From Bach to Bots

AI and Music Creation

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Introduction

I T SEEMS THAT AI IS EVERYWHERE—IN THE NEWS, IN THE classroom, on social media, and especially in advertising. Beginning in 2024, AI began to aggressively expand into the field of music in a variety of ways, including composition, audio analysis, voice cloning, music recommendations, and music recognition. This essay specifically explores the use of AI to create music, with an overview of its capabilities, and evaluation of the outcomes, ethical considerations, and recommendations for use. The conclusions are based on experiences that my students and I have had "composing" music with generative AI, including honest feedback from students in my music theory and music appreciation classes at UT Dallas.

Creating Music

There are dozens of AI music platforms available, with claims of "anyone can create extraordinary music" and "create any song, just imagine it."

Currently the leading platforms for creating music are Suno and Udio—these platforms offer a free option, and it is easy to create an account with just an email address and password. I created an account with Suno and entered the description: "Melancholy music for strings and piano." Within seconds, there were two audio samples. I played the first one and was startled to hear singing! There is a small option to designate "instrumental" music, otherwise the default setting will always include lyrics. After choosing the "instrumental" option, Suno generated the following title and audio: "Echoes of Goodbye" [1]

It had a clear looping pattern in the piano and cello with a repeated four-chord progression. I found the piece uninteresting, and not what I envisioned. I also attempted a fugue in the style of Bach, "classical" piano and violin music, as well as an arrangement of a well-known folk tune. The compositions were dull, and I did not even want to finish listening to them. The fugue was nothing like a fugue, the classical piece sounded like new-age music, and the folk tune arrangement was extremely simplistic. As a musician, I did not enjoy the process or the results of the endeavor and quickly concluded that Suno was not trained to produce instrumental music, especially classical styles. I also tested Udio, with similar results.

1   The AI music platform always creates a title. Interestingly, Udio also chose to use the word "Echoes" in another piece I created – it was even less interesting that the piece created by Suno. https://suno.com/s/Yv8Q7KFCC7TMFeY9

Student Feedback

Students frequently use AI for fact-based assignments and essays. According to the Artificiality Institute, "students are increasingly delegating mental tasks—like decision-making and problem-solving—to AI." [2] Many seem to think it is simply more efficient to use this type of "cognitive offloading." Given the pervasive use of AI for fact-based answers, I wondered: Are students also using AI to create music? Surprisingly, not much! In April of this year, I asked my UT Dallas students about their use of AI for music —only three students had ever even tried it.

So I created an extra credit assignment with the following tasks:

•Create a piece of music using Suno, Udio, or other AI (vocal or instrumental)

•What did you think of the results?

•Would you use AI again to create music?

Over thirty students completed the assignment. (Interestingly, the students who had previously experimented with AI for music had no desire to try it again!) In general, students' reactions were mixed. As expected, there was a notable difference between the reactions of musicians and non-musicians.

The students in music theory generally have had more musical training, and they were more negative and critical of the music created by AI. Among their responses were these:

Below my expectations, the instruments had a very low quality and the composition sounded very much like the no-copyright music one can find on YouTube (Logan T.)

I don't think it did a particularly good job. The instrumentation is off, and I find the music to be quite thin (Sweta V.)

The results are very superficial, and a lot of the depth I wanted from it was absent (Joshua M.)

The piece of music it generated had some nice ideas but felt very disconnected. There was a clear lack of intention behind many of the musical choices it made even though it sounded good. (Ethan S.)

I tried to create an instrumental-only piece without any vocals and the quality was really poor. It was far from passing the Turing Test and you could tell that this isn't something that a human would write and certainly not something that human ears would want to hear. If there's no emotion behind the song, is it really even worth it... (Pranav S.)

Some of the most positive reactions were from non-musicians in my music appreciation courses who requested "Lo-fi" or "pop" music:

2   Helen and Dave Edwards, "How AI Affects Critical Thinking and Cognitive Offloading," https://artificialityinstitute.org/how-ai-affects-critical-thinking-and-cognitive-offloading/

Prompt: Lo-fi chill beat with dreamy piano. I was really surprised by how polished the track sounded. The AI was able to create a clean, moody mix that was reminiscent of lo-fi tracks that you might find on a YouTube study playlist (Aarushi M.)

I prompted the AI to write a pop song about needing distractions constantly while grieving and being a foundation for others when you don't have your own foundation. It worked a lot better than I expected. I might consider using AI for self-expressive music because I've always wanted to write pop songs but struggle to compose new melodies with proper structure (Nikita R.)

One student was quite enthusiastic: My prompt was "Very suspenseful and dramatic fight scene turns into calm relaxing victory." I was blown away by the result. It gave me a few options, and I will say the first two were a bit lame and cheesy, but man the third one was straight out of a big box production action movie. It had all the elements I love - a good amount of highs for suspense and lows for a sense of weight. It all meshed together so well I would never be able to tell that this came from a computer program. It's crazy how far we have come from that one IBM computer than was able to sing "Daisy Bell". I very well may create more AI music now that I have seen how well it can perform. I am curious how licensing and copyright law works with AI music. Will Disney still find a way to sue us for using AI music?? LOL. (Danish A.) https://suno.com/s/STZT1EXD69ZdIzjN

Several students in both groups saw the potential to use Suno in specific situations:

For background music or content creation, it's definitely usable. I wouldn't use it to replace traditional music creation or live jamming, but as a tool for ideation and fast prototyping, it's incredibly useful. (Ria S.)

I didn't really like the results; the style didn't meet my expectations. I do not plan to use AI to create music, but I think Suno is a good site to use to make silly songs for friends! (Lynette Y.)

I think Suno can give us good ideas for lyrics / melodies when we aren't able to think of much. It can give us different perspectives on the same lyrics and although they are all terrible, we can build up on that and create something more human and soulful. (Pranav S.)

Overall, many students were simultaneously impressed and disappointed in the results of AI generated music; most indicated that they are unlikely to use it again. Even though students engage with AI regularly, I was pleasantly surprised and impressed to find that most of the student musicians that I surveyed expressed a lack of interest, disrespect, or even contempt for music created by AI. During in-class discussions, I found that students fundamentally believe that music should come from the soul or heart, even if it's not perfect. As one student said, "Music is music because it is human!" (Pranav S.) Some students also worry that AI is often trained on stolen art and is therefore unethical. Others think it's good for laughs, but not something to take seriously.

Ethical Issues

The darkest and most troubling aspect of AI generated music is the way that the AI is trained. Was it trained using copyrighted material? Is that a violation of copyright laws? Hundreds of musicians in the U.S. and Britain are protesting the use of copyrighted music to train AI. In April 2024, 200 musicians, including Billie Eilish, Stevie Wonder, and Nicki Minaj, wrote an open letter that stated, "We must protect against the predatory use of AI to steal artists' voices and likenesses... When used irresponsibly, AI poses enormous threats to our ability to protect our privacy, our identities, our music, and our livelihoods."[3] In February 2025, more than 1,000 musicians (including Hans Zimmer) released a lyric-less album to protest the British government's proposal to expand the ways that developers can use copyright-protected works to train artificial intelligence models.[4] There are ongoing lawsuits which will determine whether the use of copyrighted music in AI training constitutes fair use.[5]

Recommendations

If someone is interested in using Suno or other AI to create music, I recommend using it in the following situations:

•Just for laughs: If you need a silly song to celebrate a friend's birthday or as a prank, enter their name with some descriptive words and create a fun memory. Suno is surprisingly good at creating lyrics that rhyme.

•Social media content: add music to a social media post.

•Game creators and animators: For a game prototype or an unfinished animation, an AI composition could be useful. Visual creators are not always able to describe what sound they want for their game/animation, so if they generate something and show it to an actual composer/music producer, that could provide a useful reference.

•Idea generation: Generate ideas for lyrics, expand on current ideas, create quick samples.

Conclusion

Can bots create music? Yes. Can "anyone create extraordinary music" using AI? Of course not. Will bots replace composers? In a few instances, yes. I am encouraged to find that young people value human artistry, and see AI as a possible tool for experimentation, not a replacement for musical creativity. ᴀ

3   Artist Rights Alliance, "200+ Artists Urge Tech Platforms: Stop Devaluing Music," April 1, 2024: artistrightsnow.medium.com/200-artists-urge-tech-platforms-stop-devaluing-music-559fb109bbac

4   Amelia Nierenberg, "Their Album Is Wordless. Will Their Protest Against A.I. Resound?" The New York Times, Feb. 25, 2025: www.nytimes.com/2025/02/25/world/europe/uk-musicians-protest-ai-album.html

5   A recent Forbes article outlines the ongoing litigation: Virginie Berger, "What Suno And Udio's AI Licensing Deals With Music Majors Could Mean For Creators Rights," Forbes, June 6, 2025. www.forbes.com/sites/virginieberger/2025/06/06/what-suno-and-udios-ai-licensing-deals-with-music-majors-could-mean-for-creators-rights