

## Untitled

By

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AI is like the stuffy 73-year-old professor who's extremely knowledgeable but jaded, riding his tenure to the end of time. He's lost the will to come up with new ideas. Instead, he delivers cold, efficient lectures, and he can easily pinpoint the BPM of a song and the meaning of its lyrics. Students admire his expertise but his lack of enthusiasm makes their eyelids droop.

In a field where many young writers are inexperienced and paid little, numerous album reviews already read like presentations generated by ChatGPT. Still, there's investigative and memoiristic writing that AI can't compete with. AI could never attend a concert and then speculate about the cultish fan-mythology surrounding Drain Gang. AI couldn't hypothesize about how Spotify's playlisting practices spread musical misinformation. Maybe the most meaningful piece I read this year was by a man documenting the music he listened to after his baby son suddenly died.

AI is fundamentally at odds with music writing because the machine is programmed to provide the "correct" answer, but describing the impact of a song is subjective and wonderfully fallible. What makes the best criticism so genius is that it goes out on a limb and reaches into the abyss, daring to say something outrageous and somehow capturing the transient essence of an artform that is immaterial and impossible to totally describe. The best writing mirrors the chaotic feeling of the music and submerges you in the artist's psyche. In its current state, AI can poorly imitate writers' styles and offer Wikipedia-lite arguments, but it can't offer zeitgeist-shattering theories and dizzyingly creative prose.

To rise above AI, it seems likely writers will lean further into autotheory and idiosyncratic prose, which is really just getting back to music journalism's voice-y roots. The recent renaissance of blogging is going to expand as writers realize the importance of being playful with style. Similarly, as culture further decentralizes into pockets across platforms, writers will burrow into niche siloes and become the masters of microcultures that AI can't access.

Music production's future is murkier. On one hand, AI music could become an entire macrogenre, radically shrinking the time it takes artists to come up with ideas and resulting in a mish-mash of genre-oscillating algorithm-bait. On the other, platforms could ban AI music. Labels could also deploy AI as a draconian policing device, using it to detect TikTok and SoundCloud artists who repurpose tiny samples and copyright-striking them immediately.

AI hasn't yet produced anything groundbreaking. The bulk of AI's musical output to date involves opportunistic bootlegs like fake Playboi Carti songs. My favorite AI music is the