

## Feature

# How generative AI could make, break music sector

In the second instalment of a six-part series on the disruption within the creative industries occasioned by generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), **Bamuturaki Musnguzi** takes stock of the goings-on that threaten to take the wind out of the sails of the music industry.

Last year, the Danish non-profit collective rights management organisation Koda—with 52,000 members, including composers, songwriters, and music publishers, under its belt—took legal action against the popular generative AI music platform Suno. In a first-of-its-kind lawsuit out of Denmark, Koda accused the US-based Suno of what the former referred to as “the biggest music theft in history.” The ongoing legal battle will impact what constitutes fair use in the copyright laws of most jurisdictions, with Koda contending that companies like Suno should seek authorisation before using copyrighted music to train AI models.

As Björn Ulvaeus, president of the Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers (CISAC), succinctly put it in the Foreword of the CISAC Global Collections Report 2023, “The advent of Artificial Intelligence signals a profound shift for our sector—proof that progress and disruption can exist side by side, and that the future of creativity will be shaped by how we reconcile both realities.” The use of generative AI to create new music is a topic of ongoing debate for the recording industry, with the word theft thrown around quite extensively.

“I approach this technological revolution as someone who has used AI tools myself. I recognise their potential. For me, AI tools can be like a soundboard, offering references and unexpected directions that expand and complement the human creative process,” Ulvaeus, best known as a key member of the pop group ABBA, further wrote.

Adding, “But I also recognise that when AI companies build vast models using unlicensed works of millions of creators, the effect is very different. What began as a simple tool became an instrument of systematic exploitation. Unchecked and uncontrolled, AI raises deep questions about authorship and value.”

## Viewed with suspicion

In an amended Bill that the Parliament of Uganda passed last week on copyrights, a clause on AI was dropped because the government is developing a policy on the same.

“I truly hope so,” folk pop singer and songwriter Suzan Kerunen told Case Files when told about the government’s plans “I feel people are more

writer, funkster and multi-instrumentalist, says AI has the potential to “improve efficiency in procedural mundane tasks”. This, he adds, is “the equivalent of housekeeping in creative works”.

Kerunen concurs, but adds that for AI to “add great value in production, market placement and add standards to creativity”, the parameters of what she describes as exploration “should be well defined.” The folk pop musician says while she can effortlessly tell the difference between a song produced by a human and one by AI, she is not sure most Ugandans can.

Joe Kahirimbanyi, the Ugandan singer-songwriter and leader of Qwela Band, for one, admits he cannot.

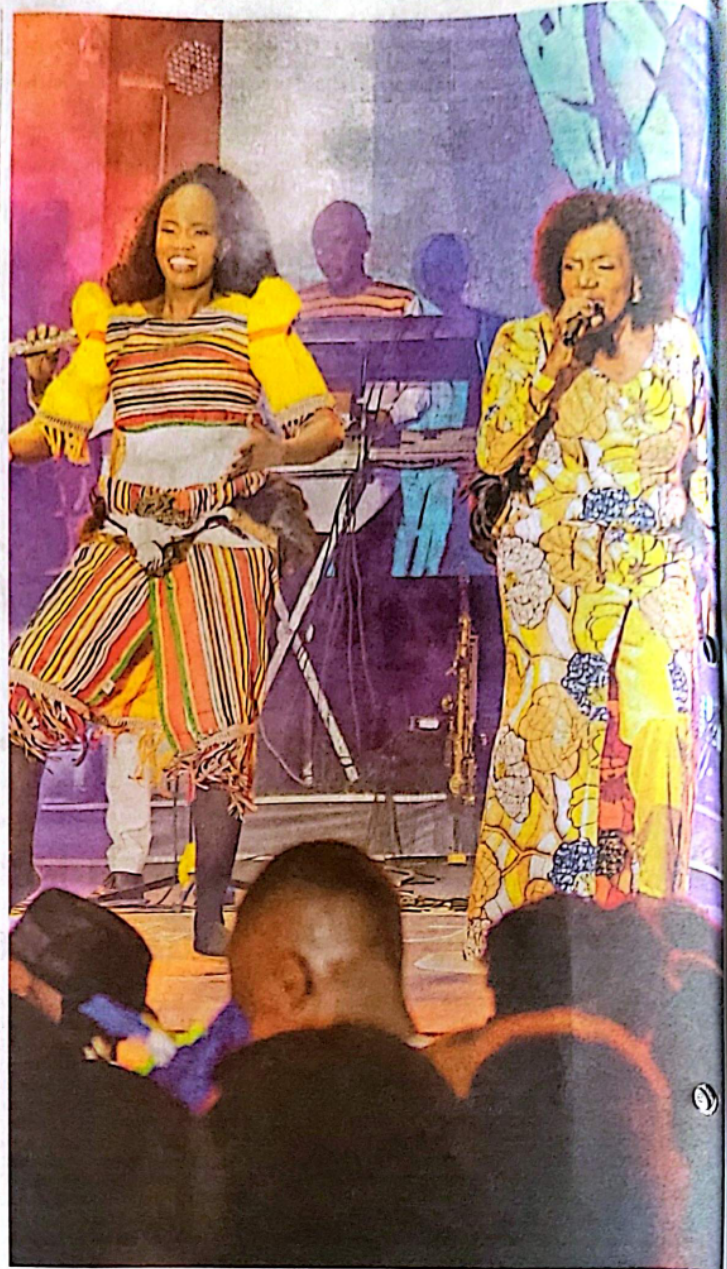
“It is getting very difficult even for a music professional to tell the difference between AI-generated music and human-generated music,” Kahirimbanyi admits. “As AI rapidly improves, it gets harder to tell.”

While Kerunen swears by “authenticity”, Kahirimbanyi is alive to the fact that “nowadays, most artists are relying on visualisers as opposed to an actual music video because the main avenues for breaking out music have now shifted from mainstream TV to social media clips.” He specifically points out that “Canva and other AI apps are now easing the budgets on things like flyers and poster designs.” The Qwela Band frontman concedes to experimenting with AI a little bit, “but nothing I can use yet.”

“I am approaching it with a lot of curiosity and a bit of caution. I would want to adapt AI to aid my process without completely abandoning my creative spirit and abilities for it,” Kahirimbanyi says.

As for Kasozi, he harbours no plans of gravitating towards AI. “My reason for doing what I do is intrinsically tied to who I am and why I exist. Letting AI do creative work for me would be a slow but certain creative suicide and self-defeating on a spiritual level. It would be like asking someone to eat a meal for you and then expecting to get the nutrition!”

A 2024 report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), however, makes clear that AI has been used in creation, production, and distribution in the music industry. It is used to generate music using vast databases of already existing tracks, blend them, develop new or



Members of Afrigo Band perform at the band's 48th anniversary in Kampala on August 5, 2023. PHOTO/ COURTESY OF TALENT AFRICA

ration, and more options for consumers to personalise their content.”

This has spawned a Responsible AI market, which is a key focus for Universal Music Group (UMG). Casandra Strauss, the senior director, strategic technology, global digital strategy at UMG, says the world's leading music entertainment company, which is operational in 60 countries, “aim[s] to help foster [the] success” of the Responsible AI market.

“We’ve already announced so many collaborations with responsible AI companies, but only after doing our due diligence on potential partners. We do a lot of research into what the state-of-the-art technology is, what new businesses out there are doing and what ethical tools we can incorporate into our business to help our artists and our teams.”

tal business at Sony Music Entertainment—points out, that AI-synthesised voice technology could be used at scale to cover songs and attempt to replace artists.

But as Chris Horton, who leads UMG's AI Review Team, discloses, “We first look at whether AI tools are ethically trained, and respect copyright.”

Elio Quinton, another member of the AI Review Team, further offers: “What we’re always trying to do as a label is enable artists to achieve their creative and commercial goals. And there are numerous ways we can leverage AI technology to make us more efficient at doing this.”

AI can improve, Quinton points out, operational efficiency as seen in the provision of data analytical tools to artists. On

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