MUSIC IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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STREAMING & ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

1. Music and New Technologies

In recent years, and particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, the artistic community and cultural management sector have focused on the working realities of musicians in the digital age—encompassing both employment and intellectual property issues arising from the online exploitation of their works, primarily through streaming technology.

This complex landscape brings three critical challenges to the forefront:
- The **inherent precarity** of music professions.
- The urgent **need for adaptation and continuous training** in new technologies.
- The **inadequate legislative protection** for copyright and related rights, which remain exposed to the business risks of the free market.

To these challenges, we must now add Artificial Intelligence. Currently, this leading-edge technology is being developed and funded without sufficient oversight, raising crucial ethical and legal questions. To the extent that these issues remain unregulated, they create a vacuum susceptible to lobbying and risk establishing a *fait accompli* in the creative industries.

2. The Challenge of Generative Artificial Intelligence

The artistic community is facing an unprecedented rate of income loss. The abuse of AI, driven by its unregulated exploitation, is leading to a loss of composure and perspective, with the mistake of adopting a purely oppositional stance being repeated: "AI is the enemy - it must be expelled from Art." This is an extreme narrative of an asymmetric threat, a digital Armageddon brought on by an uncontrollable machine that develops superior intelligence and destroys culture. While it is a compelling science-fiction dystopia, the reality is far more chaotic and complex. AI should be viewed as another tool to be integrated into our creative toolkit.[1]

Cultural management has developed tools, methods, and has extensively researched the Creative Industries. However, its findings often circulate internally within academia, failing to disseminate to the artistic community, the union movement, and, most importantly, failing to be applied to policy. This occurs precisely at a moment when techno-oligarchs are prepared to alter the very "social contract" to the extent that it impedes their vision of innovation.[2]

Legal science is struggling to keep pace with these rapid developments. Legislative initiatives to date have been hesitant, ambivalent, and generally inadequate to address the scope of the problems and the gravity of the circumstances. This discomfort is evident in the EU AI Act (Regulation 2024/1689)[3], which reflects the expediencies of a political environment where investors have the final say.[4] The US Copyright Office's opinion moves along the same wavelength,[5] concluding that "existing legal principles are sufficient and appropriate to resolve copyright issues."

Generative AI is a manufacturing process, detached from the concepts of lived experience, expression, and creative identity. While this ethical dimension may not be immediately apparent in the output, as the public may not be able to distinguish the creator of a work, it is imperative in the medium term to ensure fair compensation for artists whose works are used in AI training (the "input" problem). Correspondingly, significant income losses are recorded from the "output" side: the cannibalization of musicians' traditional revenue streams due to the substitution of their work by AI-generated content. It is estimated that by 2028, 24% of music creators' revenues will be at risk, leading to a cumulative loss of €22 billion.[6] A fair and realistic solution could be the extension of legislation on private copying (in Greece, Law 2121/1993, Art. 18).[7]

3. Streaming and Fair Compensation

Regarding streaming, artist remuneration is truly disheartening. Musicians earn fractions of a cent per stream, even as streaming accounts for 67% of the recorded music industry's revenue. The opaque financial management of the music industry, the predatory contracts of record labels, and the inaction of the artistic community allow Spotify, the world's largest streaming service, to pay rights holders an average of $0.003-$0.005 per stream.[8] This means an artist needs more than 800,000 monthly streams to earn the equivalent of a full-time, minimum-wage job at $15/hour.

In his 2015 annual report to shareholders, CEO Daniel Ek stated, "we don't sell music," but rather subscriptions and access;[9] music is merely an operational cost to be systematically compressed.[10] If AI-generated music does not generate royalties, providers will favor it as a cost-effective alternative. Thus, the already saturated "content" environment will be flooded with a plethora of royalty-free music, further intensifying the cannibalization of musicians' revenues, especially when the current pro-rata distribution algorithm exclusively favors top-performing artists.

With the financials of streaming providers remaining obscure, as they systematically report losses,[11] the principle of fair compensation must be clarified and formulated through a WIPO directive or similar "soft" legislation. Until then, a standing committee with local observatories could be established to circulate information and promote collaboration.

4. The International Conference: "MUSIC IN THE DIGITAL AGE"

Throughout its history, the music industry has experienced technological innovations as crises - and has always found ways to overcome them. The first printed score, mechanical pianos, magnetic tape, personal computers, broadband networks, and file-sharing all brought radical changes to the production and consumption of music. Musicians met these challenges by adopting and adapting to the innovations. Where this did not happen, negotiation failed: at the dawn of the digital age (late 20th century), record labels fought the internet by all means possible. The result was that they missed the train of the digital era, which is now driven by technology companies.[12]

Today, we find ourselves in a similarly critical period. It is now clear that new technologies are reshaping the creative industries and creating unprecedented challenges for musicians and audiovisual creators. Revenue streams are being disrupted, legislation is struggling to keep pace, and artistic labor is undervalued in a digital economy that prioritizes scale over sustainability. Furthermore, the degradation of musical work into mere "content" has cultural consequences in terms of aesthetics, symbolism, and social functionality. The crucial question is how musicians can adapt and negotiate to shape the future.

APOLLON, the Greek Collective Management Organization for Musicians' Neighboring Rights, and FIM, the International Federation of Musicians are organizing the conference "Music in the Digital Age: Streaming & Artificial Intelligence," an international forum on the future of music rights that brings together artists, industry professionals, academics, journalists, lawyers, politicians, and technologists.

During this three-day conference, held under the auspices of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and various university departments, leading experts from around the world will address critical issues:

🎵 **Streaming & Fair Pay** - How can we ensure sustainable and equitable compensation models in a hyper-saturated digital economy?

🤖 **Artificial Intelligence & Copyright** - How can the rights of musicians be protected when AI systems are trained on their works and compete directly against them?

⚖️ **Legislative Frameworks & Innovation** - How can these be balanced to shape ethical AI and a fair digital market?

Through specialized panels, sessions, and cross-sector dialogue, we will analyze these challenges, seeking concrete and realistic solutions that will empower artists in the digital era to confront the potential cultural risks posed by new technologies. The keynotes, discussions, and networking opportunities with leading professionals from around the globe offer a unique chance to get up-to-date on the latest developments in music rights, technology, and policy.

More details on the three-day program and an updated list of panels and speakers can be found on the APOLLON and FIM websites
(https://apollon.org.gr/music-in-the-digital-age/
and https://www.fim-musicians.org/music-in-the-digital-age-streaming-and-ai/).
Alternatively you may scan the QR Code.

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📍 SNF Cultural Center, Syggrou Avenue 364, 17674 Kallithea
📞 +30 210 3252980
✉️ musicinthedigitalage@apollon.org.gr
🔗 https://apollon.org.gr/music-in-the-digital-age

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