

The Changing Value of Music Education in the Age of AI and Its Impact on the Music Industry

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Abstract

As generative artificial intelligence becomes increasingly embedded in music, the way music is created is changing. Creation is moving away from a process that depends heavily on specialized technical skills and toward one based increasingly on collaboration between people and machines. This shift is changing not only how music is made, but also what music education is meant to achieve. If machines can now generate melodies and even complete songs, what, then, should music schools still teach? This paper argues that the central purpose of music education in the age of AI is shifting from traditional skills training toward three broader goals: developing creativity, cultivating aesthetic judgment, and teaching students how to work effectively with intelligent systems. This is more than an educational change. By shaping the skills and capabilities of future music professionals, education can influence who works in the industry, how music is produced, and what kinds of music enter the wider cultural environment. The relationship also works in the other direction. As the industry changes, its new demands put pressure on educational institutions to adapt. In this sense, education and the music industry are locked in a two-way process: education trains new talent, talent helps reshape the industry, and the changing industry pushes education to evolve again. Understanding this cycle is essential to understanding the broader transformation of music in the age of AI.

Keywords

Artificial intelligence; music education; music industry; human-AI collaboration; aesthetic literacy.

1. Introduction

The impact of AI on music is not simply a story of new technology disrupting an industry. Education plays an important role in carrying that change into the next generation of musicians and amplifying its effects.

In recent years, generative AI has advanced rapidly and begun to enter almost every part of the music ecosystem, from creation and production to distribution and consumption. Platforms such as Suno allow users to generate melodies, lyrics and even complete songs simply by describing what they want in words. The technical barrier to making music has therefore fallen considerably.[7]

This does more than introduce a new set of production tools. It also challenges an educational model that has traditionally been built around years of specialized training. If technology can now handle much of the technical work, what kind of musicians should music education prepare for the future?

This paper addresses two questions. First, how should the value of music education change in the age of AI, and how should its goals and curriculum respond? Second, how might changes in education and talent development affect the workforce, production methods and creative environment of the music industry?

The argument is that education and industry influence each other in a continuous cycle: education trains talent, talent changes the industry, and the industry's changing needs reshape education.

2. New Challenges for Music Education in the Age of AI

Lower Barriers to Creation: Rethinking What Education Is For

One of the most immediate effects of generative AI on music is that it has made music creation much easier to enter.

Evidence from a quasi-experimental study by Feng Xi at a university for older adults illustrates the point. Of 32 participants aged 58 to 78, 26 people in the group taught with an AIGC-based model independently completed at least one full song, or 81.25 percent of the group. None of the participants in the control group did so.[1]

At the same time, platforms such as Suno allow people with little or no professional music training to create complete pieces simply by describing what they want in natural language.[7] Making music is therefore becoming less dependent on years of technical training and more accessible to people who were previously excluded from the creative process.

But easier access to creative tools does not mean that musical value can be produced automatically. Research suggests that even when AI is involved throughout the creative process, the quality of the final work still depends heavily on the creator's understanding of musical structure, emotional expression and artistic purpose.[4]

The challenge for music education, then, is not to assume that traditional skills no longer matter. It is to rethink what those skills are actually for.

3. How the Value of Music Education Is Changing

Why Technical Skills Still Matter

Traditionally, technical training has had a straightforward purpose: to give students the ability to make music themselves. In an AI-assisted environment, its role is changing.

Technical knowledge now helps students understand how music works, judge what AI produces and improve the results. It gives them the language they need to tell a machine what they actually want.

Consider the difference between saying, "Make it sadder," and giving a precise instruction about tempo, harmony, instrumentation, dynamics or timbre. The second kind of instruction requires genuine musical knowledge. A student who lacks basic training in music theory and performance may be able to use AI, but may have difficulty directing it effectively.

This is why technical skills are not becoming obsolete in the age of AI. Their value is shifting. They are becoming less about doing every task by hand and more about understanding music well enough to guide, evaluate and reshape what machines produce.

The Growing Importance of Aesthetic Judgment

The key question for music education is no longer simply, "How do we train people who can make music?" It is increasingly, "How do we train people who can use technology creatively and know whether the result is actually good?" That second question points to aesthetic judgment.

Aesthetic judgment is not simply the ability to choose between different technical options. It involves recognizing what works, identifying what feels wrong, understanding why it feels wrong, and deciding how a piece should be changed. It also requires an understanding of musical styles, structures and forms, as well as the values and emotions they can convey.

A classroom example documented by Yuan Ming at Shanghai Jianqing Experimental School illustrates this particularly well.[9] During a lesson called "The Sound of the Grasslands,"

students used AI to generate the sound of a horse's hooves. They quickly noticed that the result sounded mechanical—more like a hammer hitting a nail than a living animal.

The students spent the following week investigating the problem. They discovered that real hoofbeats contain brief pauses of roughly 0.3 seconds every few beats. These pauses created a subtle rhythm that sounded almost like breathing. The students then fed this observation back into the AI system as a parameter, producing a more lifelike result.

The important point is that the students did more than operate a tool. They recognized that something was wrong through their own sensory experience, and then turned that artistic intuition into a concrete instruction that the machine could understand.

That is what aesthetic judgment looks like in practice: sensing, questioning, experimenting and ultimately making a decision.

As machines become better at carrying out technical tasks, one of the most important things music education can provide is the human ability to decide what is worth creating in the first place—and what makes the result good. The Transformation of Educational Objectives: From Skill Acquisition to Creative Judgment

4. How Changes in Music Education Shape the Music Industry

The effect of AI on the music industry does not come from technology alone. Education acts as an important bridge between technological change and the people who ultimately use that technology.

What schools teach influences the capabilities of the future workforce. Those capabilities, in turn, influence how music is produced. At the same time, changes in the industry create new demands that feed back into education.

The result is a two-way relationship between education and industry.

Bringing Music Education Closer to Industry Needs

Music education is gradually trying to catch up with a rapidly changing industry. At many local universities, however, curricula still focus heavily on traditional singing and instrumental performance, harmony and musical form, and conventional digital audio workstation skills. By comparison, technologies such as AI-assisted arranging, audio denoising and algorithmic mastering—which are becoming increasingly common in professional settings—are still relatively new to many classrooms.[5]

Research at some private universities suggests that certain graduates need two to three months to become comfortable with intelligent teaching tools after entering the workforce. This suggests that there is still room to strengthen students' ability to work with intelligent tools and design digitally enabled learning and production environments.[8]

There is also a broader structural imbalance in music education. According to available data, Chinese universities have roughly 24.7 music performance programs for every music-industry-management program. The corresponding figures are 1 to 1 in Britain and 6.1 to 1 in the United States. Music performance programs account for about 46 percent of total enrollment in music-related programs, while recording and mixing programs account for only 2 percent and marketing programs 1 percent.[2]

The imbalance matters because it means that most music students are still trained primarily for the stage rather than for the wider music economy.

If education continues to focus mainly on producing technically proficient singers and instrumentalists, graduates may end up concentrated in precisely the areas of work where AI is increasingly capable of taking over routine tasks. The industry, meanwhile, needs capabilities that remain less common in traditional music education: people who can make aesthetic

decisions at the level of an entire production, decide when and how to use AI, and combine musical expertise with technology, business and other fields.

The issue is therefore not simply that universities need to teach more AI tools. They need to reconsider what kinds of capabilities the industry will actually need.

How Music Production Is Changing

When people with these new skills enter the industry, the production process changes with them.

The emerging model is increasingly one of division of labor: AI handles tasks where speed, scale and efficiency are important, while humans remain responsible for creative direction and decisions about artistic value.

One way of understanding this distinction is to divide human creativity into two dimensions: the idea behind a work and the way that idea is expressed. AI can contribute substantially to the expressive side, but it has a fundamental limitation on the creative side. It does not possess embodied emotional experience—the physical and psychological experiences that can trigger a human creative impulse.[6]

This distinction is already becoming visible in professional music production. Arrangers, for example, are increasingly moving away from simply producing sounds themselves. Their role is becoming more about designing the process, guiding the AI and setting the boundaries within which it generates material. Their value lies less in performing every technical operation and more in making the right decisions about the overall production.[4]

The change is also creating new types of jobs. As AI takes over some tasks previously performed by humans, new roles—including AI music trainers and music-generation engineers—are beginning to emerge.[7]

The broader history of technology suggests that technological change does not necessarily eliminate work altogether. The automobile, for example, made the traditional coachman obsolete but created the modern professional driver. AI may similarly transform employment in music by changing the structure of work rather than simply making human workers disappear.

How Industry Demand Pushes Education to Change

As new industry needs become more visible, they create pressure for educational institutions to respond.

Several examples already point in this direction. In 2019, the Central Conservatory of Music admitted its first doctoral students in music artificial intelligence and information technology. It also brought together an interdisciplinary group of mentors from institutions including Tsinghua University and Peking University. The initiative reflected growing demand for people who could bridge music and technical disciplines.

The Communication University of China has established a regular mechanism for bringing industry professionals into the classroom to discuss developments on the front lines of the business. Such initiatives can help close the information gap between what teachers know and what the industry is actually doing.

Researchers have also proposed adding modular courses such as AI applications in music education and digital music creation, bringing industry requirements into the classroom earlier. Gao Yingjie and Lin Xinyi have documented the Central Conservatory's efforts to combine algorithmic programming with music creation and link classroom theory, enterprise training and creative practice in a single educational model.[3] These examples point to a broader lesson: educational reform cannot be a one-time exercise. It has to be an ongoing process.

The music industry's technology changes much faster than universities can rewrite textbooks. As one scholar has observed, by the time a textbook is finished, some of its content may already be outdated.

Trying to keep up simply by adding the latest software or tools to the curriculum is therefore unlikely to be enough. The more important task is to teach students how to keep learning and adapting as the technology changes.

The relationship between education and industry can thus be understood as a continuous cycle. Education moves beyond traditional skills training and develops new capabilities. Those capabilities enter the workforce and help shift production toward human-machine collaboration. The new jobs and demands created by that shift then feed back into education and encourage another round of change.

That two-way process is central to understanding how the music ecosystem is evolving in the age of AI.

5. Conclusion

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence in the music field represents not merely a technological innovation in creative production, but a broader transformation of the relationship among musical knowledge, educational objectives, and industrial development. By reducing the technical barriers associated with music creation, AI has expanded participation in musical production while simultaneously challenging traditional assumptions regarding professional competence and educational priorities.

This study demonstrates that the central transformation of music education in the AI era does not lie in the replacement of technical training, but in the redefinition of its function. As intelligent systems increasingly undertake standardized and efficiency-oriented production tasks, the distinctive value of human musicians is becoming increasingly associated with creativity, aesthetic judgment, artistic decision-making, and the ability to effectively collaborate with intelligent technologies.

Furthermore, this research highlights that changes in music education influence industrial development through a process of talent formation and transmission. The cultivation of new types of music professionals contributes to transformations in production methods, occupational structures, and creative practices within the industry. At the same time, emerging industrial demands continuously provide feedback that encourages educational reform. Therefore, the relationship between music education and the music industry in the AI era should be understood as a dynamic and reciprocal process rather than a one-directional relationship determined solely by technological advancement.

From a broader perspective, the key issue facing the music field is not whether artificial intelligence will replace human creators, but how human creativity can be redefined within increasingly intelligent creative environments. The future significance of AI lies not in diminishing human artistic agency, but in expanding the possibilities of musical expression through new forms of collaboration between humans and machines.

For music education, the essential task is therefore to cultivate individuals who are capable not only of using emerging technologies, but also of critically understanding, directing, and creatively transforming them. In this process, professional musical knowledge remains fundamental, while technological literacy and interdisciplinary abilities become increasingly important components of future musical competence.

This study also has limitations. Although it proposes a theoretical framework explaining the interaction between music education transformation and industrial development, empirical evidence regarding the long-term relationship between educational reform and industrial

outcomes remains relatively limited. Future research could further explore this issue through longitudinal studies, comparative analyses of different educational systems, and investigations of specific cases involving AI-assisted music creation and professional practice.

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