

If Machines Can Make Music: GenAI, Musical Formation and Higher Music Education

Bing He

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia

Azlin Norhaini Mansor

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia

Salleh Amat

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia

Abstract

This comment article argues that generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) poses a fundamental challenge to higher music education, not because it can generate musical outputs, but because it unsettles the relationship between musical products and musical learning. Music education in higher education is concerned not only with producing songs, scores, arrangements or recordings, but with forming musicians, teachers, composers, producers and arts professionals capable of critical listening, embodied practice, aesthetic judgement, cultural awareness and ethical authorship. GenAI can accelerate musical production, yet it cannot automatically guarantee musical formation. The article therefore critiques product-centred assessment, warning that polished AI-assisted artefacts may obscure weak musical understanding. It argues for process-based assessment, AI music literacy, critical listening, creative accountability and stronger attention to embodiment and cultural responsibility. Rather than treating GenAI simply as a threat or tool, higher music education should use it to clarify what kinds of musicianship universities are responsible for cultivating.

Keywords

GenAI, music education, higher education, musical formation, musicianship.