Epidemic Sound

# Optimism, *Ownership* & Identity:

## How Artists Are Defining the Next Era of Music



Baha Bank$, Chicago-based hip-hop artist

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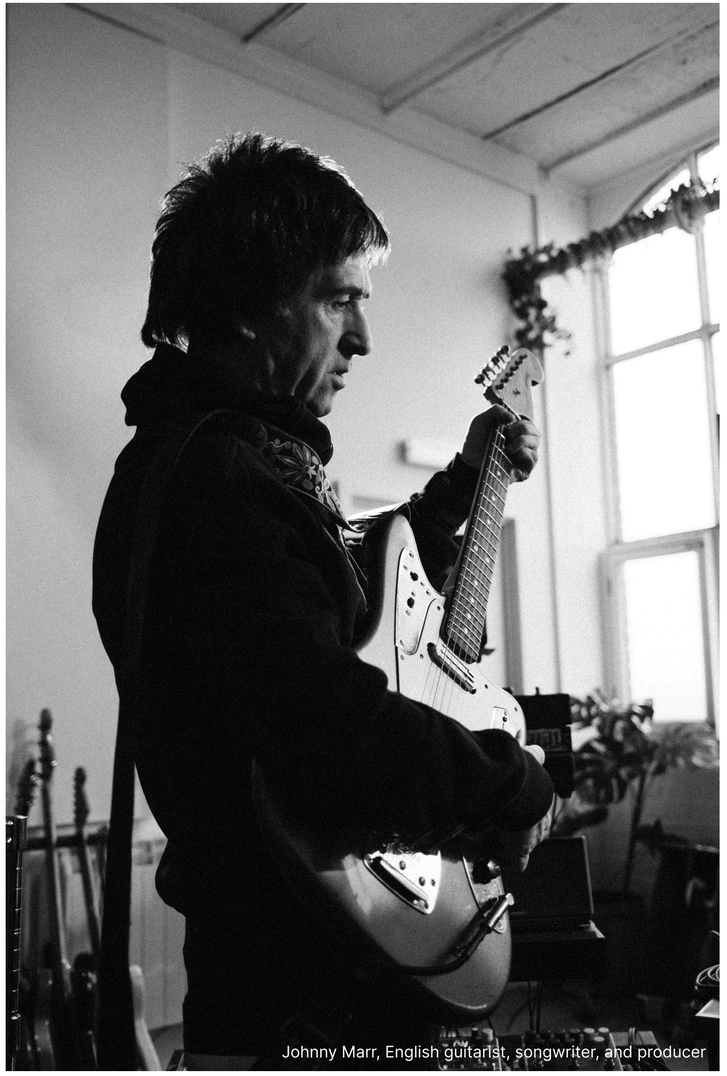
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Johnny Marr, English guitarist, songwriter, and producer

# *Introduction:*

# The future of music

**Permeating every corner of every industry, AI is reshaping how we see the world and how we move through it. When it comes to music, artists have always been way ahead of the curve in terms of embracing new tools and tech; AI is just picking up the pace.**

Our own research is proof of this, showing a growing usage among 1,000 artists across the US and UK, with already near-universal adoption of AI (93%) across creative workflows. But widespread adoption doesn't mean humans are set to be pushed aside. Without careful integration and human input, AI risks overriding creativity instead of enhancing it. And while it may be a vehicle for producing and scaling music faster, AI shouldn't ever eclipse the artist.

In this report, we explore some of the biggest questions this shift raises for artists and the future of music. Overall, artists are optimistic about what AI can bring. But that optimism comes with higher expectations for how the technology is developed, interrogated, and used.

Central to this is a call for greater transparency around AI's role in the creative process, alongside a push for ethical use that protects, rather than exploits, human-made content.

Ultimately, we explore how this is not just in the interests of artists, but of listeners and the music industry as a whole.



**Erik Wahlberg**
CEO, Epidemic Group

# Key *Findings*

**Epidemic Sound surveyed 1,000 artists in the UK and US to understand what the future for them looks like.**

**AI has entered the creative mainstream** **84%** of artists agree that AI can enhance creativity when used responsibly.

**Artists are optimistic about AI's potential** **73%** say AI will increase opportunities in their profession.

**Human-made content is now a premium** **81%** say human created content is fast becoming a premium offering to audiences in the AI era.

**Control and ownership** **89%** say maintaining control over their music, data, and creative identity will define their long-term success as an artist.

**Disclosure is no longer optional** **79%** of artists say disclosure is essential for trust.

**Permission remains paramount** **98%** of artists place importance on permissions for their music or voice to be used in AI systems.

# *Chapter One:*
# Experimentation, opportunity, and the rise of AI

**AI is opening up new creative territory, and artists in particular are welcoming the shift: 73% say it expands creative possibilities without replacing human artistry, with US artists feeling this more (78%) than UK artists (68%).**

## Artists' appetite for AI

**80%** I expect to increase my use of AI in music, sound or content creation over the next 12 months

**77%** AI enables me to experiment with ideas I wouldn't otherwise explore

**79%** Independent artists

**69%** Signed artists

Artists are more likely (73%) to agree that AI will increase opportunities in their profession compared to brands (59%)[1]. And many are experiencing the benefits across their creative process.

## How artists are using AI in their creative work

**64%** AI tools that support creative workflow (e.g., production, editing, mastering, search or tagging)

**56%** AI tools that help adapt or customize existing content

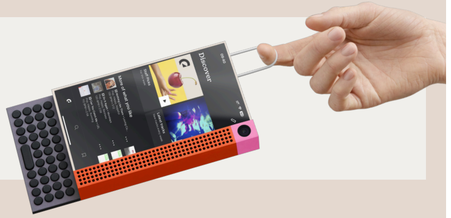
**44%** AI for marketing or distribution

**41%** Fully AI-generated music or content

[1]The Content Shift: How Brands are Adapting in 2026.

Artists aren't just experiencing the benefits of AI in isolation either. They see it unlocking broader opportunities across the industry; ones integral to their long-term future.

## What opportunities can AI enable?



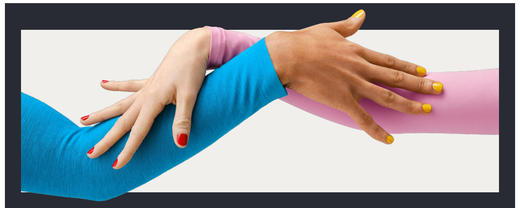
**45 %**

Faster production/distribution



**35%**

Greater independence as an artist



**31 %**

Engage new audiences



**30%**

New income streams

This potential could be what's driving more artists to experiment with AI. The portion (41%) of artists using fully AI-generated music or content in their work is even higher than creators (28%)[2] and brands (25%)[3].

This doesn't mean they're stepping out of the process. Instead, they're more willing to get hands-on and see what it can do creatively; to find a happy marriage with their own craft.

But whatever the extent of this, there remains an emphasis on permission, control, and human judgement.

**84%**

of artists agree that AI can enhance creativity when used responsibly.
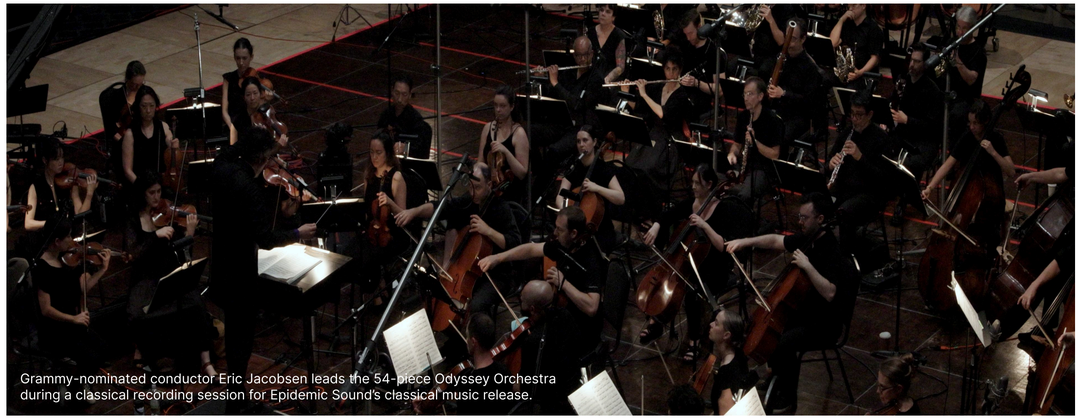



Janset, London hip-hop and grime artist

[2]The Future of the Creator Economy Report 2026.

[3]The Content Shift: How Brands are Adapting in 2026.

Not all artists share these appetites, however, with younger individuals expressing more ambivalence towards the technology. For instance, 18-24s are the least likely (42%) to agree that AI can expand creative possibilities without replacing human artistry, compared to 73% on average. And, while 77% of all artists agree that using AI in their workflow enables them to experiment in ways they wouldn't otherwise, only 54% of 18-24s agree.

Control remains paramount to artists — both in how they use AI tools and in how their own music is used. And, according to the younger generation, this is something that's set to remain the case long into the future.



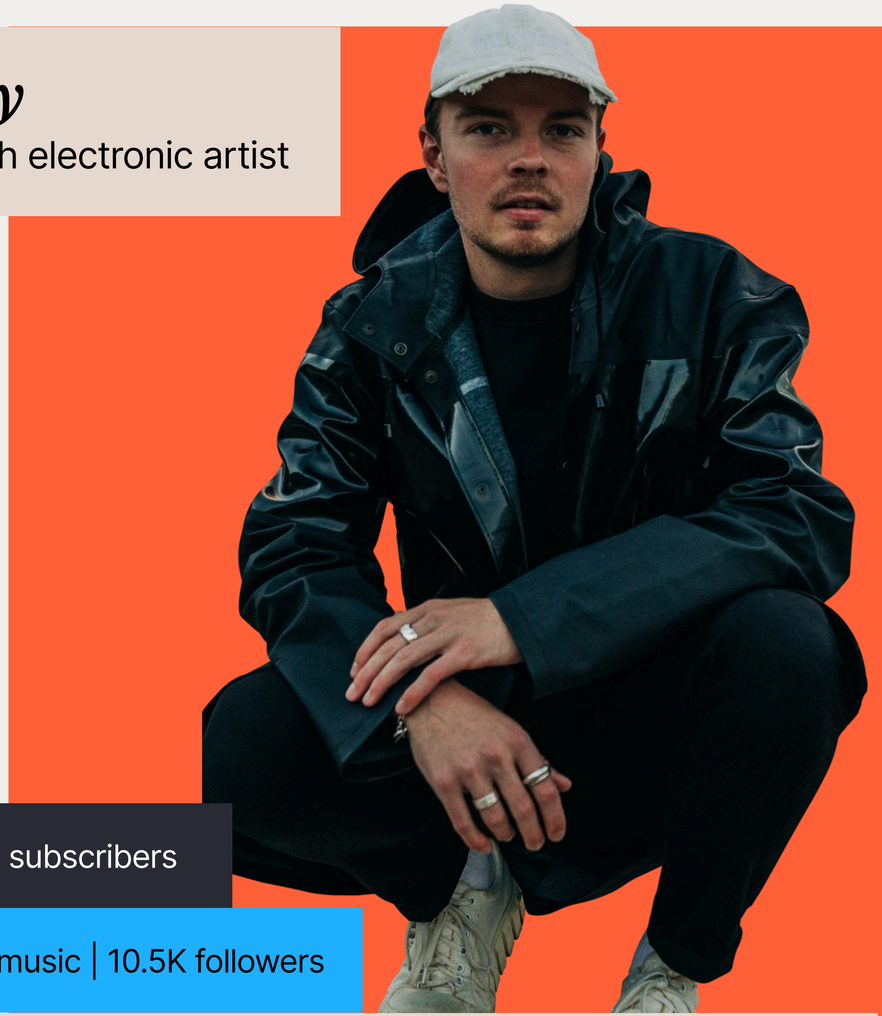
Grammy-nominated conductor Eric Jacobsen leads the 54-piece Odyssey Orchestra during a classical recording session for Epidemic Sound's classical music release.




Rebecca Mardal, Swedish guitarist, songwriter, and producer

“AI in music is like having a co-producer that I can bounce ideas back and forth to, but I feel like it can’t replace my own mind and instincts I’ve built over years of writing and producing. But where it really shines is in SoMe and video editing for promo, an area I’m less confident in. It helps me to refine scripts, bounce and come up with ideas, and save time. It’s given me the opportunity to experiment there too and put that time back into the music itself.”

***Ooyy***
Swedish electronic artist



@ooyy | 30K subscribers

@ooyy_music | 10.5K followers

▶ 265M streams across music streaming platforms | 18B views of TikTok and YouTube videos using Ooyy’s music

# *Chapter Two:*

# Creativity, consent, and control

**AI may inevitably become part of the creative process, but human authorship remains critical. As many as 91% of artists are concerned about how AI is used. This doesn't mean they oppose it — or that they aren't using it. Their concern relates to how AI is applied, and whether it undermines their work, authorship, and fair remuneration.**

## Biggest AI concerns from artists

| | |
|---|---|
| 46% | Fully AI-generated tracks released without disclosure (46% Independent \| 60% Signed ) |
| 44% | AI being able to replicate their unique voice/style |
| 42% | AI systems being trained on their work without permission |
| 31% | Lack of compensation for AI-related use |

Beyond the creative process, artists are concerned about what happens to their work after it's released into the world. Especially when consent, identity, and compensation can no longer be taken for granted.

This is making them favour creative conditions that run on permission and will allow them to confidently create and participate in an AI-heavy future.



I'MIN, multi-genre Korean pop/R&B singer-songwriter



King Sis, Los Angeles-based R&B singer-songwriter

**98%**

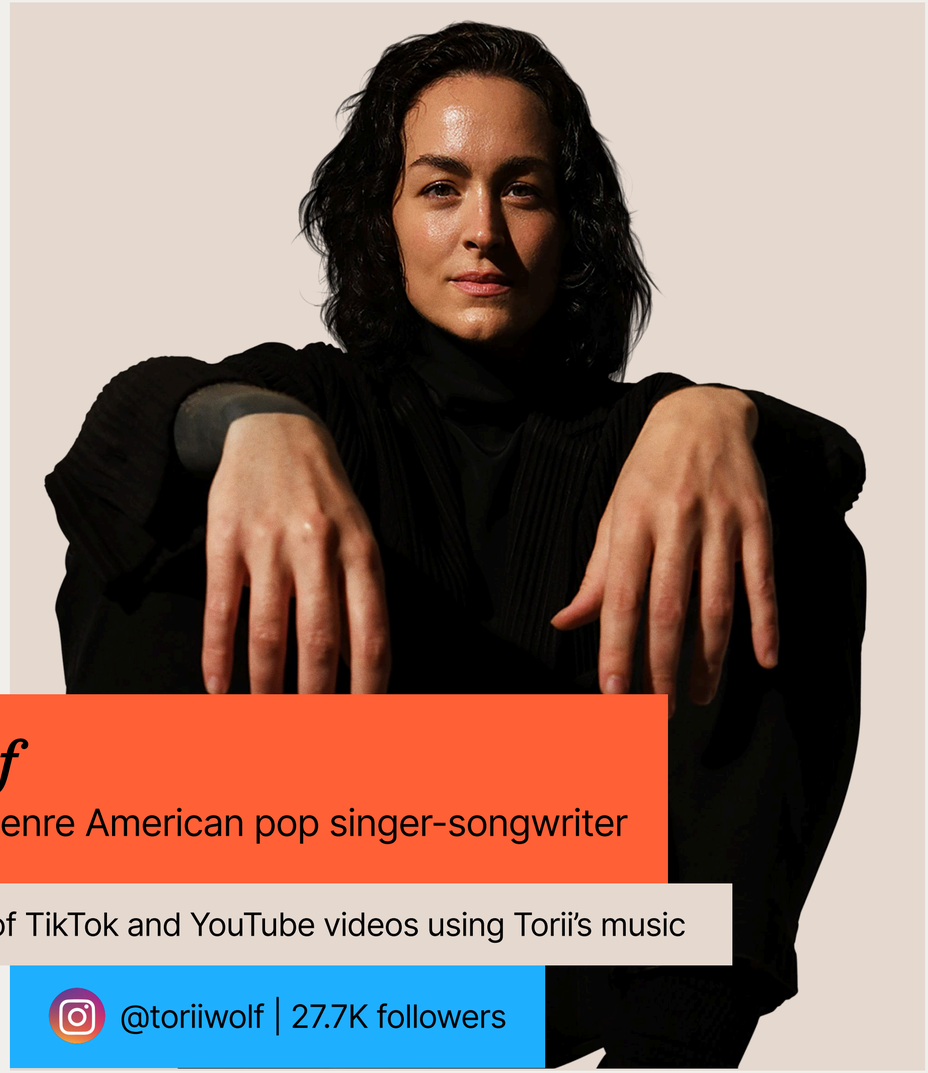
It is important that AI has permission to use my voice or music

**89%**

of artists say long-term success is defined partly by the ability to maintain control over their music, data, and creative identity

Although artists are optimistic about AI, the importance of consent and control remains high. But for them, control in the age of AI isn't just about fairness, but success.

“Much like anything else, the pendulum swings. One of the scarier parts to me is the vocal cloning. It feels terrifying that AI can make a song that sounds exactly like me singing about something that I do not morally align with, which feels very misleading to anyone who will listen. There are no limits, and until there is some protection around the human in the machine, I am finding it difficult to see the upside. Perhaps a warning label that AI was used, and more clarity around how we can protect ourselves in our expression. I saw that well over 100 of my songs were used to train AI. We should all have the right to know when AI is being used. Consent is crucial.”



***Torii Wolf***

LA-based multi-genre American pop singer-songwriter

▶ 18.5M streams across music streaming platforms | 👁 1.9B views of TikTok and YouTube videos using Torii’s music

@toriiwolf | 27.7K followers

# *Chapter Three:*

# AI's transparency challenge

**Human creativity will always be the soul of music, but in an era where AI will increasingly become part of the music creation process, it's vital that music — however it's made — comes with clear consent, ownership, and attribution.**

The line between human-made and AI-generated content has become increasingly blurred, and it's essential that greater AI use and experimentation come with greater transparency.



Lawd Ito, New Jersey-based Latin indie pop artist

## Artist beliefs about AI

**79%**

Disclosure around when AI has been used is essential to trust

**78%**

It's essential for audiences to know if content is human-made or AI-generated

**76%**

Transparency around AI improves content performance

Disclosure is essential to trust and improves performance. Artists recognize this and the need for them to be transparent to their listeners in order to maintain their trust.

Consumers of content must be clear about whether they are listening to AI or a human. This isn't just down to artists though, but the music industry as a whole.

Streaming platforms are increasingly accountable for AI-generated music and must work hard to accommodate the ethical distribution of creative work, and protect the value of it. Spotify, for instance, announced its plan to label AI-generated artists with "AI Persona" profile tags and to ban the music of AI-generated artists from its editorial and algorithmic recommendations. This is a clear effort to lean into AI innovation, but to also make human vs AI distinctions clear and transparent, and support human artists in this new era.

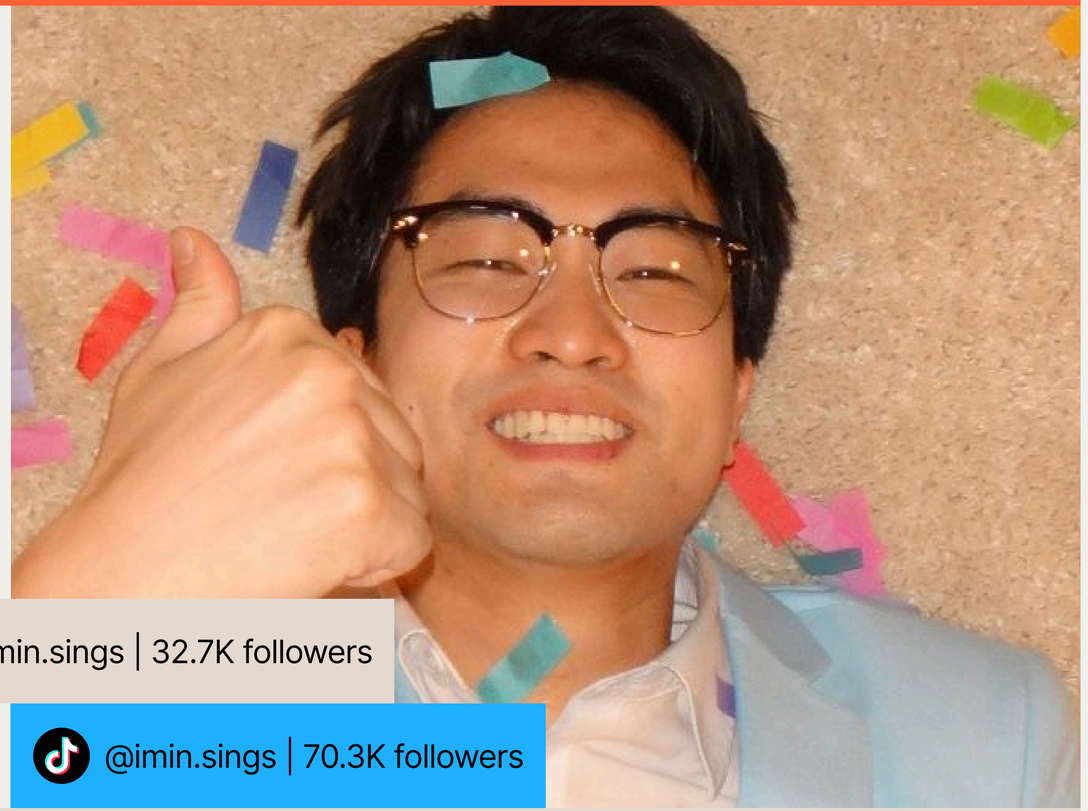


Ooyy, Swedish electronic artist

“Technology has always been part of making music, and I’m open to the inspiration new tools can offer. As a songwriter, though, I care about whether a song feels true to what I’m trying to say. A big part of the connection with listeners is knowing there’s someone behind the music who means it. That’s why I think listeners deserve to know whether music is human-made or AI-generated, with a clear distinction between using AI for inspiration and having it create the song. Disclosure gives listeners that context and helps the writing, judgment, and care an artist brings to the music remain visible. For me, that honesty is part of respecting the people who listen.”

***I’MIN***

New York-based multi-genre Korean pop/R&B singer-songwriter



@imin.sings | 32.7K followers

@imin.sings | 70.3K followers

▶ 79M streams across music streaming platforms | 👁 7.4B views of TikTok and YouTube videos using I’MIN’s music

# *Chapter Four:*

## The more AI scales, the more human identity and connection matters

**AI is making creation easier to scale, but success as an artist still depends on something technology can't automate: a distinctive identity and genuine human connection with an audience.**

**86%** say human-made music or sound **strengthens emotional connection** with audiences

**81%** say **human created content** is fast becoming a premium offering to audiences in the AI era

More than a third (37%) of artists say a strong connection with audiences/fans is their long-term goal. This is even greater than creative freedom (33%).

This is pushing artists to become more like 'creators', building distinct identities and direct relationships with audiences. Social media is central to that shift, with 57% saying it's essential to building a music career and an important part of their monetization strategy — the top response among artists.



Honey Dijon, American DJ, producer, and electronic artist



Baha Bank$, Chicago-based hip-hop artist

## The type of content artists are creating and publishing



**84 %**

Social media content
(e.g., Instagram, short-form content)




**81%**

Video content
(e.g., YouTube, TikTok)

Another 34% go even further and say social media and creator sync (e.g. TikTok, YouTube) is the most reliable path for building their music career today.

This shows us that while AI may change how music is made and shared, it also makes the qualities that are uniquely human (identity, creativity, and connection) more valuable than ever.

# *Conclusion:*

## AI changes the tools, not the soul

AI will continue to shape the landscape for artists and the music industry. But, as this report has shown, that might not be a bad thing. Artists have always been the frontrunners of new technology. The sampler was dismissed as theft before hip-hop turned it into a language of its own; the DAW was going to make everyone sound the same, and instead put a studio in every bedroom. This report shows that the pattern might still hold: artists take whatever is put in front of them and find the creative possibility in it. AI is no different.

The opportunity, then, is not to choose between human creativity and AI, but to create the conditions in which the two can coexist responsibly.

The findings in this report point to a clear set of expectations. Artists want control over how their work, voice, and identity are used. They want transparency over where and how AI is involved. And they want confidence that the value created from human work continues to get back to the people who made it.

This all creates an opportunity for the music industry as a whole to help set the standard for what ethical AI looks like, protecting rights while enabling innovation.



Stella Explorer, Stockholm and London-based producer, singer, multi-instrumentalist, and filmmaker

# Here are Epidemic Sound's *key principles* to make this a reality:



Rebecca Mardal, Swedish guitarist, songwriter, and producer, and Johnny Marr, legendary English guitarist, songwriter, and producer, during Epidemic Sound's artist mentorship program, The Bridge

## 1 Put human creativity at the center of AI innovation

Technology should help artists experiment, solve creative problems, and grow. It shouldn't replace them. This means supporting them throughout this new era and turbocharging their talent instead of cancelling it out.



King Sis, Los Angeles-based R&B singer-songwriter

## 2 Don't let consent become a grey area

Give artists actual control over how their voice, identity, and music are all used by AI. This means giving them clear, signposted permissions and the opportunity to opt-out.



Janset, London-based hip-hop and grime artist

## 3 Prioritize control and purpose

Keep the artists you work with in control of the process, always putting creative decision-making ahead of an algorithm. AI should only be used when it genuinely improves the creative process, not only because it exists.



Gavin Luke, American composer and pianist

## 4 Double down on transparency

Companies should be clear about whether AI is being used, where it's being used, and to what extent. This report highlights just how important clear disclosure is.



Nyck Caution, New York-based rapper

## 5 Modernize remuneration

If human-created music or sound powers AI content, humans must still be compensated and share in the value that content creates. Compensation models must evolve alongside technology.



Jordin Sparks, American singer-songwriter

## 6 Shape AI with artists

The best way forwards will come from a collaborative music industry — one that doesn't force technology upon creativity, but works together to ensure new tools reflect shared needs, rights, and ambitions.

At Epidemic Sound we're keeping artists in control. Our AI tools support video creators and marketeers to find and adapt tracks to fit their content. But we allow artists to make that decision — to opt-out if they don't want their music to be used by these tools.

For those who want to participate though, we guarantee artists are paid when one of their tracks is used in our AI tools. Boosting discoverability and remuneration but never compromising on control.

Fairness and equity is baked into how we work: our artists earn over $60,000 per year on average, with top earners earning as high as $200,000. Our model guarantees artists make a sustainable living, whether it's their full-time passion or side hustle, and evolves with industry standards and developments.

With a direct route to billions of potential fans through platforms like YouTube and TikTok, Epidemic Sound's distribution power is uncapped.

## *Epidemic Sound* for artists



- We're an equitable partner who pays artists fairly.
- We provide unique distribution power with unprecedented reach.
- We support artist development through expert guidance and insights.
- We enable collaboration through access to a new creative community.
- We innovate responsibly, ensuring artists are compensated for new AI features and always have the control to opt-out.

# Who is Epidemic Sound

Epidemic Sound is the world's leading soundtracking platform, helping creators and brands soundtrack their content with human-made music, Hollywood-grade sound effects, AI-powered tools, and a 100% IP-owned catalog that lets them publish safely anywhere online. All while empowering artists to build and grow a career in music.

- **Over 3.5 billion**
  average daily views of YouTube and TikTok videos soundtracked by Epidemic Sound music
- **Over 20 billion**
  streams a year of the Epidemic Sound group's tracks across music streaming platforms
- **70%**
  of the top 300 US YouTube channels use Epidemic Sound
- **Nearly 200 hours**
  of music downloaded from Epidemic Sound platforms per hour



Lawd Ito, New Jersey-based Latin indie pop artist

# Methodology

**Optimism, Ownership & Identity: How Artists Are Defining the Next Era of Music**

The survey was conducted among 1,000 artists across the UK and US.
The interviews were conducted online by Sapio Research in March–April 2026
using an email invitation and an online survey.

Sapio Research is a B Corp Certified full-service market research agency.
Sapio Research is an MRS Company Partner, and employs members of,
and abides by, the MRS Code of Conduct and ESOMAR principles.



Mimmi Bangoura, Swedish R&B singer-songwriter