# Indie artists hit hardest as AI music fraud surges on streaming platforms



In a rapidly evolving digital landscape, the music industry finds itself embroiled in a complex battle against streaming fraud, where innocent indie artists are often left reeling from the fallout. The advent of AI-generated music tracks has transformed the streaming environment into a battleground for authenticity, as fraudsters increasingly exploit platforms like Spotify and Apple Music to generate illicit royalties. Recent estimates from Deezer suggest that as many as 20,000 new AI-created tracks are uploaded daily, representing a staggering 18% of all new content — a figure that has nearly doubled since the beginning of the year. This surge poses a significant threat to legitimate artists, particularly those producing independent music.

Fraudsters employ sophisticated methods, including bots, to manipulate listening metrics and extract revenue from these fake songs, often wreaking havoc on the charts and diverting critical royalties from genuine artists. While Spotify claims to monitor these activities closely by deploying significant engineering resources, Apple Music suggests that manipulated streams account for less than 1% of their traffic. However, industry insiders argue that in a global streaming market valued at approximately $20.4 billion, even a fraction of this manipulation could equate to hundreds of millions of dollars lost annually.

The challenges are compounded by the lowered barriers to entry for both artists and con artists. While independent musicians can upload their music with ease compared to the arduous process of physical media production, the same convenience invites nefarious activities. Darren Owen, the chief operating officer of the music distribution company Fuga, noted that the issue of streaming fraud has escalated dramatically since 2021, now consuming half of his operational focus. Fuga employs machine learning algorithms to assess listening patterns, aiming to differentiate authentic engagement from fraudulent activity — a task made complicated by the endless creativity of those intent on deception.

The plight of innocent artists is stark. Darren Hemmings, managing director of music marketing firm Motive Unknown, recounted a situation where a track on his EP jumped from negligible plays to over 1,000 and was subsequently accused of manipulation. “It’s very judge, jury, executioner,” he lamented, acknowledging that while the conclusion drawn by his distributor was understandable, it underlined the inherent risks artists face in an system often predicated on suspicion. Similarly, Northern Irish rock band Final Thirteen experienced their music removed following a substantial spike in streams, which they believe stemmed from increased airplay on BBC Radio 1, yet their distributor hastily penalised them for suspected manipulation.

The repercussions of these erroneous takedowns can be devastating for indie artists, derailing marketing strategies and resulting in tangible financial losses. Matthew Whiteside, artistic director of the experimental classical label TNW Music, noted that his albums faced multiple removals due to their inclusion in manipulated playlists. With limited funds, resubmitting albums at a cost of $40 each is simply unfeasible, especially when the earnings from streaming are already marginal.

Deezer has taken steps to combat this issue, being the first streaming service to institute fraud detection systems. Thibault Roucou, the company’s royalties and reporting director, explained that they analyse numerous indicators to assess streaming authenticity. However, many other platforms operate under a presumption of guilt, meaning that appealing a wrongful takedown can be arduous and discouraging. Pop singer Levina, who had her music unjustly removed simply due to sharing a name with another artist, expressed frustration at the lack of recourse available for affected musicians.

While the fight against artificial manipulation continues, experts suggest that streaming providers now see this as a containment strategy rather than a complete eradication. Owen highlighted a new trend wherein fraudsters manipulate multiple tracks to a lesser degree, evading sophisticated detection systems. For many in the indie music community, the prospect of shifting their focus to alternative platforms such as Bandcamp is becoming increasingly appealing. Hemmings posits that a two-tier streaming economy could emerge, where independent artists abandon mainstream platforms to seek more equitable avenues for monetisation, further complicating the challenges faced by the industry.

As the landscape evolves, the call for robust industry standards and fairer practices becomes more urgent. Levina is working with the Featured Artists Coalition to establish minimum standards for distributors, advocating for a system that would allow artists the opportunity to defend themselves against wrongful accusations. With many struggling to harness the potential of streaming, the urgency for reform is palpable, and the fate of countless indie artists hangs in the balance.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/jun/03/ai-bot-farms-and-innocent-indie-victims-how-music-streaming-became-a-hotbed-of-and-fakery), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/jun/03/ai-bot-farms-and-innocent-indie-victims-how-music-streaming-became-a-hotbed-of-and-fakery)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/jun/03/ai-bot-farms-and-innocent-indie-victims-how-music-streaming-became-a-hotbed-of-and-fakery), [[5]](https://time.com/6273529/drake-the-weeknd-ai-song/), [[7]](https://www.ft.com/content/c5334762-dcd2-4820-9a75-534a13b6fb59)
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* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/jun/03/ai-bot-farms-and-innocent-indie-victims-how-music-streaming-became-a-hotbed-of-and-fakery), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/0128384e-dabe-4788-89bb-63a33e78c77f)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/jun/03/ai-bot-farms-and-innocent-indie-victims-how-music-streaming-became-a-hotbed-of-and-fakery), [[7]](https://www.ft.com/content/c5334762-dcd2-4820-9a75-534a13b6fb59)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/jun/03/ai-bot-farms-and-innocent-indie-victims-how-music-streaming-became-a-hotbed-of-and-fakery), [[6]](https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/musician-charged-with-10m-streaming-royalties-fraud-using-ai-and-bots/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/jun/03/ai-bot-farms-and-innocent-indie-victims-how-music-streaming-became-a-hotbed-of-and-fakery), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/jun/03/ai-bot-farms-and-innocent-indie-victims-how-music-streaming-became-a-hotbed-of-and-fakery)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/jun/03/ai-bot-farms-and-innocent-indie-victims-how-music-streaming-became-a-hotbed-of-and-fakery> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/jun/03/ai-bot-farms-and-innocent-indie-victims-how-music-streaming-became-a-hotbed-of-and-fakery> - This article discusses the rise of AI-generated music tracks flooding streaming platforms like Spotify and Apple Music, leading to fraudulent royalty claims. Deezer reported that over 20,000 AI-created tracks were being added daily, nearly doubling since January. Fraudsters use bots and AI to generate revenue, while some exploit upload services to place fake songs on legitimate artists' pages, diverting royalties. The piece highlights the challenges in detecting and mitigating such activities, with streaming services investing in engineering resources to address the issue.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/0128384e-dabe-4788-89bb-63a33e78c77f> - Deezer, the French music streaming service, announced achieving cash flow break-even for the first time in nearly two decades. In 2024, its revenues increased by 12% to €542 million, despite an adjusted loss before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation of €4 million. Deezer plans to invest in research and development to foster sustainable growth and profitability, aiming to offer more personalised and exclusive experiences while improving artist revenues through AI-generated song detection.
4. <https://time.com/6275794/ai-voice-cloning-scams-music/> - The article explores the growing prevalence of AI voice cloning, posing significant risks in both scams and the music industry. It highlights cases where AI-generated voices have been used in fraudulent activities, such as ransom calls mimicking loved ones. In the music sector, AI voice cloning allows users to create songs featuring vocals that sound like popular artists without their involvement, raising legal concerns about copyright infringement and the exploitation of artists' reputations.
5. <https://time.com/6273529/drake-the-weeknd-ai-song/> - A controversial AI-generated song titled 'Heart on My Sleeve,' featuring simulated voices of rappers Drake and The Weeknd, went viral with millions of streams across various platforms. Created by TikTok user @ghostwriter977, the song stirred debate on social media about its quality and the ethical implications of using AI to mimic artists. Universal Music Group (UMG), which represents Drake, has been actively working to prevent unauthorized use of its artists' music by AI platforms.
6. <https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/musician-charged-with-10m-streaming-royalties-fraud-using-ai-and-bots/> - North Carolina musician Michael Smith was indicted for collecting over $10 million in royalty payments from Spotify, Amazon Music, Apple Music, and YouTube Music using AI-generated songs streamed by thousands of bots in a massive streaming fraud scheme. Smith fraudulently inflated music streams on digital platforms between 2017 and 2024 with the assistance of an unnamed music promoter and the CEO of an AI music company.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/c5334762-dcd2-4820-9a75-534a13b6fb59> - Sony Music has reported removing over 75,000 AI-generated deepfake recordings featuring popular artists like Harry Styles. This revelation was made in a submission to a UK government consultation on copyright rules, where Sony expressed concern that proposed changes could exacerbate the issue. Music executives believe that the identified fakes are only a small portion of those available online, as they are manually located on streaming services.