move to the previous or next track on that album. If you're playing songs by an artist or within a genre, you move to the previous or next song listed. If you're playing a playlist, you move to the previous or next song in the playlist.

Shuffle and Repeat

When you're playing a lot of songs—in a playlist, for example—it's nice to mix up the order. Just for these times, WMP offers a shuffle function, which lets you play all the selected songs (in a playlist, in an album, by an artist, in a genre, or on a CD) in random order. All you have to do is click “on” the Shuffle button on the far left of the transport panel (refer to Figure 4).

WMP also offers a repeat function, which repeats the selected song over and over. You activate this function by clicking “on” the Repeat button, which is next to the Shuffle button in the transport panel.