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AI-Generated Music Artists and Hybrid Collaborations: Recent Developments

Summary

- **AI-Driven Music Creation:** Advances in AI now enable generation of song elements – from lyrics and melodies to vocals and fully produced tracks. Tools like generative language models can write lyrics, and neural audio models compose instrumentals or even synthesize singing voices, producing convincing new songs in various genres. For example, Google's *MusicLM* can turn text prompts into music (though not publicly released due to copyright concerns) [1], and startups offer apps to create songs from simple inputs [2] [3]. These systems greatly expand who can create music, but also raise questions of originality and rights.

- **AI-Generated "Artists" Emerge:** Entire music acts have been created with AI. *The Velvet Sundown* is a striking recent case – an indie folk-rock "band" whose music, vocals, images, and backstory were all AI-generated [4]. They went viral with over 1 million Spotify streams before admitting their true nature, sparking debates about transparency and authenticity in streaming music [5]. Similarly, a viral *"AI Drake"* track in 2023 featured AI-cloned vocals of Drake and The Weeknd, fooling millions of listeners before being removed for copyright infringement [6]. Such cases highlight both the creative potential and the legal/ethical dilemmas of AI in music.

- **Hybrid Collaborations:** Many human artists are now collaborating with AI as a creative partner. In classical music, AI helped complete Beethoven's unfinished *10th Symphony*, which premiered in 2021 as a human-AI co-composition [7]. Contemporary musicians have used AI to generate ideas or vocals – e.g. DJ David Guetta famously used AI to write lyrics "in the style of Eminem" and to clone Eminem's voice for an unreleased live track [8] [9]. Artists like Grimes and Holly Herndon have even **open-sourced AI models of their voices** for fans to create new music, a novel form of collaboration. These hybrid approaches show AI as a tool to augment (not replace) human creativity.

- **Industry Deals and Initiatives:** The music industry has begun striking major AI-related deals. Label partnerships with AI startups are expanding: Warner Music Group first **signed an algorithm (Endel)** in 2019 to release 20 albums of AI-generated ambient music, and in 2023 its Spinnin' Records label partnered with Endel for 50 AI-generated "wellness" albums of functional *chill-out* music [10] [11]. In the pop domain, Universal Music Group (UMG) and Google have explored licensing artist voices for authorized AI-generated songs, so that fans can make AI music **legitimately** with artists' approval and revenue sharing [12] [13]. Meanwhile, artist-entrepreneurs like **will.i.am** are investing in AI music tech – funding apps that compose songs from text prompts [2] [3] and launching AI-powered interactive music platforms – signaling a commercial push to embrace AI in music creation.

- **Challenges and Responses:** The rise of AI-generated music has led to calls for regulation and transparency. Music bodies like the Ivors Academy and BPI argue that AI should **"serve human creativity, not supplant it,"** urging labels and lawmakers to require clear labeling of AI-generated

content [14] . Streaming platforms have started removing suspect AI-made tracks that game the system (Spotify deleted tens of thousands of songs made via the AI app Boomy due to *artificial streaming* bots [15] [16]). Prominent voices such as will.i.am suggest new norms – for instance, he advocates that artists should **own the AI models of their voice** to control how their voice is cloned or used [17] . In sum, while AI opens exciting frontiers in music, the industry is actively negotiating how to integrate it ethically and sustainably.

Introduction

Artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming the music industry. In the past few years, **AI-generated music** has evolved from a tech curiosity to a mainstream reality. Today's AI systems can contribute to every aspect of songwriting and production. Algorithms can **write lyrics**, suggest melodies and chords, imitate musical styles, and even **generate human-like vocals** that sing. Entire songs – instrumentals and vocals – can be created by AI with minimal human input. This has enabled new kinds of music "artists" that are partly or wholly powered by AI, and it has facilitated novel collaborations where humans and AI work together to create music.

These developments are not confined to any single genre. AI is being used to compose relaxing ambient music for wellness apps, to churn out catchy pop and hip-hop tracks, and to attempt feats in classical composition that challenge the creativity of even the great masters. With major record labels signing deals for AI-generated content and famous musicians embracing AI tools, the integration of AI into music is accelerating. At the same time, these changes bring **significant debate**: about authenticity and transparency (are we listening to a human or a machine?), about intellectual property (who owns an AI-created song, or the data used to train it?), and about the very definition of an "artist." This report surveys the recent landscape of AI-generated artists and hybrid AI-human collaborations in music, highlighting key projects, industry moves, and genre applications – from chill beats to classical symphonies – as well as the notable cases of *The Velvet Sundown* and *will.i.am*'s ventures in AI music.

AI Systems for Lyrics, Composition, Vocals, and Full Songs

Modern AI music systems can contribute to different parts of the creative process. Below we outline how AI generates **lyrics**, **melodies/composition**, **vocals**, and even entire **songs**, along with examples of tools and projects in each category:

AI-Generated Lyrics and Songwriting Assistance

Recent advances in large language models (LLMs) like GPT-4 have made it possible for AI to **generate song lyrics** in various styles. Given a theme or prompt, these models can produce verses and rhymes that mimic a desired mood or artist. Songwriters are beginning to use such AI tools as creative aids – for instance, to overcome writer's block or generate multiple lyrical ideas quickly [18] [19] . Dedicated lyric generator apps (e.g. *Audoir* or *LyricStudio*) let users input a topic or style and output draft lyrics in that vein [18] [20] . While AI-authored lyrics may sometimes be clichéd or require human polishing, they can serve as a springboard for human songwriters. An example in practice was DJ **David Guetta**'s experiment: he prompted an AI (likely ChatGPT) to *"write a verse in the style of Eminem about future rave."* The result provided him with on-topic lyrics ("This is the future rave sound...") that, while not perfect poetry, were coherent and rhyming [8] .

Guetta then used these AI-written lines in a live track (with an AI-cloned Eminem voice), demonstrating how AI can help generate lyrical content as a starting point [9] .

Professional musicians are also exploring AI for songwriting. In interviews, will.i.am noted he has been using AI to **ideate lyrics and melodies** for years as part of his creative process [21] [22] . However, the use of AI in songwriting raises the question of credit and originality – if a hit song's lyrics come partly from a machine, how do we value the human songwriter's artistry? To address such concerns, industry experts emphasize that AI should remain a *"co-writer"* or tool under human direction, rather than a solo composer taking jobs from humans [14] . Indeed, most successful uses so far treat AI-generated lyrics as **draft material** that humans curate and refine, keeping the artist's personal voice and vision in control.

AI Composition and Melody Generation

Beyond words, AI is composing music at the level of melodies, harmonies, and instrumentals. AI-driven composition has roots in classical music – for example, the algorithmic composer *AIVA (Artificial Intelligence Virtual Artist)* has been creating orchestral pieces and soundtracks since the late 2010s, trained on classical works to generate new compositions in a similar style [23] . AIVA's music has been used in video games and advertising, and it even earned the status of a recognized composer in a music rights society. Likewise, Sony's *Flow Machines* project (an early AI composition system) famously co-wrote a pop song, "Daddy's Car," in the style of The Beatles in 2016, illustrating that AI can learn musical styles and produce new works blending those influences.

In the 2020s, AI composition has reached new heights. OpenAI's research on *MuseNet* and *Jukebox* showed that neural networks can generate original music across genres – *MuseNet* (2019) focused on multi-instrumental compositions in styles from classical to jazz, while *Jukebox* (2020) went further to produce complete songs with vocals by training on vast music data [1] . These were research breakthroughs demonstrating that AI can capture long-range musical structure. Meanwhile, startups have built user-friendly AI composition tools. For example, the app **Endel** generates endless ambient music and soundscapes algorithmically; its AI composes gentle rhythms and textures tailored for activities like sleep, relaxation, or focus. Endel's technology uses rules and AI to create calming "functional music" on the fly, reacting to inputs like time of day or heart rate [24] [25] . This kind of AI-generated *background/chill music* has become popular for wellness and study playlists.

Text-to-music models are another leap in AI composition. In 2023, Google introduced *MusicLM*, an AI model that can create musical audio from descriptive text prompts [1] . For instance, a user could request "a calming violin melody with piano accompaniment" or "upbeat pop with tropical house vibes," and MusicLM will generate an original music clip matching that description. MusicLM could even build on a hummed tune or adjust style/tempo as instructed [1] . While Google has not released MusicLM publicly (due to caution over potential copyright learning in the model), it demonstrated the *granularity of control* now possible – users can compose by describing what they want to hear. Other tech firms like Meta have similarly open-sourced text-to-music AI (e.g. Meta's *MusicGen* in 2023), and open communities (e.g. Diffusion models for audio) are advancing the state of AI composition. The result is an expanding toolkit where AI can generate melodies and full instrumental arrangements at the click of a button, covering genres from classical to hip-hop.

Notably, AI has also been used to *extend or complete existing compositions*. A landmark example is **Beethoven's 10th Symphony**. Beethoven died leaving only fragments of a Tenth; in a 2021 project, a team

of musicologists and engineers trained an AI on Beethoven's works and style, then used it to help compose and **complete the 10th Symphony**, which was performed by a full orchestra nearly two centuries after Beethoven's time [7] . The AI generated candidate passages which human composers iteratively refined, aiming to respect Beethoven's known sketches and style. The successful premiere of this AI-assisted symphony in Bonn, Germany [7] was hailed as a remarkable blend of music history and technology – an AI effectively collaborating with a long-deceased genius. Similar efforts have had AI finish Schubert's unfinished pieces and others, suggesting AI can act as a diligent student extending the work of human composers in the classical realm.

AI-Generated Vocals and Voice Cloning

One of the most striking advances in AI music is the ability to generate **realistic vocals** – that is, having a computer *sing* or mimic a human singer's voice. This involves two aspects: generating vocal *melodies/ phrasing* and synthesizing the *timbre* of a human voice. Early forms of vocal synthesis appeared in products like Yamaha's **Vocaloid** (which uses sample-based synthesis to sing typed lyrics, popular in Japan for virtual pop idols). But modern AI has taken vocal generation to a new level with deep learning-based voice models.

Voice cloning AI can learn a particular singer's voice characteristics from audio data and reproduce them. Companies like *Supertone* in Korea claim their tech can create "a hyper-realistic and expressive voice [not] distinguishable from real humans" [26] . In China, Tencent Music Entertainment (TME) built an AI system called **Lingyin Engine** that mimics singers' voices. By 2022, TME had released *over 1,000 songs* with AI-generated vocals that sound human [27] [28] . One of these tracks, featuring an AI voice "singing" in the style of a pop singer, became the first AI-performed song to surpass **100 million streams** in China [29] [30] . TME even used AI to recreate the voices of deceased stars like Teresa Teng and Anita Mui, producing tribute songs that sparked both awe and controversy about "resurrecting" iconic voices [31] [30] . This indicates how advanced and commercially significant AI vocals have become – a single AI-sung hit can achieve huge audience numbers.

This trend entered Western headlines in 2023 with the case of **"Heart on My Sleeve,"** a song uploaded by anonymous creators using AI-trained models of superstar artists Drake and The Weeknd. The AI-generated vocals so closely imitated the rappers' voices and style that the song went viral – it accrued *15 million views on TikTok* and over *600,000 streams on Spotify* in a matter of days [6] . Listeners were stunned by how convincingly the AI had produced what sounded like a real collaboration between Drake and The Weeknd (who had no involvement). Universal Music Group, representing those artists, swiftly demanded the track's removal as "infringing content created with generative AI" [32] . The incident ignited intense debate: fans were excited by the remix potential, while artists and labels raised alarms about **voice IP rights** and musical deepfakes. As Drake himself warned after earlier AI mimicry of his voice, this felt like a "final straw" [33] – prompting the industry to seek solutions so that artists have control and are compensated when their voices are cloned.

AI vocals are not only about impersonation of existing stars; they also enable synthetic voices for *original* virtual artists. *The Velvet Sundown* project (detailed later in this report) created entirely fictional singers with AI vocals. And countless hobbyist musicians are now using AI voice models to add singers to their tracks without hiring a vocalist – for instance, using software like **Synthesizer V** or **Voicemod** that offer AI-synthesized singing voices with various characters and tones [34] . These tools can take a melody and lyrics as input and output a vocal line sung in a chosen AI voice, often with surprising realism. Recently, Voicemod

(known for voice-changing tech) even launched an AI *Text-to-Song* feature after acquiring a singing synthesis startup, allowing users to input lyrics and get a sung performance in different voice styles [34] [35] .

The implications of AI vocals are huge. They can democratize music production – a solo producer can have a choir or lead singer on demand – and enable creative experiments (e.g. famous singers "performing" songs they never actually sang). But they also force tough conversations on **ownership and consent**. Recognizing this, some forward-thinking artists have approached it collaboratively: artist **Grimes** in 2023 announced she would allow anyone to use an AI model of her voice to create new songs *legally*, as long as they split royalties with her. This essentially gave fans permission to make "AI Grimes" music without fear of takedowns, framing the AI as a tool for co-creation rather than piracy. Similarly, musician Holly Herndon developed "Holly+," an AI model of her voice, and invited other artists to experiment with it under an open license – an artistic project exploring what it means to share one's vocal identity with an algorithm. These cases contrast with artists like Drake or Ice Cube who have come out strongly against unauthorized AI uses of their voice, illustrating a divide in approach. **Will.i.am**, for his part, has argued that artists *should have ownership over their AI voice models* and a say in how those clones are used, to protect their "vibe" and creative legacy [17] . This is an area where we can expect new frameworks – possibly even new rights or watermarking technologies – to emerge so that the **human voice** (the most personal instrument) isn't exploited by AI without permission.

End-to-End Song Generators

The ultimate goal for some is AI that can create an entire song – combining lyrics, composition, arrangement, and vocals into a finished piece. We are witnessing the early stages of this capability. One approach is **text-conditioned music generation**, as mentioned with MusicLM and similar models, where a single system tries to handle all aspects given a prompt. Another approach is to chain specialized AIs: for example, use an LLM to write lyrics, a composition model to create the melody and chords, and a vocal model to sing the lyrics, then maybe a mastering AI to polish the final audio. Startups are actively developing user-friendly services along these lines.

A notable example is **Udio**, a generative AI music app launched in 2024. Backed by musician will.i.am and others, Udio allows a user to input a simple prompt like *"A country song about trucking"* and in a few minutes it generates a 30-second original song snippet – including instrumental accompaniment and even AI-sung vocals [36] [3] . Users can then extend these snippets into longer songs or refine them by adding sections and adjusting lyrics. Impressively, Udio's AI can produce vocals in **multiple languages** and mimic various genres on demand [37] [38] . The app is powered by a proprietary model (Udio v1) and was launched in beta for free, quickly attracting so much interest that the servers were overloaded at first [39] . This demonstrates real consumer appetite for *one-stop AI song creation*. Udio emphasizes it blocks any prompts that would plagiarize existing songs (no cloning copyrighted lyrics or generating known melodies) [40] , aligning with an industry push for responsible use. Its motto is enabling the "next generation of music creators" by letting anyone with an idea make a song [41] .

Other platforms like **Boomy**, **Soundful**, **Mubert**, and **Amper** (now owned by Shutterstock) have similarly offered AI-driven song generation for users, particularly targeting content creators in need of royalty-free music. Boomy, founded in 2019, let users pick a style (hip-hop, lo-fi, electronic, etc.) and would algorithmically generate a unique track which the user could further tweak or release. By 2023, Boomy's users had created an astonishing **14.4 million songs**, which the company claimed was about *13.7% of the world's recorded music* catalog [16] . Many of these AI-generated tracks even made it onto streaming services

via Boomy's distribution partnerships. This volume, however, triggered alarms about potential **spam** – in May 2023 Spotify removed a chunk of Boomy-uploaded songs and temporarily blocked new releases, citing "artificial streaming" activity (bots inflating play counts) associated with some of those tracks [15] [42]. Although Boomy itself wasn't necessarily at fault for the bot abuse, the incident showed how easily AI can flood platforms with content and how the music industry is responding to maintain quality and fairness [43] [44]. It became a cautionary tale: just because AI can pump out endless songs doesn't mean all that music should live on major streaming services, especially if it's used to game the system.

Despite such hiccups, AI-generated full songs are here to stay and improving quickly. Even established music production software suites are adding AI composition features. We can expect a proliferation of "AI music studios" online where a user can choose a mood, enter a few keywords, and get a fully arranged song – perhaps with an AI singer included. The quality of these productions is rising, but typically a human touch (for fine-tuning lyrics, adding expressiveness, etc.) can elevate them further. The line between *"AI as a tool"* and *"AI as an autonomous artist"* blurs most at this end-to-end stage. As we'll see with AI-generated bands like Velvet Sundown, the question arises: if a song is entirely AI-created under some human direction, who is the artist? The human directing it, the AI, or a fictional persona representing the project? The music industry is only beginning to grapple with these novel scenarios.

Below is a summary table of some **notable AI music tools and projects** and their capabilities:

AI Tool / Project	Capabilities	Notable Use or Outcome
Endel (AI soundscapes)	Algorithm generates ambient "functional" music (adaptive to user context)	First-ever algorithm signed by a major label (Warner) – produced 20 albums of ambient music (2019) [45]. In 2023, partnered with WMG's Spinnin' Records to create 50 AI-generated wellness albums [10] [11].
AIVA (Virtual Composer)	Composes original classical-style and symphonic pieces	Used for game and film music; first AI to register as a composer with a rights society. Active in assisting composers with classical works.
Boomy (Song generator)	Generates complete songs in various genres with one click	Users created 14.4 million tracks (2019-2023) [16]. Some tracks gained streaming traction, but thousands were removed in 2023 due to spam concerns [15]. Shows both scale and challenges of AI music on streaming platforms.
Udio (Text-to-song app)	Generates 30s song drafts (with music & vocals) from text prompts; supports extensions and multi-language vocals	Launched 2024 with backing from will.i.am and Andreessen Horowitz [2] [3]. Impressed early users with output quality; highlights trend of user-friendly AI music creation.
Suno (Generative music platform)	AI platform that can create songs with AI vocals from prompts or provided lyrics	Reportedly used by The Velvet Sundown project to help create their AI-generated album tracks [46]. Illustrates how accessible tools enable fully AI-composed and performed songs.

AI Tool / Project	Capabilities	Notable Use or Outcome
Supertone (Voice AI)	Deep learning voice synthesis – clones voices or generates new singing voices that sound human	Gained fame recreating voices of deceased K-pop singers. Acquired by HYBE (BTS's label) in 2022 for $32M [26] [47] , indicating music industry's investment in AI vocals for content and interactive media.
OpenAI Jukebox (R&D)	Research model generating full songs (lyrics, music) in the style of various artists from raw audio training	Demonstrated in 2020 by producing new songs *à la* Elvis Presley, Katy Perry, etc. Not a commercial tool but a proof-of-concept that AI can capture musical style end-to-end.
Google MusicLM (R&D)	Text-conditioned music generation model (no lyrics, but detailed instrumental audio)	Announced 2023 with ability to compose music from text descriptions [1] . Produced convincing genre pieces and long compositions, but withheld from public release due to unsolved copyright training issues.
Synthesizer V (AI singer software)	High-fidelity AI singing voice synthesis with user-controlled pitch and lyrics	Widely used by indie music creators to add vocals. Offers multiple AI voice personas (some very realistic). Represents how AI singers can be "plugged into" music projects easily.

(Table: A selection of AI music generation tools/projects of the 2020s, illustrating the range from functional ambient music to pop song generators and voice cloning systems.)

Notable AI-Generated Artist Projects

One of the most fascinating trends is the rise of **AI-generated artists** – music acts or songs presented to the public as if they were by human artists, but which are actually created with significant (or total) AI involvement. These range from anonymous internet uploads to orchestrated projects with fictional backstories. Below, we highlight some of the recent notable examples, including the *Velvet Sundown* band and other cases that have made headlines.

AI-generated promotional image of The Velvet Sundown, an AI-created band whose music, lyrics, and even band member portraits were produced by generative algorithms (under human direction). The band released multiple albums and amassed over a million Spotify streams within weeks before revealing their true nature, sparking debates about authenticity and transparency in music streaming [4] [5] .

The Velvet Sundown: An AI Band Hoax Goes Viral

Perhaps the most headline-grabbing AI music experiment of 2025 was **The Velvet Sundown** – a band that wasn't a "real" band at all. In June 2025, The Velvet Sundown suddenly emerged on streaming platforms with two albums of original music (*Floating On Echoes* and *Dust And Silence*). Their sound was described as *"rustic and heartfelt folk-country in the vein of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young,"* featuring rich vocal harmonies and mellow guitar work [48] . The group's Spotify profile even listed four band members with evocative names (vocalist *Gabe Farrow*, guitarist *Lennie West*, bassist *Milo Rains*, and percussionist *Orion "Rio" Del Mar*) [49] .

With bearded faces in the promo photos and an Instagram full of seemingly artsy band snapshots, The Velvet Sundown initially appeared to be an up-and-coming indie folk ensemble.

Within weeks, they went **viral**. The Velvet Sundown's tracks mysteriously found their way into algorithmic playlists – everything from "Vietnam War Music" nostalgia mixes to morning acoustic vibes [50] . The band's monthly listeners shot above 1 million on Spotify [51] , a number most new indie bands only dream of. Yet fans and journalists searching for info on this band hit a wall: no live show histories, no prior press – something was off. Observant listeners noticed an odd *uncanny valley* quality to the photos (slightly distorted, as AI images can be) [52] , and even a note on one platform (Deezer) quietly stating that some tracks *"may have been created using artificial intelligence."* [50]

The truth began to unravel in early July 2025. First, a person calling himself **Andrew Frelon** came forward claiming to be an "adjunct member" of The Velvet Sundown. In an interview with Rolling Stone (on July 2), Frelon alleged that **the band's songs were generated using the Suno AI music platform** and that the entire project was an "art hoax" meant to troll the industry [46] . "It's marketing. It's trolling," he said – implying the creators wanted to prove a point about how an AI-made band could game the system [53] . This caused a stir: had The Velvet Sundown really been an AI all along?

Immediately, the official Velvet Sundown social media accounts blasted Frelon's claims as false, calling him an imposter trying to hijack their identity [54] [55] . The band (or whoever runs it) posted statements that *someone* was spreading misinformation and that they had "no affiliation" with any Andrew Frelon [56] . This only deepened the intrigue, as it became a surreal cat-and-mouse narrative – was the band real and being smeared, or fake and trying to cover its tracks?

Finally, on July 5, 2025, **The Velvet Sundown officially confirmed** what many suspected: *they were an AI-generated act*. In a public statement, they embraced the tagline used earlier on their socials – "Not quite human. Not quite machine." – admitting the music and images were created with AI, guided by human creative direction [57] [58] . In other words, Velvet Sundown was a conceptual art project blending human songwriting ideas with AI tools (like Suno, an AI music generator) to produce the final songs. They had deliberately presented it as a "normal" band to see if the music could stand on its own – and it did, until the reveal.

Outcome and Reactions: The Velvet Sundown saga became 2025's weirdest music story [59] and a cautionary tale for the industry. On one hand, it proved that an AI-assisted group *could* craft songs that millions would listen to – the folk-rock tunes resonated with playlists and didn't raise alarm for many casual listeners. On the other hand, once the ruse was exposed, it sparked serious discussion about **transparency in music**. Industry figures argued that streaming platforms should *label AI-generated music clearly*, so audiences aren't misled [60] [5] . "AI-generated bands like Velvet Sundown…raise serious concerns around transparency, authorship and consent," said Roberto Neri of the Ivors Academy, noting that currently listeners have no easy way to know if a song is by a human or AI [5] . The British Phonographic Industry echoed that call, emphasizing AI should "serve human creativity, not supplant it," and urging new rules for disclosure and licensing of AI content [14] .

For The Velvet Sundown's part, being outed didn't necessarily end the project – their Spotify bio simply updated to describe them as *"a synthetic music project guided by human creative direction"* [61] [62] . In a way, they became an art collective examining the line between human and machine in music. But the hoax element (especially the fake spokesperson stunt by "Frelon") also drew some ire – it involved deceiving the

media. Rolling Stone, The Fader, The Guardian and others ran features dissecting how the hoax was pulled off [58] [63] . Some commentators pointed out that the band's swift streaming success might have been boosted by inauthentic means (possibly *streaming bots* or algorithm exploitation) given Spotify's known issues with artificial streaming [64] , though this wasn't proven. In any case, Velvet Sundown achieved what it set out to do: get the music world talking about AI. It is a prime example of a **hybrid AI artist**, where human creators remain behind the scenes, using AI as a tool to generate the music and even the "faces" of the band, effectively performing a high-concept experiment on the listening public.

Deepfake Hits and AI Imitators

The Velvet Sundown may have been a deliberate art project, but 2023 showed that AI-generated music can emerge from the wilds of the internet too – sometimes to the chagrin of established artists. The **"Heart on My Sleeve"** incident discussed earlier is emblematic: an anonymous TikTok user, known as @ghostwriter, released a track featuring AI-generated vocals that impersonated chart-topping artists Drake and The Weeknd. The song itself was original (AI-composed lyrics and melody), but the selling point was how uncannily it captured Drake's flow and The Weeknd's timbre. It became a viral curiosity – many listeners enjoyed it as a *mashup that never was*, until lawyers stepped in. UMG's takedown of the track [6] underscored that *vocals are protected by publicity and copyright rights* even if the composition is new. This was one of the first major public clashes over AI music IP, and it has pushed the industry into action.

In response, by mid-2023 **Universal Music Group and Google entered talks** to develop a legal framework for AI songs using artists' voices [12] . The idea floated was a platform or tool where fans could create their own AI-generated tracks with famous artists' voices *legitimately*, with the proper licenses in place so that the original artists and rights-holders get paid and can opt in or out [12] [13] . In effect, they began exploring turning the phenomenon into a monetizable, permission-based model rather than whack-a-mole litigation. While details were (and still are) being worked out, this initiative indicates that **major labels see AI music not only as a threat but also as an opportunity** – if harnessed correctly. Imagine a future where you could officially remix your favorite singer's voice into a new song via an authorized AI app; it could open a new revenue stream and fan engagement model, provided it's done with consent and quality control.

Another category of AI-generated "artist" that gained attention is the **AI rapper/virtual influencer**. While the prompt specifically excludes virtual influencers, it's worth noting a notorious case: *FN Meka*, a CG character billed as a robot rapper powered by AI. FN Meka had a TikTok following and, in 2022, even secured a record deal with Capitol Records – only to be quickly dropped after backlash over cultural appropriation and the revelation that his lyrics and voice were actually written and performed by humans (the AI's role was overstated). That incident, albeit a virtual persona more than genuine AI music generation, showed the perils of trying to commercialize an "AI artist" without transparency or sensitivity. The difference with Velvet Sundown is that FN Meka was essentially a puppet (with real humans behind the scenes writing the music) marketed as an AI, whereas Velvet Sundown's music was truly AI-generated with minimal human composition. The public and artists have generally reacted negatively to projects that feel like mere gimmicks or that usurp representation, as happened with FN Meka. This reinforces that for AI-generated artists to be accepted, they may need to be genuine about their nature and perhaps offer something creatively interesting beyond a marketing stunt.

On a more positive experimental note, AI has also been used to pay **homage to past artists**. In 2022, an AI program in China produced a song "in the voice of" the late Cantopop star Anita Mui, as mentioned above, which garnered huge streaming numbers [65] [30] . And in the West, a project called "Lost Tapes of the 27

Club" (2021) utilized AI to create songs in the style of musicians who died at age 27 (like Jimi Hendrix and Kurt Cobain) as a mental health awareness campaign. They trained models on those artists' catalogs and generated new tracks that listeners found eerily close to the real thing. Those songs were released openly as AI tributes, not to fool anyone but to imagine "what might have been" and draw attention to human issues. This shows another face of AI-generated art: **pastiche and preservation** – using AI to keep alive the *styles* of artists who are gone, or to emulate genres past, arguably like a sophisticated form of fan fiction in music.

AI in Chill, Ambient, and Background Music

One area where AI-generated music has really thrived commercially is in **chill-out, ambient, and functional music**. This type of music – think instrumental lo-fi beats, meditation music, nature soundscapes – is in high demand for relaxation, study, sleep, and wellness. It's relatively low stakes in terms of complexity, and listeners often treat it as background audio, making it a prime candidate for AI generation.

Companies like **Endel** have pioneered this space. Endel's AI generates endless streams of gentle sounds tailored to certain modes (Sleep, Relax, Focus, etc.), and it personalizes the output with inputs like time of day or user heart rate [24] . In a groundbreaking move, Endel signed a **distribution deal with Warner Music Group in 2019** – effectively becoming the first algorithm to "sign" to a major label – to release 20 albums of AI-made soundscapes [45] [66] . These albums had titles like *Clear Night* or *Rainy Sleep*, and they were algorithmically generated but packaged as music albums on streaming services. The fact a major label embraced this indicated that such functional music was both low-risk and potentially high-reward (listeners might loop these tracks for hours).

Fast forward to 2023: WMG doubled down on AI ambient music through its dance imprint **Spinnin' Records**. Spinnin' partnered with Endel to create **50 AI-generated "wellness" albums**, repurposing the sounds of some of its electronic artists into calming soundscapes [10] [11] . Essentially, Endel's AI took stems and styles from Spinnin' DJs and algorithmically transformed them into *focus and sleep* music. The project, released under a series called *Spinnin' COSMOS*, aims to offer EDM fans a new way to hear their favorite artists – in ultra-chill, downtempo mode – and introduces the massive global EDM audience to AI-driven functional music [67] . Warner's CEO Robert Kyncl highlighted that this kind of initiative can **ethically "expand artists' creative scope"** – since it was done *with* the artists' input and consent, giving them another avenue for their music and another revenue stream without them manually writing these hours of ambient tracks [68] [69] . It's a vision of AI being used to *multiply* content from one creative source (one song can spawn many derivative pieces adapted for wellness, etc., via AI).

Beyond Endel, other startups like **Mubert** provide generative music for streams and apps – Mubert's tech powers 24/7 lo-fi hip-hop livestreams on YouTube and Twitch, algorithmically producing new chill beats around the clock. There have been reports (and complaints) of YouTube channels flooding the platform with AI-generated lo-fi tracks and videos, since one can generate a multitude quickly [70] . While this has caused some listener fatigue in the lo-fi scene, it also shows how *commodified* background music could become with AI: endless, cheap to produce, and tailored to any micro-genre or mood. **Soundful** and **Boomy** similarly offer quick lo-fi or electronic track generation which many content creators use as royalty-free music for videos and podcasts. This is a *major commercial use-case* for AI music: supplying the huge demand for ambient tracks in the content economy.

The "chill" genre, being less about distinctive vocals or complex songwriting, has seen less public controversy about AI replacement. In fact, some human producers find AI a welcome assistant here – for instance, generating a base ambient track which they can then sprinkle with their own melodies on top. The main concern raised is the potential oversaturation of streaming platforms with monotonous AI-made tracks that could clutter search results or playlists (as echoed by the CEO of Deezer warning about too much "content that is not even music" diluting user experience [71] [44]). The industry might address this by curating AI content or requiring labeling, but as long as there's listener appetite for easy-listening background music, AI will likely play a growing role in supplying it.

AI in Classical and Instrumental Genres

We touched on Beethoven's AI-completed symphony as a marquee classical project. In general, the classical music world has shown *cautious curiosity* toward AI. On one side, purists are skeptical that a machine without human emotion can create moving art. On the other side, some composers see AI as a fascinating tool to generate new ideas or to modernize classical repertoire. Beyond Beethoven X, there have been concerts and albums of AI-assisted classical works. For example, the **China Now Music Festival 2024** planned a program titled "Composing The Future," featuring pieces by contemporary composers that incorporate AI assistance or AI-generated material performed at Carnegie Hall [72] . This indicates acceptance of AI as part of the composer's toolbox in academic music circles.

There are also AI composers like *Emily Howell* (a computer program developed by David Cope) which have been creating classical music for years, even fooling some listeners in Turing-test style experiments. More recently, the focus is on *collaborative AI*: e.g., pieces where a human composes part and an AI continues it. A project called **"Waltz Symphony"** in 2023 trained an AI on Johann Strauss waltzes and had composition students in Vienna co-compose new waltzes with the AI [73] . The results were performed to show how AI could help expand a traditional genre. Many such experiments are happening at the intersection of music and tech (often at universities or tech-forward music labs).

Classical label deals with AI are not common (classical music is a smaller industry segment), but classical *style* AI music has found a niche in stock music and gaming. For example, AIVA's classical pieces have been licensed for background use where an "in the style of Mozart" vibe is needed without paying for known works. As AI improves, we might eventually see new symphonies or concertos composed by AI commissioned by orchestras – a controversial but intriguing idea (the Beethoven project paved the way, but that had Beethoven's name to carry it – an AI's own symphony might be a harder sell without a human narrative).

In instrumental jazz and rock, AI has been used in a more limited way, mostly generating solos or riffs. There was an attempt to create an AI jazz improviser that could trade solos with live musicians. And the startup **Suno** (the one referenced in Velvet Sundown) not only handles vocals but also can generate instrument tracks in genres like rock or metal from prompts [74] . A research duo named **Dadabots** gained a cult following by training AI on extreme metal and hosting YouTube streams of AI-generated death metal that run 24/7, demonstrating AI's stamina for even niche genres. These remain experimental, but they show no genre is truly off-limits for AI – it's been said "from Bach to bot" as AI now can study any structured music data and attempt to create something in that style [75] .

Major Commercial Deals and Industry Initiatives

The infiltration of AI into music has reached the boardrooms of major music companies. Here we outline some of the **significant deals, investments, and policy moves** in recent years involving AI-generated music and collaborations. These illustrate how stakeholders – from tech companies to record labels to artists – are jockeying to shape the future of AI in the industry.

- **Warner Music Group (WMG) & Endel (2019 & 2023):** WMG has been a front-runner in partnering with AI. In January 2019, Warner's distribution deal with *Endel* made headlines as the first time a major label "signed" an algorithm [45] . Warner released 20 albums of Endel's AI-generated soundscapes that year. Building on that, in 2023 Warner's Spinnin' Records announced an expanded partnership: Endel would create 50 new albums derived from Spinnin' artists' tracks for wellness purposes [10] [11] . This multi-year strategic partnership was framed as exploring how AI can *ethically* increase the usage of artists' catalogs (e.g., a DJ's high-energy track can be transformed into a sleep song) [68] [69] . The releases began under a label imprint *"Spinnin' COSMOS,"* with new albums dropping weekly [11] . For Warner, these deals are a way to lead in functional music and also learn how audiences respond to AI content. Warner's CEO Robert Kyncl has spoken about giving artists a *choice* in using AI, and using it only with artist approval [69] . So far, the Endel collaborations have been positioned as win-wins – the AI doesn't replace artists, it works with their material to create new derivative products.

- **Universal Music Group (UMG) initiatives:** UMG, the largest music company, took a more cautious and defensive stance initially. In early 2023, UMG reportedly pressured streaming services to **take down a large number of AI-generated songs** that had been uploaded, particularly from services like Boomy, as part of a crackdown on content that either infringed on artist rights or was clogging the platforms with low-quality material [76] [15] . UMG's CEO Sir Lucian Grainge issued statements about "oversupply" of music and how *"bad actors"* might flood the market with AI content that harms genuine artists [43] [77] . However, by mid-2023 UMG shifted to a more proactive approach: the collaboration talks with Google to license voices, as discussed, which would effectively bring AI into a controlled, legitimate channel [12] [13] . In August 2023 it came out that **Google and UMG were working on an AI music tool** for fans [12] . This would be a significant commercial development if it comes to fruition, creating a marketplace for AI-generated music using UMG's artist IP. Additionally, UMG in 2023 partnered with Endel (similar to Warner) for what they called "AI-powered, artist-driven functional music" [78] , showing even the biggest label sees a role for AI in generating content when artists are on board. We can interpret UMG's strategy as twofold: protect their artists from unauthorized AI use, but simultaneously invest in **authorized AI content creation** so they're not left behind. Another sign of the times: in 2022 UMG's subsidiary Capitol signed (then quickly "unsigned") the AI persona FN Meka, which, despite the fiasco, demonstrated that even traditional labels experimented with the idea of AI artists – a learning moment that likely informs their current careful approach.

- **HYBE (BigHit) & Supertone (2021-2022):** In the K-pop arena, HYBE – the company behind BTS – made a notable acquisition to bolster its AI capabilities. In late 2021, HYBE invested in the Seoul-based AI voice company *Supertone*, and by October 2022 HYBE **acquired Supertone outright for $32 million** [26] [47] . Supertone is known for its ability to create highly realistic voice clones and even "sing" in the style of a target voice. HYBE's interest stemmed from possibilities like using AI voices for gaming, animations, or even to continue releasing content while artists are unavailable (for instance,

BTS members during military service) [79] [80] . HYBE's CEO Jiwon Park explicitly said the AI voice tech would *"serve as a key piece of the technology sphere"* for new content and services [47] . We haven't yet seen the public debut of an HYBE AI singer, but the investment signals how entertainment companies see AI as part of the future of content creation, extending artists' reach. There's also a crossover here with virtual performers and the metaverse (HYBE might create virtual idols using real artists' AI voices, etc.), but staying on music – this deal is a prime example of a **major commercial bet on AI music tech**.

- **Will.i.am's Ventures (FYI.AI, RAiDiO, Udio funding):** Black Eyed Peas frontman **will.i.am** has been one of the most vocal artist proponents of AI in music and tech. He founded a company called **FYI.AI (Focus Your Ideas)** in 2020, which develops AI applications. In 2024, will.i.am launched **RAiDiO.FYI**, an AI-driven interactive radio platform [81] . This isn't AI making music per se, but rather an AI-curated and AI-hosted set of radio stations: when you tune in, an AI DJ voice greets you by name and discusses topics before playing songs, and you can actually talk back to have a conversation with the AI host [81] [82] . It's like a personalized AI radio where the "presenter" is a chatbot with access to news and music knowledge. Will.i.am demonstrated this at CES 2025, highlighting how AI can transform the listening experience itself, making it more interactive. RAiDiO.FYI is integrated into the FYI app and has stations themed on sports, finance, etc., showing his view that AI can enhance content delivery in music and beyond [83] [84] .

On the music creation side, as mentioned earlier, will.i.am was a key investor in the **Udio** text-to-music app, part of a $5 million seed round that included Andreessen Horowitz [2] [37] . His involvement brings star power and a musician's perspective to that startup, which aims to empower anyone to create songs. Will.i.am has stated in interviews that he's passionate about AI's potential in creativity, but also about doing it inclusively and ethically. In a July 2024 Forbes interview, he demoed AI voice and image tools, and emphasized the need for diversity in AI development (not having just one demographic's perspective in the datasets) [85] [86] . He cautions against over-regulation stifling innovation [87] , yet simultaneously champions artists' rights in the AI realm, advocating for **model ownership by artists** so they control their voice's usage [17] . Will.i.am's dual role as an artist and tech entrepreneur makes his initiatives notable – they often showcase cutting-edge AI while calling for balance in policy. His stance can be summed up as: *embrace AI to boost creativity and inclusion, but make sure the creators (especially marginalized ones) benefit and have agency*.

- **Streaming Platforms & AI Features:** The big streaming services are also integrating AI in various ways. **Spotify** introduced an AI DJ feature in 2023 that provides a personalized radio show for each user, complete with an AI voice (modeled after a Spotify editor) that comments on the music selections. They achieved this by acquiring a voice AI startup (Sonantic) for the speech and using OpenAI tech for the conversational script. While this is about curation, not generating songs, it shows how AI is becoming part of the music consumption experience. Spotify and others also use AI for personalized playlist generation and music recommendation – a long-standing practice now simply being more personified (as with the AI DJ). On the content side, Spotify's removal of tens of thousands of AI-generated songs (like Boomy's) in 2023 was an assertive move [15] , but Spotify's CEO Daniel Ek made it clear they *don't want to ban AI outright* – they want to allow innovation while protecting legitimate artists [88] . Spotify likely will devise guidelines so that AI music that is uploaded is vetted (e.g., no copyright issues, no fake artist misrepresentation, etc.). Meanwhile, **YouTube** is reportedly developing tools for creators to **add AI music** to their videos legally, as indicated by its experiment with the *Lyria* AI model for music generation [89] . And **Meta (Facebook)** expanded a

music licensing deal with UMG in 2023 with mention of addressing AI, perhaps to cover AI-generated remixes on platforms [90] .

- **Artist and Songwriter Initiatives:** On the rights holder side, beyond corporate moves, there have been collective efforts. In 2023, over 20,000 artists signed a petition (organized by the Human Artistry Campaign) asking for regulations ensuring AI respects their copyrights and likeness [91] . Songwriters in particular worry about AI generating music "in the style of" someone which might dilute their market or training on their songs without compensation. These advocacy moves are pushing for things like an industry standard of **labeling AI-created music**, ensuring training data transparency (was an AI trained on licensed music or scraped illegally?), and perhaps new legal protections for an artist's style as part of their IP. Governments are listening: by late 2023, the US Congress had held hearings on AI in music, and the UK was considering updates to copyright law around AI. So the major "deal" in the works could be legislative – crafting laws that govern AI's role in music, balancing innovation with protection.

Finally, worth noting are a couple of **experimental commercial projects**: In 2023, a virtual singer named **Noonoouri** (a CGI influencer) released a single through Warner Music where *her vocals were entirely AI-generated* (using a real singer's voice model). This was essentially Warner test-driving an AI virtual artist in the pop space – though Noonoouri is a digital character, the significance is a major label putting out AI vocals on a mainstream track. It shows labels are interested in whether the public will embrace a song performed by an "AI singer" if the marketing is done right. Also, AI music startups have attracted big funding – e.g., *Soundful* and *Beatoven* for content creators, and *Amplitude* (by Stability AI) working on open-source music generators.

The intersection of AI and music is thus a flurry of deals: tech firms buying music AI companies, labels partnering with AI services, artists forming companies around AI, and cross-industry collaborations (music x tech) to set standards. It's an exciting and uncertain time. As will.i.am eloquently put it, *"The future of music will undoubtedly be shaped by artificial intelligence… the goal should be leveraging AI as a tool to amplify more voices and open up new creative frontiers – not to replace human ingenuity."* [92] . The developments covered here suggest that if approached with that mindset, AI could indeed make the music world more **diverse, accessible, and innovative**, even as we navigate the challenges of doing so responsibly.

Conclusion

AI-generated music and hybrid AI-human collaborations have moved from the fringes into the heart of the music industry over the past few years. We now have credible **AI artists** attracting mass audiences, powerful composition tools that can write music in seconds, and major stakeholders investing in AI as part of music's future. From chill-out playlists algorithmically generated for relaxation, to classical pieces completed by AI, to hit songs augmented by AI vocals, the creative landscape is expanding. The cases of *The Velvet Sundown* and will.i.am's endeavors highlight both the promise and the complexities: Velvet Sundown demonstrated that audiences can enjoy AI-crafted music – but also revealed the ethical quandaries if transparency is lacking; will.i.am's projects show enthusiasm for AI's creative potential – coupled with a call to ensure it remains inclusive and artist-friendly.

The music industry is responding with a mix of excitement and caution. **Notable experimental projects** are pushing artistic boundaries, while **major commercial deals** are laying groundwork for AI to be incorporated into the business (through licensing frameworks, partnerships, and new services). Genres like

ambient, pop, and classical each face unique opportunities and questions with AI – yet across all, a common theme is emerging: success will depend on how well human creativity and AI innovation can complement each other.

As we move forward, we can expect: - Clearer **guidelines and labels** identifying AI-generated content to listeners [5] [14] . - New forms of **collaboration**, where artists routinely use AI in production or even "jam" with AI systems. - Continued growth of AI-generated music in functional and background uses (e.g. infinite game soundtracks, personal mood music). - Ongoing debate around copyright, ownership, and cultural impact – possibly leading to new laws or rights (such as protection of an artist's voice and likeness in training data). - Perhaps, the emergence of AI as a genre/style of its own, where the novelty and aesthetics of AI-crafted sound become an artistic statement much like synthesizers once were in electronic music.

In summary, AI is not just automating aspects of music; it's **inspiring new creative processes and business models**. The key will be steering this technology in a way that amplifies human artistry rather than undermines it. The recent developments from Velvet Sundown's folk songs to will.i.am's AI radio, from deepfake Drake tracks to symphonies co-written by code, all suggest that when humans and machines collaborate, the definition of "music artist" is evolving. The next few years will be critical in shaping how these hybrid collaborations are valued – by listeners, by creators, and by the industry at large. One thing is clear: the soundtrack of the future will be co-created with artificial intelligence, and we are only at the overture of this new musical era.

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