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Abstract

Central to questions of co-creativity and "AI"–which we define as both generative and assistive AI models built from machine learning and other computational systems–are the ways in which different types of artificial intelligence programs impact the music workplace. The following assembles highlights from a roundtable held during the conference that explores how AI music tools reshape the creative process as well as how labor operates in these spaces. Who creates AI tools for musical applications, who controls their operations, and who gets to use them? What are the costs and consequences of AI usage, from environmental destruction to power imbalances in the music industry? We came to this panel in order to discuss these crucial questions. This discussion draws on the expertise of five professionals located across popular music: scholars who study music production, producer-scholars, and professionals whose primary work is in production.

Keywords: music industry; generative AI; assistive AI; sampling; ethics

1. Introduction

Central to questions of co-creativity and "AI"–which we define as both generative and assistive AI models built from machine learning and other computational systems–are the ways in which different types of artificial intelligence programs impact the music workplace. The following assembles highlights from a roundtable held during the conference that explores how AI music tools reshape the creative process as well as how labor operates in these spaces. Who creates AI tools for musical applications, who controls their operations, and who gets to use them? What are the costs and consequences of AI usage, from environmental destruction to power imbalances in the music industry? We came to this panel in order to discuss these crucial questions. This discussion draws on the expertise of five professionals located across popular music: scholars who study music production, producer-scholars, and professionals whose primary work is in production.

Kathryn Agnes Huether (Director of the Project on AI and Extremism at UCLA) is a sound studies and digital humanities scholar whose work includes projects such as guest editing *Sounding Out!*'s series "Hate and NonHuman Listening." Her research examines artificial intelligence, antisemitism and hate, and the particular role that music and sound play in shaping cultural production, mediation, and meaning across digital environments.

Amy Skjerseth (Assistant Professor of Popular Music, UC Riverside) is a music and media scholar whose book *Preprogrammed: How Electronic Presets Changed Music and Media* (UC Press, 2026) historicizes technologies and labor and creative practices from push-button radios and drum machines to AI music platforms.

mesmi is an independent artist, producer and industry professional whose original music has placed in the International Songwriting Competition, GRAMMY programs and multiple television shows. A former Fulbright recipient who researched the cultural relationships of K-pop's evolution, she serves as the Music Industry Chapter Lead at Unlock Her Potential and helms creative services as the founder of VATOCA Studios, as well as runs *SOUND OFFF*, a digital space for spotlighting music from the Asian American community.

Liz Przybylski is a scholar of hip hop and the popular music industry, and a Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of California, Riverside. Dr. Przybylski wrote *Sonic Sovereignty: Hip Hop, Indigeneity and Shifting Popular Music Mainstreams* and *Hybrid Ethnography.* Liz's recent publications address on- and off-line hybrid ethnographic research, the role of technology in pop music distribution, Indigenous hip hop, and popular music pedagogy. Liz's ongoing work interrogates music as labor within international popular music industries.

Frank Duchêne, former founding member of electronic band Hooverphonic, is an independent audio producer and lecturer in music and audio production at PXL-Music in Belgium. His research focuses on developing the STrOOM framework, a STEAM-based approach that integrates coding, software, and music for students aged 11 to 14.

In the sections that follow, we will collectively speak to how AI is currently showing up in music workplace, how we parse varied applications of AI in a creative work environment, and critical questions we advise practitioners and scholars consider in order to determine which kinds of AI tools could be productive in workplace environments, and where caution and critical attention are necessary in order to support both human musical creativity and an equitable labor environment–while deliberating potential benefits.

This conversation was not recorded; rather the segments that follow are written based on the conversational highlights that most directly illuminate the questions that were discussed during the roundtable. The bolded headers here follow from the questions raised at the roundtable, and serve to organize this reflection. These responses are offered as a basis for ongoing conversation, and to spark grounded approaches to tool applications in music workplaces.

2. What are the possible applications of AI that you see now or in the very near future in your workplace or music workplace that you interact with? What does AI actually look, feel, and sound like in a creative work environment?

It's helpful to begin by coming to a collective understanding about what we mean when we say AI.

Kathryn: It seems that AI is everywhere now—and that it arrived almost overnight with the release of ChatGPT on November 30, 2022. But ChatGPT and other Large Language Models represent only one form of AI, and a very recent one at that, within a much longer history of artificial intelligence.

The term itself dates to the 1956 Dartmouth Conference, when AI was largely imagined around the possibility that machines could simulate forms of human reasoning. What changes considerably with the development of machine learning and, later, deep learning is that rather than attempting to program intelligence through a set of formal rules, systems learn patterns and statistical relationships from increasingly large amounts of data. Asking what AI might look, sound, and feel like, then, is both technologically and historically contingent. The science and technology scholar and former president of the European Research Council Helga Nowotny argues that "the definition of AI varies according to where we find ourselves in this trajectory" (2024, p. 61). Nowotny points specifically to the expansion of computational capacity, the increasing sophistication of algorithms, and the enormous growth of available data.

When considering what AI might "look, sound, and feel like," requires a reflection upon both the technological and historical contingencies. For me, in my work, approaching AI requires attention to both the input and the output. On the input side, I am interested in what these systems are built from: what constitutes their data, whose creative and cultural production becomes computationally legible as data, and what happens to that material in the process. On the output side, I am interested in what these systems then produce and, particularly, how those outputs are received, interpreted, and experienced. That latter question is where my work becomes more explicitly sonic and affective, although I don't think the two can ultimately be separated.

mesmi: As there has been increasing conversation around AI in the music industry, a topic that becomes especially controversial in regards to "AI music," I have been endeavoring to expand my own knowledge, thoughts and stance in regards to AI in the music workplace. In the process of learning and reflecting, I find it important to identify and clarify what might be called AI or not, as the terminology can be confusing but significant. There has been for quite some time a number of music software tools that incorporate machine learning and/or advanced algorithms, and these may technically fall under the AI umbrella; this can range from third-party plug-ins, which are tools that often help with various techniques and details of audio like frequency and balance, to musical instrumentation tools within the digital audio workstation (DAW) that may simulate musicians playing. Similarly, there has also been a form of AI mastering around for a while, where users can upload their tracks through a website and receive different "mastered" versions. However, it is the more recent evolution into generative AI, like Suno, that may more drastically change the process of creating music and what that means.

As to how that currently or in near future shows up in a creative work environment, there have been a few claims in recent music industry interviews, including from Recording Academy CEO Harvey Mason Jr., that almost every major production/songwriting session has people using more generative AI. The comments of such posts or interviews will show disagreement and varied opinions from music creators, many saying they haven't seen it in their writing or production rooms. Most of the working musicians I know, so it is anecdotally, are heavily against generative AI in its current form and circumstances.

Frank: Among my colleagues, AI is increasingly showing up not so much as a finished product but as a tool for building tools, something that speeds up and reshapes their production workflows from the inside. One prototype by a colleague of mine used AI to design complex microphone setups for classical recordings, calculate delay times to compensate for physical placement, and automatically translate all the information into ready-to-use Pro Tools sessions. Others have used it to bridge feedback platforms like Frame.io directly into the DAW, so that

comments from directors, producers, or composers import straight into the session, sparing them the hassle of switching between programs. What stands out across these examples is AI's role as a practical co-designer: it can turn an idea for solving a problem into a working tool far more quickly than before, changing not just what gets produced but also how the work of production itself gets done.

Kathryn: See, for example, this screenshot I sourced from Bette Midler's Instagram post made on August 21, 2026:

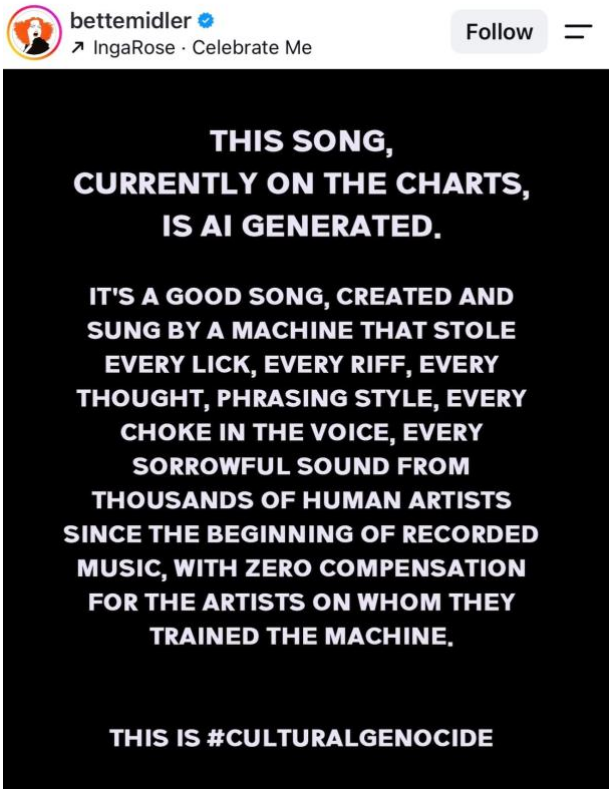


Figure 1: Bette Midler, *Instagram*, August 21, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/p/DcUWoSqPaCx/?hl=en.

3. What are applications for which you might consider using specific kinds of AI tools, or specific kinds of AI tools that you either use or would consider using in your work?

Liz: In our collective discussion, we tossed back and forth the ideas of what AI tools are for. This is reminiscent of conversations I've had with other audio engineers who, for example, use highly targeted tool applications to offload tasks that feel like drudgery so they can concentrate on those that require creative thought. **Frank** and **mesmi** both shared ideas of looking for ways that a tool could allow an engineer to focus their energy elsewhere or to more easily manage multiple tasks at once in the DAW. Crucially, we also talked about AI tools that promise efficiency but actually take more time to manage than doing the task oneself. Harkening back to the disaggregation of different types of tools, considering what they are supposed to be for and how they are actually operationalized, leads to two additional questions. 1) Is the proposed AI tool functioning like a personal labor accelerator, or does it distract, slow, or otherwise

hamper the engineer? 2) Is it functioning like an instrument, or is it taking over the creative part of the work?

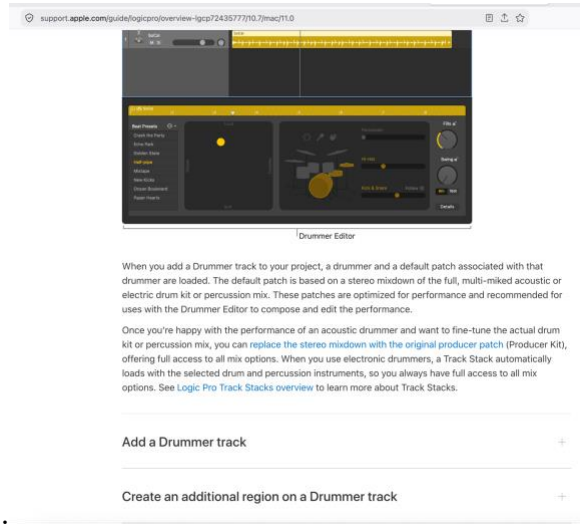
In the pre-conversation that helped us focus on the set of questions for this roundtable, mesmi and I talked through the ways we experience AI tools, when they might enter the process, and when they exit.

An example that comes to mind is the virtual drummer in Logic. Here's an example of how it entered and exited my workflow in the case of one song I wrote and recorded. I have a drum kit in my recording space that I play some times, but my technical chops have limits. In order to write this new song, I've played the drums to get the idea of where I want the sound to land. However, when I went to actually complete the multitrack recording, I chose the virtual drummer from Logic that was closest to the style I wanted, and edited it just a bit to get the right sound. Then, I recorded my other instruments and vocals, listening to that drummer. Because I don't want to do a final mix that uses a virtual drummer; options are to work with another drummer, work up my skills until my own recording sounds right, or create the drum track using studio tools, such as making a track with MIDI drums using samples, adjusting the timings, and applying dynamics and spatial processors to create the room sound and balance I want. At this point, the virtual drummer leaves the picture and doesn't end up in the final song.

Using a tool in the recording process, even if it doesn't end up on the actual recording, brings up the question of what feels like AI. As **mesmi** pointed out, DAWs have long had automations that extend the engineer's toolset, and that can make up for players' technical limitations. To whom does a virtual session player feel like AI, and when might it appear more akin to just one more snazzy or labor-saving plugin? Is this feature new in degree, if not in kind?

In this case, the Logic Pro support article does not call the virtual drummer an AI tool. Yet, the musicians' forum Drummerworld does refer to this as an AI drummer. The perception of what counts as AI is also contingent upon our vantage points (and perhaps our financial interests as well).

The Logic Pro user guide explains how you can use other tools within the software to take out the virtual drummer, but still create the tracks in the DAW rather than with a live musician.



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Figure 2: Logic Pro user guide screenshot.
https://support.apple.com/guide/logicpro/overview-lgcp72435777/10.7/mac/11.0

Among musicians, there is some anxiety about this tool and its potential impact on creative labor on the Drummerworld forum on the topic.

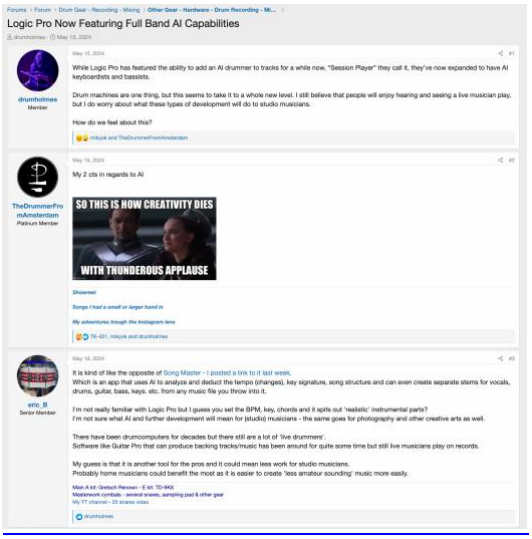


Figure 3: Drummerworld forum screenshot.
https://www.drummerworld.com/forums/index.php?threads/logic-pro-now-featuring-full-band-ai-capabilities.188235/

There are some other practical tools that panelists either have used or would consider using in their own work. **Frank** described the utility of iZotope for audio restoration. As mesmi added as well, this same tool can reduce S sounds to make the work less tedious. Tedium is part of the work of sound engineering, so tools that help with declicking are appealing. Panelists noted that it's useful to know how to do such tasks manually in order to have more control over the sound, and described that it's possible to leverage this competency and then hand over repeated tasks to that application.

mesmi: While I haven't used it yet, I came across a site someone had made that was an AI tool to create one's own custom music tools, your own music plugins. While I still have concerns with other effects of using generative-type AI, like environmental, privacy, data sourcing and IP rights, this form of it did pique my interest and is something I might consider trying and using.

4. Which specific kinds of tools that use AI would you not use in your own work?

Liz: There is a long history of discourses of fairness and access in the literature on music technology that can provide additional context here. A vast literature on sampling offers useful counterpoints: what legal questions and ramifications does sampling pose, including about ownership and ethics? How do we parse the artistic avenues it opens and forecloses for musicians? How are musicians approaching learning the technical skills sampling requires in order to create a desired sound? Aesthetically, how does sampling shift the sound that listeners expect? Sampling has been posed as theft, and as innovative creative practice, and there is a hip hop literature that helps us parse these questions. Hip hop sampling invites ethical questions, and has been part of stylistic innovation (Boutros, 2014; Chang, 2009; Demers, 2003; DiCola & McLeod, 2011; Przybylski, 2019). Re-listening now to the music of Public Enemy, and to the aesthetic and legal quagmires their music opened for people in the 1990s, is relevant today (Thorpe and Chuck D, 1999). Across these examples, such discourses can help us ask more about what continues to be creative when our tools expand, and how it is possible to adapt something that someone else has created and do something with it that feels both intellectually honest and emotionally meaningful.

Amy: An important distinction that arises here is generative versus assistive, which is crucial because that indicates how much creative control an artist or consumer maintains. Historically, the majority of tools with computational backends have created ready-to-hand interfaces that facilitate musicians' creativity–for example, Laurie Spiegel's algorithmic composition tool Music Mouse, developed for computers in 1986 and re-released in 2026 by Eventide Audio. While such software assists the creative process, generative AI can operate as a stand-in for it. As AI music scholars Raquel Campos Valverde and D Bondy Valdovinos Kaye write, "To illustrate in the context of music, LandR is a production service that offers AI-assisted audio mastering to prepare recordings to be uploaded to streaming platforms, while Suno is a platform that generates completed musical tracks from text-based user inputs" (2026, 3). My book *Preprogrammed* investigates the similarities and slippages between assistive and generative AI technologies, ultimately advocating for us not to throw out both assistive binary push-buttons, black-boxed backends, and user interfaces out with the bathwater but to learn how to use them ethically as an alternative to generative fill logics. If we were to generalize, assistive AI tends to partner with human creativity, but generative AI tends to supplant it.

Kathryn: A student of mine wrote, "Good AI is functional, bad AI removes what it means to be human." And I think that gets at something very close to the distinction Amy is making between assistive and generative AI. In my own work, I always force myself to stop and ask a seemingly basic question before using AI: *why am I using it, and why am I using it for this?* Do I wish for a world without AI? Do I think it would be a better place? In all honesty, yes. But I am also not naïve enough to think that we can simply ignore it and it will go away. It is here, and, as with the technologies that have come before it, we need to understand what it is doing and develop ethical ways of engaging with it.

My own research actually shifted toward AI for precisely this reason. I did not begin as an AI scholar (although, did any of us?). My work has long been concerned with sound, music, trauma, Holocaust and genocide studies, and, more recently, hate and extremism. But increasingly, AI began appearing within the very objects and environments I was already studying: synthetic historical voices, fabricated testimony, AI-generated images and videos, algorithmically circulated hate, and new forms of historical distortion. The growing role of AI within extremist and hateful digital cultures, in particular, was a significant red flag for me. At a certain point**,** understanding these cultural forms required understanding the technologies through which they were being produced and circulated.

And sound and music are very much part of that problem. Generative systems can now synthesize voices, imitate vocal and musical styles, generate songs, and reproduce sonic markers associated with particular histories, communities, or identities. So, for me, studying AI became less about an interest in the technology itself than about asking what happens when these systems begin mediating the things I was already studying. It was the next form of technological mediation.

That also shapes how I use AI myself. Much of my own use is therefore analytical and assistive: I use these systems to understand how they work, to examine what they produce, to compare outputs, and, where appropriate, to work across bodies of material at a scale that would otherwise be difficult. Where I become much more hesitant is when assistance begins to become substitution—particularly when AI is asked to stand in for the creative or intellectual work itself.

I don't think my boundary is simply AI or no AI, and I don’t think we can. It is much closer to the distinction Amy has drawn: what is the technology being asked to do, and what human activity is it augmenting, altering, or replacing?

5. What questions do you ask yourself when you decide how you will and won’t use AI tools, or what you will and won’t use them for?

The discussion crystallized several key questions that frame the decision on what to use (or not) and how: where the LLMs come from, who generates them, and what are the goals of those people or aims of those companies.

Frank: In terms of teaching we can think about classrooms that already have tech. How can we use the tech that already exists as musical tools, for instruments, how might this impact accessibility? The idea of the Theremin with a WebCam is an input device makes people think about tactility in ways continuous with long histories of embodied histories of technology.

Liz: This resonates through practical concerns from music tech ed. There are potential boons for accessibility. It’s also important to think about what schools are investing in, and not investing in, when they choose which AI and which human-driven tools to purchase and support. It’s pragmatic to figure out ways to use the tech that’s already in classrooms, especially in cash-strapped districts. At the same time, we should ask: are we backing off from insisting upon access to other kinds of tools and instruments like that classroom set of guitars that better-resourced schools have, and instead just putting kids in front of screens longer because it feels easier in the short term? Or are we really encouraging creativity in meaningful ways, and

appropriately balancing human-driven and AI-enabled learning? Again, we can learn much from the history of hip hop, where we see that early musicians moved into a space where arts education had been underfunded and did something innovative (Chang, 2005; Katz, 2012; Rose, 1994). But just because they could do something innovative in a space of intentional underresourcing doesn't necessarily mean we want long-term to not support students and see what they make in an intentional vacuum. There's a push-and-pull between resourcefulness and fatalism here. And from a resource standpoint, is the total cost of buying and maintaining classroom AI products really less than investing in human-driven musical teaching tools? Tech ed decisions should be both pedagogically driven and resource-aware.

Amy: Following on from my earlier thread about assistive versus generative AI, I want to preview some work I am doing on the royalty-free music generation platform Splice, known predominantly for its sample packs (both drum and guitar loops were featured in Sabrina Carpenter's 2024 song "Espresso." In an article I am preparing, I dissect an interview with the CEO of the royalty-free music generation platform Splice, Kakul Srivastava, on the technology podcast *Decoder* about "why push-button AI is 'insulting' to musicians" (2025). Srivastava sets up a dichotomy between Suno as a push-button music-making device and hence too easily-generated, and Splice as an assistive AI technology that supports musicians in their own artistic endeavors–rather than doing their job for them. Srivastava's care to differentiate Splice from Suno with questions of labor and authenticity is a little smoke-and-mirrors, however, given Splice's recent flirtation with more generative AI. While this is just a preview of my argument in this upcoming article, musicians and consumers can learn from this case: the dichotomy of assistive AI as good and generative AI as bad does not hold for music tools and many other technologies besides music, because it is a slippery slope from assistive to generative, and it depends who is using them and for what purpose. But the dichotomy can be a place to start in order to think about the extent of creative control musicians are willing to cede to AI tools.

mesmi: I ask myself about the ethics in the creation and use of the tool, such as sourcing, data privacy, digital load and remuneration. One metaphor I find helpful in regards to the creative process of using an AI tool is the idea of a manager versus practitioner of the craft: Am I still getting my hands in there? How much am I actually touching, tweaking the end result, like imagining if the song I make is akin to carving a piece of wood… am I forming things or am I the manager, the "boss," telling and directing an employee how to do the work and what I desire? At what point does the tool cross the line to become the craftsperson? When it feels like the AI tool is imbued with theft, stealing from others and even from myself–my own growth and creativity, my voice and what I gain from being in process–I cannot help but want to refrain from using it.

6. What impacts do you see AI having on musical and creative labor?

mesmi: I am wary of the current generative AI. I may try it a few times to see what it's like, as I think it is important to know and understand what is going on and the experience people who use this new technology are having. However, there are deep and intrinsic differences in the formation and work type of these tools compared to previous technology, such as the issues of sourcing, data load and housing, pay model, etc. Previously, companies often made music tools or products with paid contracted creative workers given their specific skill, and that tool lived locally on your computer or system. For example, I knew a colleague who played guitar for a karaoke app that would allow product users to sing along to all sorts of songs and genres; this guitarist was paid for her work, time and skill, with legal contract and permissions, and in turn

her tracks and music were used to help create the tracks for all various guitar-part instrumentals in that app. Generative AI in its current form disregards these basic agreements of labor, remuneration, intellectual property–not even getting into the realms of consideration in regards to impact on creativity, originality or humanity–simple mutual economic agreements and consent. Such factors make it difficult for me to use tools with that kind of disregard and form of harm in its "supply chain."

6.1. In terms of ethical questions it's important to think about guardrails. Another way to reflect on labor here is in a slightly different sense—not simply whether AI replaces a musician's work, job, or gig, but what happens when a musician's pre-existing oeuvre can be extracted, manipulated, and made to perform new cultural and political work.

Kathryn: This happened to Ukrainian singer Ani Lorak, who moved to Russia and became the subject of considerable backlash in Ukraine following Russia's full-scale invasion (Zaitseva-Herz, 2026). In 2023, an AI-generated parody of one of her earlier songs went viral under the title "Samotni Moskali," or "Lonely Muscovites." The song used a synthetic voice designed to closely mimic Lorak's vocal timbre and affect, but replaced the original lyrics with strongly pro-Ukrainian content and circulated alongside footage from the war.
What AI makes possible here is the reconstruction of Lorak's recognizable vocal identity while completely severing that voice from her own agency. And the implications extended well beyond the song itself. At the center of the controversy was a political question: *whose side was Lorak on?* Her own voice was effectively made to answer that question for her. AI enabled a twenty-year-old song—and the accumulated musical labor attached to Lorak's voice and public persona—to be reactivated within an entirely different historical and political context. Her previous creative labor did not simply become training material for another song; it became a means of political satire, protest, and retaliation within the context of an ongoing war.

6.2. How is the session musician model helpful for understanding rights, labor, and payment? We have other moments where we look to people on short contract labor, which then gets used and reused in other ways. Although this becomes more complicated now as the actual tracing of individual people's labor can become obscured, and some of it has actually been intentionally obscured by other LLMs and AI companies. Do you use something built on theft?

mesmi: Yes, there's a difference when the labor at least has been contracted and paid for, a mutual exchange there, and in that conscious, voluntary exchange a release of licensing. This is how Apple's Logic Drummer was created, from "the performances and sounds of some of the industry's top session players and recording engineers" for software users to use freely, including commercially (2013).

I see generative AI heavily diluting pipelines, such as streaming services, social media content, royalties in an already difficult industry economic model. Unfortunately, given how the digital landscape and distribution models work, its impact seems to not only devalue musical and creative labor but even takes away from the monetary pool those creators would be due. And to me, there is an inherent unfair skew in that this tool has taken so much creative data without permission *or* pay as it means of a way to create output, and from that stolen labor (which

includes hours upon hours in the category of time alone, not counting other resources or costs) allows others to generate songs in mere seconds; that speed is due to the en masse amounts of uncredited, unpaid work. Which results in instances such as reports that half or even over 50% of newly uploaded tracks on streaming services like Spotify or Deezer are AI-generated music, and beyond that, a majority of the streams they receive (and thereby monetize, taking money from the general payout pool) are from bots. The arms and effects are incredibly widespread, and I have found my own music to be in an AI development dataset using *The Atlantic*'s "AI Watchdog" tool (2026).

I also wonder if and what sort of impact there is with a certain amount of deception in generative AI music and media, how that impacts trust–the listeners, the recipients, the experience of listening; if people can notice or care? There already has been a long conversation in the industry of how people value music, how that may have changed. This now has extended into how people might value musicians, artists, and their relationship with music creators, if they still do.

Almost surprisingly, there has been some actual initiative and action there recently, different places starting to label AI music, AI artists, maybe even choosing to chart and stream them separately. Deezer has been one of the first digital streaming platforms (DSP) to take a stance on that.

And of course the impact on creators themselves. It's not a standalone idea or potential phenomenon, as we're seeing the related impact in education and students at large. I wonder how younger, newer musicians will approach their instruments, craft, connection to the music and creating in general? There is a cost to convenience, "something's gained but something's lost" (as a flip on the Joni Mitchell lyric). Using generative AI technology in this complete song-generating way can actually take away from the people involved by robbing them of the experience itself, and it is the experience that builds creative muscle; a lot of music and creative process is parallel to the physical bodily process of building strength, tone, agility, mastery. There is a beautiful letter writer Kurt Vonnegut apparently wrote to high school students in 2006 where he encouraged them to "practice any art, music, singing, dancing, acting, drawing, painting, sculpting, poetry, fiction, essays, reportage, no matter how well or badly, not to get money and fame, but to experience <u>becoming</u>, to find out what's inside you, to <u>make your soul grow</u>." That intangible and immeasurable growth is what creatives themselves may lose out on; everyone has their own process, to be sure, but it is a different breadth and depth of relationship to the craft, and that may run relative to the breadth and depth of relationship within oneself.

It can impact everyone, from listeners to economics and professions to the arc of the field. It's really interesting, what choices all of us can make in those different aspects of the music and creative ecosystem, and how we might all shape it.

Liz: This conversation connects to the Turing test, which is a way to think about how well humans can tell if they are communicating with a person or a computer from behind a screen. In his 1950 paper "Computing Machinery and Intelligence," Alan Turing proposed an "imitation game" to test a computer program's ability to deceive a human interlocutor. Turing predicted that within 50 years, computers would be able to play the game so convincingly that an average interrogator would have no more than a 70% chance of correctly identifying the computer after five minutes of questioning (Turing 1950).

A study by AI 21 Labs found that 32% of people couldn't tell the difference between a human and a bot during a two-minute online chat session (Press 2023). After more than 10 million conversations, the analysis found that people guessed correctly 73% of the time if they were talking with a person, but only 60% of the time when chatting with a bot, with an overall success rate of just 68%. That was three years ago. An important caveat here is not just that computers are getting more sophisticated, but that humans are communicating in ways that are closer to what sophisticated bots produce. The change in communication is working both ways.

Recently, I've talked with listeners who feel tricked when they later learn music that they found on an online streaming site was composed by AI. It's also worth asking what changes in musical aesthetics and/or listener expectations we might encounter as music made by or in significant collaboration with AI proliferates.

In a related aesthetic turn, **mesmi** referenced the moment in time during which Auto-Tune became very popular. This technological tool created a characteristic sound. Producers got excited about using it, and listeners became accustomed to hearing it. Whether or not everyone enjoyed it is a separate issue. The point is that it proliferated.

7. Tell us about ethical questions you have observed or faced related to AI in the music workplace(s).

7.1. Authorship

Frank: AI's use in productions doesn't always *announce* itself. A Belgian film composer I often worked with was once hired to write a string arrangement for a piece by another composer and, as is standard practice, asked for a MIDI file to import into notation software like Sibelius. This typically allows for a faster workflow in producing parts and scores for the performing musicians. But in this case, the client could/would only supply an audio demo, one that, on closer listening, suggested the underlying piece had likely been AI-generated. As a result, with no MIDI file to work from, the arranger was left to transcribe the entire piece by ear. What this, to me, makes visible is how undisclosed AI use can quietly disrupt proven, established professional workflows, and how it unsettles, without always resolving, questions of authorship and transparency. More recently, I've encountered an interesting situation where an AI-generated track lacked a stable, consistent tempo, and this instability meant that the resulting song's tempo drifted enough that it was easier to cut the stems into sections and manually place them on a grid than to program around the fluctuations, which cost valuable production time.

The legal and economics discussion highlighted structural differences between Northern European and Anglo-American legal systems, particularly regarding law where nothing is 100% recoupable. US companies often try to use American contracts, but Europeans are pushing back, leaving Europe unaligned with both US and Chinese companies. In the US, you can't keep the work even if you pay everything back, raising questions about whether terms will change if your songs are claimed by the company. This issue is tied to the broader political climate between the US and Europe as well as techno-colonialism. Through a neo-marxist lens, it reflects techno-feudalism, as creators do not own the tools of production for the music. This shifts the focus toward creative content versus authentic art, especially as the AFM sued Warner and Universal, who themselves had already sued Suno.

7.2. From the panelists and those who asked questions during the conference presentation, important ongoing considerations emerged:

- What does it mean to use systems that were trained with copyrighted material?
- Who do we trust? When we implement AI tools, on whose authority do we use, what kind of authority do we create with them?
- What kinds of impacts are there on listeners of music created with AI tools?
- How are individuals choosing to act or speak up regarding AI's impact in their work and music?
- When it comes to ethical consumption, several additional points arise: Do people who are nervous about the company's ethical practices still listen to Spotify or any other streaming service with which they might not value-align? Do they choose to stop listening to particular lists because they are generated by AI? What is actually included on the toggle to "remove AI" on some of your favorite streaming services?
- When it comes to counting consumption and sales, should there be different Billboard charts for human authored and AI music?
- Where humans use AI tools as part of a larger workflow, what counts as substantively AI-created along a kind of human/machine interactivity scale?
- We can sometimes work more quickly using new tools, but what is the purpose of speed in a creative industry? For whom are we trying to make more, and make more quickly?
- As we follow the dollar in music, does AI implementation follow some other labor changes and become a race to the bottom?

7.3. Limitations

Frank: On a personal level I feel that when using AI starts shrinking your life, it becomes a problem. For that reason, I try to use it consciously, actively choosing what I'm using it for. At the same time, I know how tempting it can be to turn to generative AI when feeling insecure. However, doing so may undermine and even corrupt the true value of any creative process, in which confronting uncertainty is itself an essential part of learning.

8. Conclusion

To conclude, we offer a refined set of questions for music recording professionals and artist-scholars alike to consider when making decisions about the use of AI for music production:

8.1. What critical questions should we be asking ourselves and each other (as creatives, students, scholars, and music industry professionals) about AI and labor, legal concerns, ethical questions, or other areas that you think are important in the music workplace?

Amy: I love this line of thinking that media industries scholar Jennifer Holt introduced me to at a Society for Cinema and Media Studies event, which is from sociologist Shoshana Zuboff (2021): "Who knows, who decides who knows, and who decides who decides who knows?" These questions are currently ruled by AI-hungry technocapitalists upheld and sped on by the current government, and it is up to individuals and collectives alike to hold these unelected people accountable and to regulate them within the industries that we can.

Liz: This conversation has been focused on potential applications of AI in musical creativity and its potential aesthetic and labor implications. It's important to note that this dialogue is not happening in a vacuum. Keep listening for connections between the questions we pose as musician-scholars, and those in overlapping areas. This will help us all bring a critical ear to AI-associated concerns like environmental impact, public safety, and related serious issues that impact all of us.

8.2. How would you advise us to go about the process of discerning how we choose to interact with AI and music in workplace settings, and what guardrails we might wish to put up in our own creative and or professional practice?

mesmi: As music can become a legacy of a culture, the framework of such powerful tools can shape the legacy of an industry, and thereby the culture itself. In this relatively emergent phase of AI technology, we have a responsibility and opportunity to create a framework around AI, especially generative AI, that relates to values of craft, intellectual property and equitable creative labor in the music workplace; and on a deeper underlying level, what values we hold for humanity. Some questions that come to mind for me as we engage in this process are how are the tools made, who benefits from the use and proliferation of these products (monetarily and otherwise), how do we define and protect creative labor and ownership, and how can we create systems that are traceable and transparent (and thereby equitable) in the amount and role of AI use. Is the tool able to keep up with its own "genealogy" can it accurately track its data usage/formation and parse out payment, what it draws from and where remuneration is due? In AI use, what do I gain; what does it cost me, and others? We should keep pondering these considerations, as well as keep asking ourselves what are the best ways to make a step toward the sort of tech-music framework we wish to see. Regarding our own interactions with AI in music workplace settings, I would encourage myself and others to keep at the forefront a discernment process that foundations transparency, traceability, equity and creative fiber, with guard rails related to how closely we are able to remain in alignment with these values.

Frank: Presuming we can work with ethically developed AI models, my main concern, both as an audio professional and as a lecturer educating the next generation of audio producers, is this:

Are we automating tedious administrative overhead, or are we inadvertently outsourcing the core practice that builds human mastery?

Can we identify and preserve the tasks that genuinely motivate us—even when they require significant effort—so we can sustain our interest, enthusiasm, and commitment throughout a long career (usually through skill growth)?

The guardrail I envision is to retain tasks that promote intrinsic motivation, skill growth, and emotional significance, while delegating only those tasks that cause mental fatigue and lack any artistic merit.

Kathryn: I continually return to: *why am I using AI, and why for this?* For me, that has become an important guardrail because it requires me to think not only about what a particular technology is capable of doing, but what I am asking it to do for myself, for us—and, in turn, what we may be choosing not to do ourselves. There are forms of labor that are tedious,

repetitive, or inaccessible at a particular scale, where an assistive tool can be enormously useful. But there are also forms of difficulty that are constitutive of creative and intellectual practice. And I think judgment has to extend beyond the moment when we decide whether or not to use AI. We also have to exercise it in relation to the claims being made *about* AI: what we are told these systems are, what they are capable of, and increasingly, what kind of authority we are being asked to grant them. That question feels particularly urgent as the language surrounding AI becomes increasingly detached from the specific technologies describing it. As I noted at the beginning, AI has a long history and its meaning and contexts have changed over time, and, most recently on September 22, 2026, in his United Nations General Assembly address, President Donald Trump "hereby declared" that "artificial intelligence" should "from here on out be called "super intelligence,"" concluding: "whoever wins AI…whoever wins SI…wins. That's the group that wins."

This declaration is less about the technology and more about what a name is asking us to associate with it. By elevating "artificial" to "super," AI becomes not a collection of technologies, built by real people with specific materials and for different purposes, but rather a seemingly autonomous form of intelligence, one whose development is framed as a competition to be won. Perhaps, one of the simplest questions that we should be asking is what form of agency are we allowing it, and before asking even whether AI is "artificial," "generative," or "super," we might ask instead at a very practical level what the technology actually does, who, why, and what makes that possible, and what forms of human agency we might be replacing, or even erasing, by its use.

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