

I don't know if everyone feels this the same way I do. Some days I wonder if it's just me. Is music actually getting worse, or am I just aging out of something I used to love? I don't have a neat answer to that, and I don't really trust people who claim they do. All I can say with confidence is that something feels off. Everything sounds over-polished, but very little of it sounds lived in. Music is easier to find than it's ever been, easier to make than it's ever been, and somehow easier to forget than it's ever been. That combination should raise more questions than it does. The decline didn't start when people noticed it. It started when effort quietly stopped being required—both to make music and to obtain it. Somewhere around the late 1990s and early 2000s, the friction that used to filter ideas, talent, and intent began disappearing. Nobody called it decline at the time. Why would they? The industry still looked massive. Records still sold. Tours still happened. Everything appeared healthy from the outside.

But the rules underneath was already shifting.

Home recording stopped being a compromise and became the norm. Editing tools moved from correcting mistakes to hiding them. The internet broke the idea that music should cost anything to acquire. Napster didn't kill music—it killed the expectation that obtaining it should involve choice, money, or patience. The system changed long before the culture caught up. By the time streaming normalized access over ownership, the damage was already baked in. Albums still existed, but risk didn't. Genres still existed, but meaning started thinning. Labels still existed, but development didn't. Attention became the currency, not memory. None of this happened all at once. There was no announcement. No collapse moment. Just a slow erosion that only becomes obvious once you're far enough away from where it started. Now it's everywhere. And once you see it, it's hard to unsee.

I. Music Isn't 'Getting Worse.' It is worse...

More Precisely, Music Is Being Made by People Who Never Learned the Language of Making Music.

The uncomfortable truth isn't just that music is “**easier**” to make now—it's that **the system no longer distinguishes between learning the craft and bypassing it**. Tools that once required foundational understanding—rhythm, harmony, arrangement, tension and release—now present themselves as creativity itself. The blueprint has been abstracted away, and what remains is a polished surface that convinces the untrained they've built something when they've only assembled it.

Building something and assembling something, while having close associations, are not ‘**one in the same.**’

This mirrors the exact pathology I called out a few years ago in my essay called [The Art of Fake](#): people projecting professional authority without professional failure. They aren't artists yet—they're **students, tinkerers, or app operators**, mistaking access for aptitude. The danger isn't democratization; it's that **standards stopped being enforced**, and the market rewards confidence and volume over comprehension. The deeper question isn't whether this music is “**bad**,” but whether a culture that no longer requires apprenticeship can even recognize mastery when it appears. The lines between expert and beginner have now blurred that beginners are now getting the rewards only designed for experts and only the experts are complaining about it.

II. Spotify Didn't Just Kill the Album — It Killed the Cost of Commitment

The album didn't die because listeners lost attention spans; it died because **the system removed the need to commit to anything longer than a moment**. The old album cycle wasn't romantic—it was transactional.

How it used to go was you would be in the car or hanging out at home, have the AM/FM radio playing. Maybe out on a bike ride with the headphones on listening to your local radio station. You would hear a new song and would really like it. Back then they would usually play a song on a rotation every hour or couple of hours. It was always likely to hear it again the same day if you heard it earlier. A few weeks later another song from the same group would be released. You then did some work to earn some money and would go to your local record store, CD Warehouse, Camelot Music, wherever you purchased music. You bought ten songs for the two you loved from the radio because scarcity demanded it. Sometimes you would love the entire album. Sometimes it was one or two other songs from the album and even sometimes it is still those two songs you bought the whole album for. That transaction forced immersion, and immersion created meaning. The album cover. The liner notes. Sometimes the photography was cool or the artwork being badass. It was an experience to listen to a new record in its entirety for the first time uninterrupted. Especially if it was a group, you already really liked. I know for a fact I got to experience that as a kid, teenager, young adult and now older adult. I still very much appreciate the full-length album.

However, times have changed. Streaming replaced that with infinite optionality, which feels like freedom until you realize **nothing sticks because nothing has weight**. Bands still make albums now for the same reason people still write long letters—they believe in the form, even if the recipient doesn't. At first, in the 2000s, when pirating was really huge, artists and labels didn't really know how to deal with this. Ultimately, streaming took over because they realized one important part of the music industry was king above all else.

Publication Rights...

You're still watching the movie. The music is still playing. Nothing sounds broken. That's the trick. The song didn't change. What changed was who it belongs to and what it's for. One day, music was something you bought. You owned a copy. You could play it when you wanted, as many times as you wanted, and nobody was tracking you doing it. That mattered more than people realized. Then a frame got spliced in. You didn't notice it, because nothing stopped working. The song still played. The album art was still there. The artist name was still on the screen. But behind it, the rules changed. You don't own the music anymore. You're renting access to it. And that small shift rewired everything.

Publishing rights are where that money actually goes now. Not to the act of selling music to people, but to the act of allowing music to exist inside other things. Videos. Ads. Clips. Streams. Background noise. Anywhere attention passes through. If a song plays in a TikTok, someone gets paid. If it plays in a YouTube video, someone gets paid. If it plays in a store, a gym, a show, a commercial—someone gets paid.

That “someone” is whoever owns the publishing.

It doesn't matter if you listen closely.
It doesn't matter if you remember it.
It doesn't matter if you even like what you heard.
It doesn't matter if you even know what you heard.
Or if you heard at all.

The system doesn't care.

Under the old model, money came from commitment. You bought the record. You sat with it. You lived with it. The artist and the label both needed you to actually want the music. Under the new model, money comes from placement. From being used. From being present. A song can make money without ever meaning anything to anyone. That's the frame you didn't notice. Once ownership shifted from people buying music to platforms licensing sound, albums stopped being the point. Songs became modular. Shorter. Safer. Easier to drop into someone else's content and disappear without friction. The music didn't get worse overnight. It got lighter. Thinner. Less demanding. Because when you don't have to commit to something to own it, you stop committing at all.

And the movie keeps playing like nothing had ever changed. Then all of the sudden, a blip. Most people never realized the splice happened. A big fat cock in your face. Just like in *"Fight Club."*

2026. AI productivity tools are now a normal thing, and if you have money, and a little creativity with how technology works, one can make things others cannot and those things be seen by the public as polished and professional. Social media only *"artists"* flooding platforms with content: output without investment. When nothing costs the creator much, the audience assumes it shouldn't cost them much either—attention included. The album didn't lose relevance because it failed. It lost relevance because **the environment no longer rewards endurance.**

III. Genres Didn't Die — They Collapsed Under the Weight of Gatekeeping, Even more Sub-Genres and Over-Labeling

Heavy metal is the perfect case study for this. Heavy Metal has survived fragmentation without losing identity. However, with internet sub-cultures being more prevalent in the 2020s, cracks are starting to show. There are some nonsense labels out there pretending to be serious sub-genres of heavy metal. Labels like Nintendocore and Witch House Metal are not real sub-genres. A sub-genre is just a label to describe a style, within the genre. It's all under the Heavy Metal banner. Give or take, responsibly, there are approximately 40 legitimate subgenres—and over 100 if you indulge internet micro-taxonomies—but everyone still understands what **"metal"** means. The umbrella holds because the culture values lineage and skill, even when it argues about labels or which sub-genre of heavy metal this/that band/song/record should belong in.

Contrast that with modern genre logic elsewhere, where categories exist less to describe sound and more to **signal belonging**. When every micro-variation demands recognition, the label stops communicating anything useful. At that point, genres become aesthetic marketing tags, not musical descriptors. Like having full-blown arguments why Metalcore isn't really metal when compared to thrash or the subtle differences between Death Metal and Deathcore. At the end of the day, does it really matter? The Metal Community should feel proud there is so much metal to consume in 2026 that one will never get to it all. There was a time in my youth where there wasn't a whole lot of really great heavy metal out there. There was a lot of arena rock being called Heavy Metal and that was fine but a lot of Heavy Metal of the late 1970s and 1980s were really loud, really fast and really experimental. Not all of it was good. Most of it wasn't but then again, 'good' can be whatever one thinks. The old debate would be based on record sales, T-shirt sales and concert tickets sold. In today's culture one can still use those metrics but then you have streams, views, likes, hearts, all sorts of metrics that can sway or even dictate public opinion. None of that can actually answer if it is **'good'** to you, the listener.

For example, I think Billie Eilish is a no talent mouth whisperer parading around as a singer. Yet, she's won awards. That must make her good right? Well. Sure, but 'good' is whatever you think it is because it's called art. Some have strong opinions of what consists of art as a definition. There is no wrong answer. I can explain

why I don't like her music, but I cannot convince anyone if that explanation is a true fact or not. I do find it funny Google or Wiki used the word "*avant-garde style*" as something regular people know what that means.

What "avant-garde" actually means: *Avant-garde* is a French term meaning "*advance guard*." In art, it refers to work that is:

- Intentionally experimental.
- Deliberately breaking existing forms.
- Often difficult, abrasive, or unpopular at first.
- More concerned with *process* than audience acceptance.

Avant-garde is not a sub-genre of anything. It's a category for no category. Which defies the concept of genre/sub-genre labeling to begin with. In Heavy Metal it's often used as a **polite shrug disguised as a descriptor**. The point is the actual meaning of things, even in music and even the artists themselves are blurred to have no meaning at all. Plus, she has dead eyes. Like she is blind. I feel like she is an alien pretending to be a pop star. Hey, if you love her music good for you. She has nothing on Sabbath or even Bon-Jovi. She can't play anything to the level of Jimi Hendrix but good for her. I don't like Sleep Token, Ghost, Bad Omens, or Falling in Reverse. I might be a Metalhead but I don't love everything. If I hear something and it makes my ears hurt and brain freeze. I will explain why I don't like them. It's the Gatekeepers that argue and cannot give one simple example of why they don't like something and cannot explain why, then get insulting towards the asker when they can't. Anyone that listens to metal has this one thing in common. **We all listen to metal.** There are different styles, all different in their own ways. It's those differences that makes this so damn interesting. With all that said, Gatekeeping did and does serve a function. Without it, shared standards, vocabulary, and lineage, a genre collapses into aesthetics and vibes instead of remaining a meaningful, communicable musical language. They did warn us this would happen but not from music changing. All taking the model of music, turning it on its side and reimagining it. Which is where we are now. People demanding recognition without earning distinction. The irony is that metal's gatekeeping—often criticized—may be the very thing that prevented total collapse of Heavy Metal. The question isn't whether genres still exist. It's whether **they still mean anything beyond self-identification.**

IV. Record Labels Are Useless Only If You Know What You're Doing

Labels didn't become obsolete because artists suddenly got empowered—they became optional because **infrastructure decentralized**. If you understand production, niche marketing, publishing rights, and audience targeting, a label becomes what it always was: a loan with interest.

In the past, that loan made sense. Artists and Bands needed upfront cash just to exist long enough to fail or succeed. Studio time wasn't cheap. Mixing and mastering weren't optional. Physical media had to be pressed. Merch had to be printed. Tours had to be booked, routed, and paid for before a single ticket sold. Flights, buses, hotels, food, crew—none of that ran on hope. Labels fronted the money, knowing full well they'd recoup through publishing because that's where the real money lived. If the record sold, the label got paid first. If it didn't, the artist carried the debt. Some artists became rich. Others became cautionary tales.

Today, most of that machinery no longer requires a gatekeeper. Recording can be done at home. Distribution is digital. Marketing is targeted, not broadcast. Merch can be printed on demand. Touring can be scaled to demand instead of ego. If an artist understands the system—and is willing to do the work—a label stops being a necessity and becomes a choice. Not everyone should self-manage, but those who can aren't rebelling against the industry. **They're just no longer dependent on it.**

Most who claim they "**don't need a label**" also don't understand why labels exist in the first place. They confuse independence with competence. Yes, you can self-release, self-market, self-monetize—but only if you

actually know how those systems work. The real shift is that **labels no longer develop talent**, because the market doesn't reward development anymore. Artists are expected to arrive finished, validated, and profitable—or not arrive at all. What's being exposed isn't label uselessness; it's **how many people never should have been trying to sell art in the first place**.

Bon-Jovi didn't get really noticed till the band's third record. Guns and Roses released a record and no one knew it existed for almost a year before their pop started. Motley Crue didn't headline their own tour till their second record. There are many stories like this where popular bands and artists didn't become mega stars till they had some records and time under their belt. Now one is supposed to be polished before they even walk into a professional studio or play a show in front of more people than they ever played in front of before.

V. The Grammys Aren't Proof Music Is Worse — They're Proof That Durability Is No Longer the Metric

How about a Grammy comparison? A Grammy comparison isn't about taste; it's about **construction and lifespan**. Songs once built to survive decades were written by one or two people who understood melody, structure, and restraint. Many modern nominees are committee-built, sample-dependent, and optimized for circulation—not memory.

This doesn't make them immoral. It makes them temporary.

My older blog on this subject already diagnosed this cultural sleight-of-hand: mistaking visibility for high quality and value, engagement for quality, and consensus for excellence. When songs are designed to function inside platforms rather than culture, longevity becomes accidental, not intentional. There are reasons why songs of the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s seem to feel more, “**real**,” to the people that still jam that music as if it just came out yesterday, loudly and it's the coolest thing since Crystal Pepsi. It's not because those decades were magically better or because people were smarter and more creative. Granted technology in music was not nearly as advanced and easy to use back then. Musicians and engineers alike had to be creative in troubleshooting. It's because those songs had to survive friction. They had to earn airtime on the regular old AM/FM radio. They had to justify physical production. They had to be played in rooms with other people who could disagree with you about whether they were any good. Those songs weren't optimized for algorithms, feeds, or chopped into usable fragments. They were written to exist as complete ideas, meant to be replayed, argued over, worn out, and lived with. Longevity wasn't a lucky side effect—it was the goal. When something had to clear that many real-world hurdles just to exist, what survived tended to feel heavier, louder, and more permanent. Not perfect—**just real**.

The real indictment isn't that today's music exists—it's that **no one seems offended by how disposable it's allowed to be**. This entire argument—AI, albums, genres, labels, awards, posers—collapses into one core tension I have been writing about for years: **Access has replaced apprenticeship, and overconfidence has replaced qualification**. Music didn't quietly devolve or devalue itself. We **lowered the cost of entry and removed the cost of failure**, then acted surprised when standards eroded. Not everyone creating is a poser. **But everyone demanding recognition without mastery is**. And that distinction still matters—whether the culture wants to admit it or not.

A lot of these arguments come from [Rick Beato's YouTube Channel](#). He brings up a lot of good points on the industry and how the almighty algorithm, big music labels and self-publishing have changed the music industry since the internet became the medium in which how humanity absorb music in the 2020s. He covers the material much better than I do. I just feel my own relationship with music, my work history in it and my life since absorbing the internet into my life also sees the music industry like this. The video game and film

industry are all the same now. Nothing has memorable staying power. Things come out. They come strong but within a few months it is something less remembered. I listen to more old music than I do new music but there is plenty of new music out there I find good. Same with film and video games. I find myself rewatching old movies or watching old movies I have never seen because the quality is so low now. Especially in the horror genre. There is way more crap out there than quality and that crap doesn't even lift the quality stuff up all that much. There is a resurgence of taking older video games and remodifying them, known as "modding," to bring these old games up to modern standards because the quality of video games have dropped so much with all the new platforms to host games.

If you give me a source that has unlimited potential that can access the past whenever I feel like it. To me that is a personal win, but to the craft itself and what it is used to represent dies a little bit each year, each decade, each new piece of technology that takes the friction away.

Erosion doesn't resolve, it just... continues till there isn't anything left.

Tacita Devaluatio Musicae

Latin for: (The Quiet Devaluation of Music)

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