

National News

When AI learns the beat: Creatives confront future

For the music industry that has historically struggled with copyright enforcement even in traditional formats, the stakes are higher now with AI taking shape.

BY EDGARR. BATTE

Uganda's entertainment industry has survived many revolutions. It has moved from DVDs sold in downtown arcades to YouTube premieres. Also notable is the shift from ringtone revenue to TikTok challenges.

Today, you can consume it all from low-budget studio shoots to glossy, cross-border collaborations. Each transition unsettled someone and empowered someone else. Now comes Artificial Intelligence (AI). In a probing conversation between media personality Edwin Katamba, popularly known as MC Kats, and motion picture professional Ian Akankwasa, widely recognised as Sasha Vybz, the subject is no longer speculative.

AI is not coming. It is here. "Let's talk about AI in music videos," MC Kats begins, reflecting the curiosity and anxiety many in the industry feel. "You showed me songs redone by AI. Hip hop turned rock. Rock turned Afrobeats. How does that even happen?"

Sasha Vybz explains it plainly. AI, he says, is a learning machine that collects information online and continu-



Behind the scenes on Dewinton Street in Kampala, the Jah Live broadcast crew fine-tunes the shot as artiste Lydia Jasmine steps into frame for a video shoot under the Amani Project in August 2017. PHOTO/EDGARR. BATTE

ously upgrades itself. He notes, "It's just prompts, you tell it exactly what you want."

With sufficient data, a system can analyse vocal textures, genre patterns and stylistic nuances, then generate an entirely new version of a familiar song. The machine does not "feel" music, but it recognises patterns with astonishing accuracy.

The result can be convincing enough to blur the line between homage and imitation. AI tools are increasingly accessible. Some offer limited free versions, while advanced platforms require paid subscriptions for extended features and output.

Yet the legal and financial questions remain unresolved. Who earns when an AI remix goes viral? Does the original artiste benefit, and how do platforms regulate such content? Sasha Vybz acknowledges that platforms such as YouTube are exploring ways to identify or label AI-generated material. The law, however, is racing to catch up with the algorithm.

For an industry that has historically struggled with copyright enforcement even in traditional formats, the stakes

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are higher now. The conversation shifts from music to visuals, where the implications are even more disruptive.

MC Kats references a viral AI-generated clip depicting an ultra-realistic cinematic fight scene featuring Hollywood actors. It was not filmed on location. It was generated. "That's going global," Sasha Vybz remarks.

If AI can produce convincing cinematic sequences in minutes, what becomes of the traditional production ecosystem? "It's very unfortunate because so many people are going to lose out on jobs," Sasha Vybz admits.

Lighting crews, assistant directors, editors and scriptwriters could find themselves displaced if producers opt for software over sets. AI can simulate international locations, Mexico, Miami or Barbados, without travel budgets or location

permits.

Feels different this time

The cost efficiencies are obvious. The human cost is less easily measured. The entertainment industry has weathered technological shifts before—from VHS to CDs, and physical distribution to streaming.

What feels different this time is that the disruption touches the creative core itself. Sasha Vybz resists framing AI purely as an existential threat. "I see AI as a tool," he says.

Where conceptualising a music video once required days of listening, brainstorming and scripting, AI can generate structured concepts within minutes based on detailed prompts.

For directors, this means efficiency and expanded experimentation. For technicians whose livelihoods depend on physical production, it may mean redundancy. The tension is not unique to Uganda.

Recent industry strikes in the United States (US) highlighted similar concerns, as writers and actors protested the possibility of studios replacing human labour

with automated systems.

The anxieties in Kampala echo those in Los Angeles. Perhaps the most unsettling moment in the exchange comes when MC Kats asks how audiences will distinguish reality from AI-generated fiction.

"Very soon there's not going to be any difference," Sasha Vybz responds.

The realism of AI-generated scenes, he argues, is already convincing enough to deceive viewers. Beyond entertainment lies a deeper concern of misinformation, defamation and digital manipulation.

If voices and faces can be convincingly replicated, reputations can be threatened in ways previously unimaginable. When asked how one might prove that a fabricated video is false, Sasha Vybz's answer is stark.

"You can't." Platforms now prompt users to disclose AI-generated content. But regulation trails innovation. In an era already saturated with information, verification may become the defining challenge.

Evolution is key

Amid the uncertainty, Sasha Vybz represents a broader instinct within Uganda's creative class—evolution. After more than a decade directing music videos, he transitioned into film, serving as director of photography on *Single Not Searching*, shot in Ghana and Atlanta and now streaming on Amazon Prime.

"I don't want to settle," he says. His perspective also reflects changing audience behaviour. TikTok and other short-form platforms have altered music marketing economics.

Artists increasingly test songs online before committing significant resources to full-scale music videos.

"It makes sense," he observes.

In a market driven by virality and algorithmic discovery, strategic caution replaces blind investment.

The exchange between MC Kats and Sasha Vybz reveals neither panic nor blind optimism. It exposes tension. AI can remix songs, generate scripts, simulate locations and reduce production costs.

It can empower directors while threatening traditional crew structures. It can also entertain audiences, and mislead them. Uganda's entertainment industry has always adapted to change.

The current shift, however, is deeper. It challenges distribution channels, marketing strategies as well as the very mechanics of creation. The question is no longer whether AI will influence music and film.

It already does. The more urgent question is whether creatives, for example directors, technicians, performers and regulators alike, can redefine their roles quickly enough to remain relevant in a landscape where the machine is learning the beat.

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