



MUSIC IN THE DIGITAL AGE

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE | DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND ARTISTS' RIGHTS

ATHENS, OCTOBER 22-24, STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION CULTURAL CENTER

KEYNOTES

Music in the Digital Age: Streaming & Artificial Intelligence has been a three-day international forum organized by APOLLON (Greek CMO for musicians' neighboring rights) and FIM (International Federation of Musicians). Against the backdrop of **AI-generated content and the dominance of streaming platforms**, the conference examined how **revenue models, legal frameworks and artistic labor are being reshaped** in a digital economy that prioritizes scale over sustainability.

Bringing together artists, journalists, industry professionals, legal experts, academics, policy makers and technologists, the event focused on three core questions:

- How to build **sustainable and equitable compensation** models in a saturated streaming market?
- How to protect creators' rights when **AI is trained on and competes with their work?**
- What role should legislation play in **securing ethical AI and fairer digital markets** without stifling innovation?

Christophe van Vaerenbergh (Managing Director, PlayRight) tackles the critical issue of fair remuneration in the streaming era. Given the industry's record-breaking revenues and the zero-residual reality for session musicians, he challenges the efficacy of individual contracts and the current implementation of the EU CDSM Directive.



APOLLON
GREEK MUSICIANS'
COLLECTING SOCIETY



KEYNOTES | CHRISTOPHE VAN VAERENBERGH

Solutions For Artists & Authors

Athens, October 22, 2025
Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests

First, I would like to thank Apollon and FIM for their wonderful hospitality and for inviting me today to speak about streaming and later moderating a panel of distinguished experts in this field.

Streaming is a topic that has become increasingly important in the last couple of years for performing artists and their representatives such as collective management organizations (CMOs), guilds, and unions. And for obvious reasons. According to recent reports by IFPI, almost 70%, and even more in some markets, of the global revenue on recorded music today is generated via streaming. So it is fair to say that streaming has become the main channel for music lovers to access, discover, and enjoy the music created by our artists.

Those artists, however, are not getting a fair share of these revenues, notwithstanding the claims from record producers that more and more artists are benefiting from streaming, notwithstanding the claims from streaming platforms that they put the artists at the center of their activities and that they care about copyright and neighboring rights. The large majority of musicians that my organization - PlayRight, which is the Belgian CMO for performing artists - represents, are session musicians or non-featured artists especially and they are not getting a single cent out of streaming. If anyone in this room had the audacity to call me out on this statement, I would reply with a single statement, a single sentence, "Show me the money... Show me how many session musicians are getting paid for streaming today and how much."

But there's a more fundamental discussion, a more fundamental question here, and that is, why should it be that musicians, session musicians should even be paid residuals after the recording session? And that is something that I always care to explain certainly when I go out on lobbying efforts.

A couple of years ago, I saw a documentary on one of the most important bands in the history of modern music, maybe some of you have heard of, notably a group of musicians called The Wrecking Crew. Now The Wrecking Crew were a band of very talented session musicians based in Los Angeles who, in the 1960s and '70s, helped record in the studios more than 40 No1 hits for featured artists such as Sonny & Cher, Frank Sinatra, Mamas and the Papas and The Beach Boys. In this documentary, it's very beautiful, you can witness the chemistry, the interaction between The Wrecking Crew and the featured artists, the suggestions the Crew provides, their input, and bold experimental interpretations, many of which actually made it to the final master. And it is precisely because of the recognition of this added artistic value that translates into economic value that the Rome Convention and afterwards the WPPT were adopted to compensate the musicians, to allow them to get a cut in the success they helped create.

And yet this compensation comes on top of the one-off fee non-featured artists receive for a recording session. Just to give you an idea, when one of our Belgian musicians works in the studio today, he or she will get a one-off fee of about 250 to 300 euros for a four-hour recording session, a figure that has actually remained very stable for the last decades.

It is only equitable, it is only fair that when the recording to which musicians contributed and that might generate revenues for sometimes decades on end, that those same musicians get a share in the economic and financial success of this track. But here's the funny thing. When that same record, when that record is broadcast on terrestrial radio, musicians get a remuneration right for public performance in some countries thanks to the Rome Convention and WPPT. When that same record is streamed, most musicians get nothing. Why is that? Why, where, and how did the added value, as if by magic, disappear? Perhaps it's time to consider an update of the existing international treaties, something Ms. Langer from the WIPO already hinted at, but also something that Marcos de Souza from Brazil, who is unfortunately not with us here today, will touch upon in his presentation during the panel session after this keynote speech.

Not only non-featured artists are not getting what they deserve. Often this is also the case for featured artists, as already touched upon this morning by David Martin. Older contracts predating the internet and streaming era do not provide satisfactory compensation, whereas new contracts still revert to time-old practices, like recouping for activities by labels and record producers that no longer make sense in the digital era. Ioan already referred to it this morning. The "Streams and



Dreams" study part II, a survey conducted in the EU in 2024, with the participation of 9,500 musicians, clearly showed that artists are not successful in obtaining better contracts in terms of compensation and have a hard time breaking open and adapting older contracts.

Contracts are not the solution. Individual musicians, and certainly session musicians who are in the eyes of producers interchangeable, do not have the economic clout and leverage to negotiate fair deals. Collective bargaining agreements such as the ones which are currently being negotiated in the UK by the Musicians' Union did not deliver upon their promises until now in France, as we will see later on in the panel with Philippe Gaultier.

Only a collective remuneration right, non-waivable, non-transferable, to be collected by the collective management organization of the musicians themselves provides sufficient guarantees for fair compensation. And that is exactly what the Belgian legislator enacted when transposing the European CDSM Directive in 2022. Other EU member states have meanwhile also transposed this directive which was meant to provide us with an answer for the value gap and which clearly states in its considerations number #72 that there's not a proper balance between musicians and those who are using the repertoire.

But unfortunately, this directive did not deliver upon promise. What is the result? Status quo in most European countries, EU member states, meaning hardly any compensation for musicians five years after the delay expired to implement the directive. Meanwhile, big tech and the majors have attacked the Belgian act before our constitutional court which, in its judgment, referred no less than 13 prejudicial questions to the Court of Justice in Luxembourg where the case is currently pending. You asked me the question, John, prior to this panel, where we are on that case. So all the conclusions have been introduced within the European Court and we're now waiting for a date to be set to have pleadings and audience before the court. But it's predominantly a written procedure. I must add that we had the support of a number of other European member states supporting the Belgian position, not the smallest countries, I must add. But unfortunately the regulations of the Court of Justice prohibit me to divulge more details on the content of those conclusions. I'm even liable as a private person, so I'm not gonna go there.

Now, if according to Big Tech and the majors, a collective remuneration right is not the proper way to provide fair compensation for musicians, what is the proper



solution then? Contracts? The study to which I referred earlier on clearly demonstrates that in a lot of cases there isn't even a contract or an invoice. So if contracts are the solution, well prove it. Again, show me the money, provide the data. The whole debate on streaming as well as the one on AI, which is for later during this conference, is a symptom of a much deeper crisis in the music industry.

Music is no longer about emotions, stories and creativity. Music has become a commodity in the hands of shareholders, venture capitalists, investment bankers and pension funds. There seems to be less and less room for experiment, for adventure, for diversity, for alternatives to mainstream dictated by mercantile forces. I'm old enough to have witnessed in my life the rise of genres such as hard rock, heavy metal, new wave, punk, grunge, just to name a few. So tell me how many new genres or artists that are uncompromisingly challenging the musical status quo and are truly life-changing, have you seen popping up the last decade? And why is that? Because the people running the music business don't want to take any risks. They have their spreadsheets, their quarterly reports and the return on investment to take into account.

Maybe it's time to take the music back... I've heard again this morning this sanctimonious story about "We saved the music industry from piracy." Might be, but it's an interpretation, it's a self-justifying story as far as I'm concerned. There are other solutions, there are other ways possible. I don't have all the answers, but what I do know is this, music is an authentic expression of human creativity that we should nurture and cherish. Those who practice this form of art should be fairly compensated for their investment and not be exploited. Robust copyright and neighboring rights protection is an integral part of a vibrant and diverse cultural life. Music is worth fighting for. And to help me to get an overview of the current battlefield and battles to come, I'm joined today by a distinguished set of speakers.

They hail from various regions and different backgrounds. Together with them, we will dive a little bit deeper into the various aspects already touched upon during this introduction or keynote speech. Some of them were not available to join us here, but they are waiting for us online and the very first person that we will turn to now for discussing some of the aspects that I already touched upon from the angle of a policymaker, is Mr. Marcos de Souza, who is online right now, if everything is working correctly, and who will provide us with insight on the Brazilian legislation and also his take on what happened in GRULAC in 2015 and the activities that he has been following up on for quite some time now within WIPO. So if everything

goes well technically, I would gladly hand over the floor to Mr. Marcos de Souza. But I just learned that Julie from Korea is online. And so as long as she is online, I will take advantage of that moment because connection can be lost at any moment.

**Christophe van Vaerenbergh,
Managing Director, PlayRight**