

Tools, Not Tricks: How Musicians Are Actually Using AI

Research by  Water & Music for  moises

Introduction

A comprehensive survey on how working musicians actually use AI.

In late 2025, Water & Music partnered with Moises to survey 1,525 musicians on their AI usage and sentiment. Our sample captures how creators across skill levels and career stages use AI across multiple contexts, including practice, production, and professional work.

AI in music has accumulated a thick layer of myths: that it's mainly for amateurs, that professionals reject it, that it's devastating livelihoods. We designed this survey to test those assumptions against actual behavior.

Three key findings challenge the prevailing narratives:

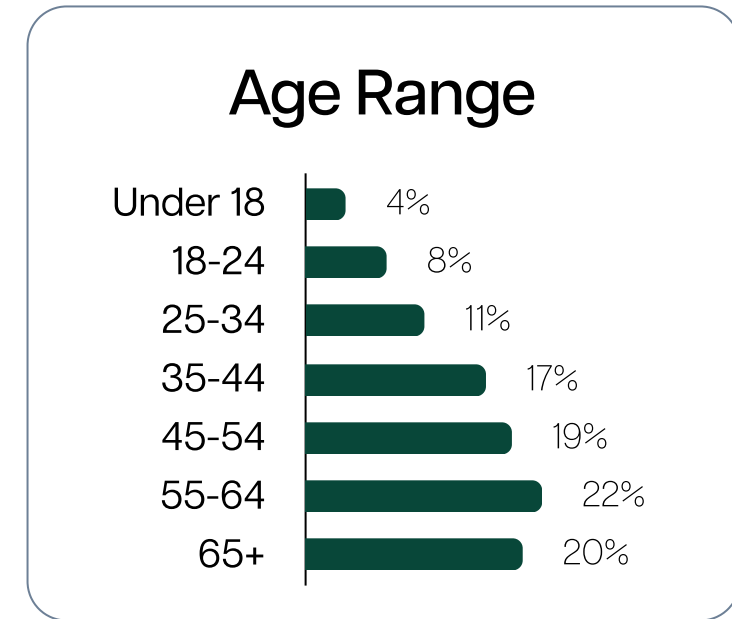
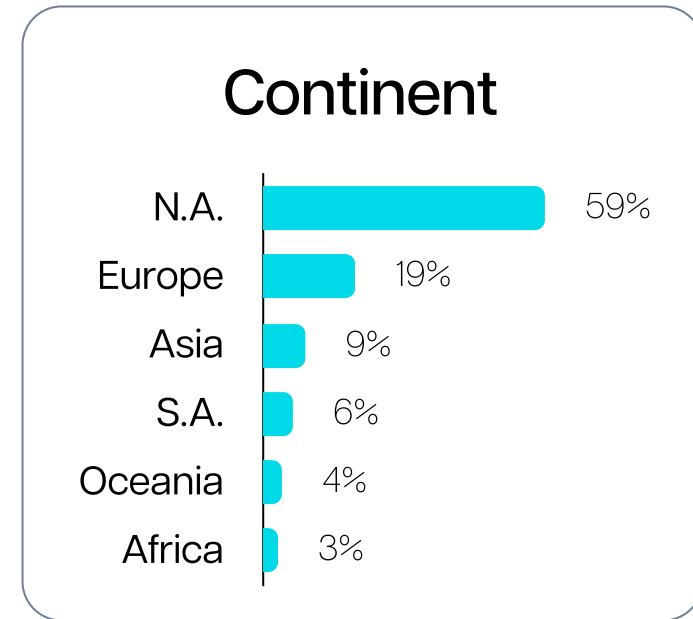
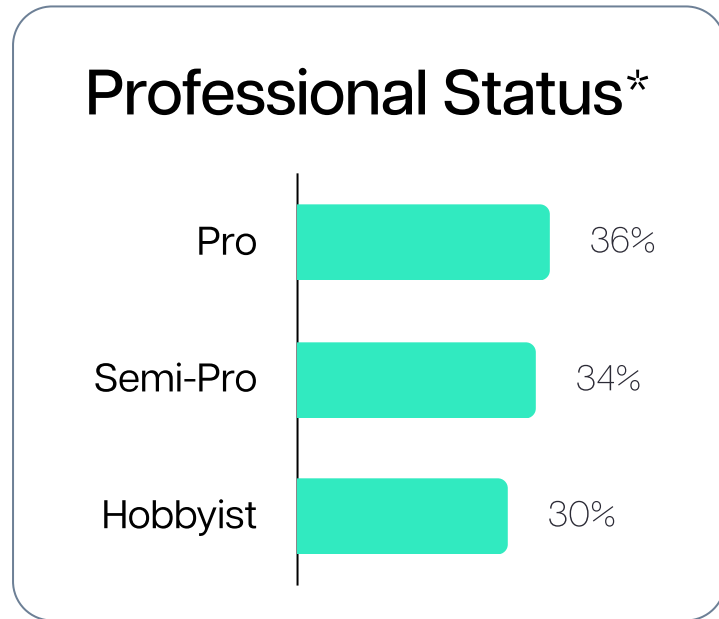
- **Professionals are leading the charge.** 78% of pros use AI, vs. 60% of hobbyists. Pros are also twice as likely to pay \$50 or more per month for AI tools.
- **AI's killer app for musicians? The unglamorous stuff.** Stem separation leads at a 71% adoption rate in our sample, outpacing full song generation (24%) by nearly 3:1.
- **Even enthusiasts have doubts.** 58% of AI users worry about authenticity, while 55% cite concerns about copyright and licensing. The top concerns are not about surface-level features and usability, but about ethics and ownership.

Who we surveyed

1,525 musicians completed this survey between November and December 2025. Roughly 80% were recruited through Moises' user and follower base (email list, mobile app, and web app), with the remainder from Water & Music's newsletter and social channels.

This sample does not represent every musician. Rather, it captures a specific population of **engaged music creators who actively use digital tools in their practice and production** – a leading indicator for broader market adoption of AI and other emerging technologies.

**For the purpose of analysis, we define “pros” as those who don't self-identify as hobbyists and earn some income from music. “Hobbyists” are defined as those who self-identify as such and earn no income from music. “Semi-pros” comprise everyone in between.*



- ### Top 10 Genres
1. Rock
 2. Pop
 3. Jazz
 4. R&B
 5. Country
 6. Soul
 7. Dance/Electronic
 8. Gospel
 9. Hip-Hop
 10. Latin

- ### Top 10 Musical Roles
1. Songwriter or composer
 2. Performing/touring artist
 3. Producer
 4. Studio or session musician
 5. Educator or student
 6. Recording artist
 7. Engineer (recording, mixing, mastering)
 8. Music industry professional
 9. Beatmaker
 10. Remixer

Behavior & Impact

Most AI music users aren't trying to write a hit song.

The dominant use cases center on streamlining workflow, not wholesale generation of full tracks. Stem separation tops the list at 71%, followed by practice and skill development (44%), accompaniment generation (40%), and mixing and mastering (32%). Meanwhile, full song generation ranks 6th at 24%.

The outcomes of AI also defy the popular narrative of efficiency at all costs. **Musicians aren't using the tech primarily to save money or speed up output; they're using it to grow as artists.**

When we asked our sample to indicate what AI has enabled them to achieve, learning more songs (40%), experimenting with new genres (33%), and improving production quality (30%) all ranked above economic results like cutting studio costs (20%).

All this points to a picture where AI isn't shortcutting the creative process; it's actually subsidizing it, giving musicians room to stretch their abilities – and then put them to work.

***Survey structure note:** Respondents were first asked whether they had used AI for music-related work in the past 12 months. Two-thirds (67%) said yes; the remaining third said no or were unsure. Detailed questions about AI tools, use cases, and outcomes were only asked of those who indicated they had used AI. This is why sample sizes vary across the charts in this report – some findings reflect all 1,525 respondents, while others draw from the 1,021 confirmed AI users.*

Top 10 AI Tasks

[multi-select]

[70.8% of respondents] Stem separation / vocal isolation

[43.7%] Practice / skill development

[40%] Accompaniment / backing track generation

[32.3%] Mixing and mastering

[27.9%] Melody / chord progression ideas

[24.0%] Full song generation from text prompt

[21.9%] Time stretching / pitch correction

[21.8%] Lyric writing or editing

[19.9%] Vocal editing or tuning

[19.6%] Audio-to-MIDI conversion

n = 1,021 (AI users). Survey question: "Which music-specific tasks have you used AI for in the past 12 months? Select all that apply." Total of 17 possible options.

Top 10 AI Outcomes

[multi-select]

[39.6% of respondents] Learned more songs

[32.9%] Experimented with new genres/styles

[30.4%] Improved production quality

[29.2%] Finished more tracks

[28.5%] Overcame creative blocks

[26.5%] Sped up mixing/mastering

[24.9%] Learned new production techniques

[19.7%] Reduced costs on studio time or session musicians

[19.4%] Created content for social/promotional purposes

[11.9%] Performed more live shows

n = 1,021 (AI users). Survey question: "What music-related outcomes has AI helped you achieve in the past 12 months? Please select all that apply." Total of 16 possible options.

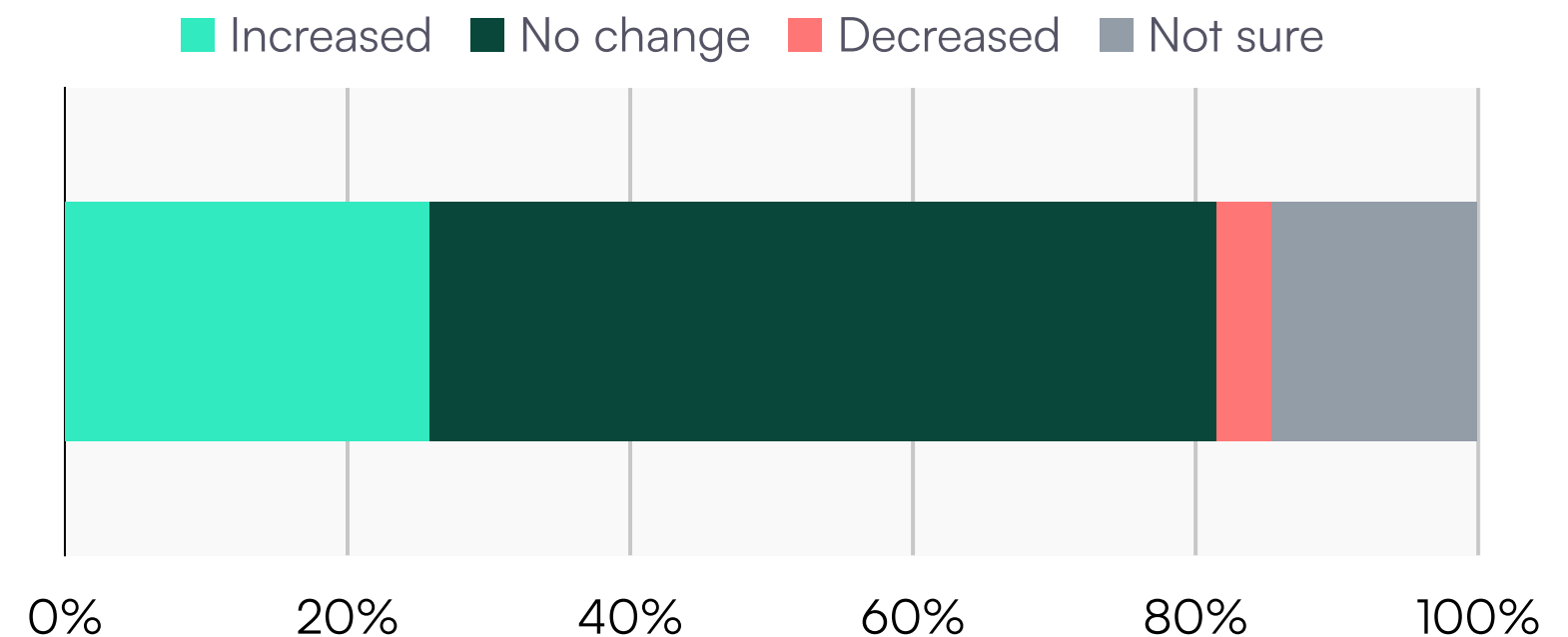
AI's impact on income: More positive than negative

Among musicians who monetize their work, more report that AI has *increased* their income (26%) than decreased it (less than 4%). The majority (56%) report no change at all. For those actively engaging with AI tools today, the short-term economic picture is neutral to positive.

Of course, this doesn't mean the wider threats are imaginary. AI-generated content is flooding streaming platforms, and many artists and their teams worry about what that means for discovery and royalties over time.

But the feared collapse hasn't materialized. Tracking whether it does in the long term will be critical in the years ahead.

AI's perceived impact on music income



n = 983 (people who monetize their music). Survey question: "Thinking about AI as an industry-wide trend (whether or not you personally use AI), how has it affected your music-related income in the last 12 months?"

Pros vs. Hobbyists

The more invested the musician, the more likely they are to adopt AI.

Across nearly every metric, professional musicians are more bullish on AI than hobbyists. They adopt at higher rates (78% vs. 60%), spend more on tools, and plan to increase usage over the next year.

Pros are twice as likely as hobbyists to spend \$50+ monthly on AI tools (21% vs. 11%). Hobbyists cluster at lower price points, with 36% spending \$1–19 and a quarter using only free tools.

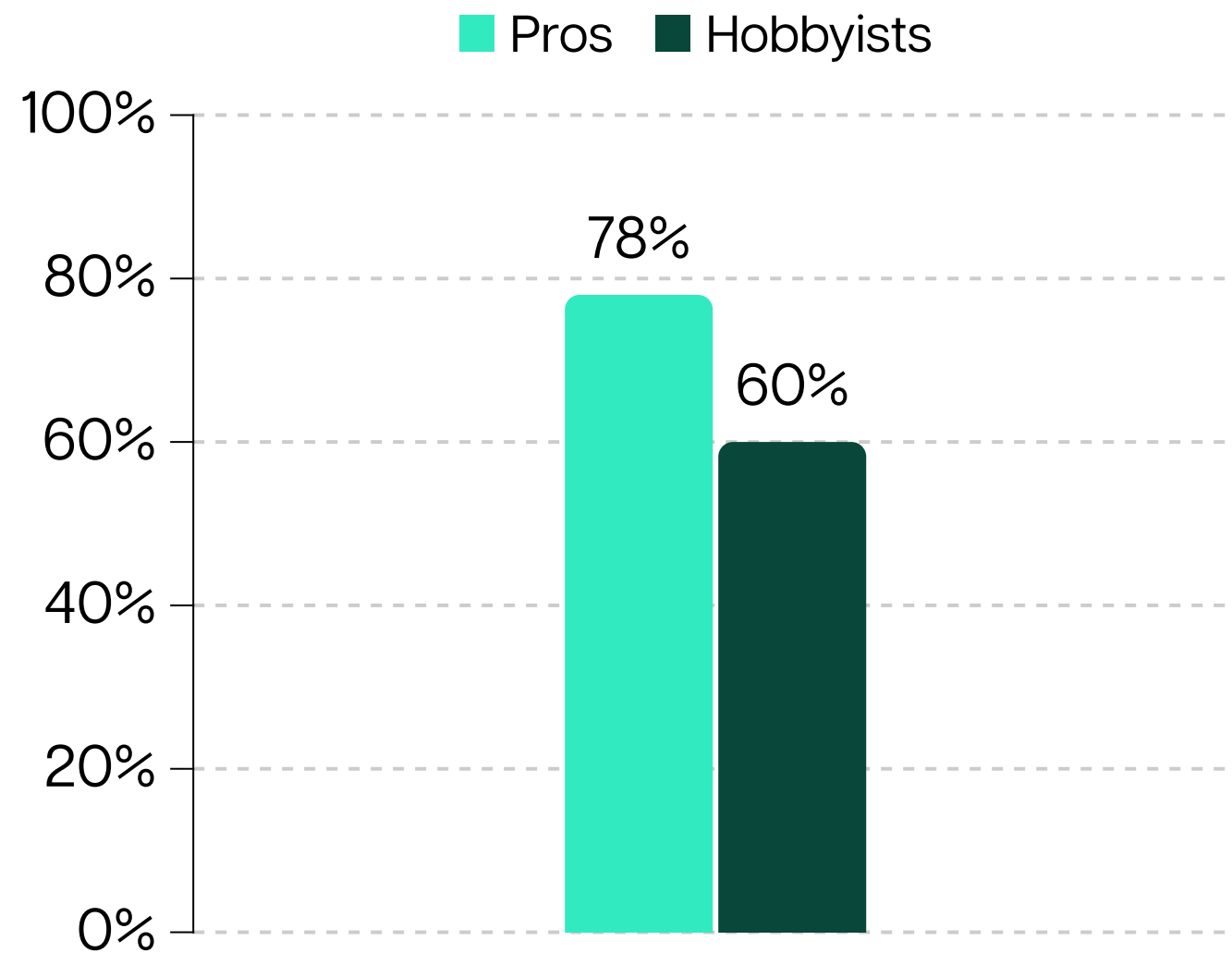
The spending gap reflects economics. For working musicians, time is money. A subscription that shaves hours off a session pays for itself.

Professionals are also pragmatists by nature: they test available tools, keep what delivers, and move on from what doesn't. The open question with AI is not *whether* pros will adopt the tech, but rather *which* tools will drive long-term loyalty, and on what basis.

**Please see Page 3 for more detail on how we categorize pros vs. hobbyists.*

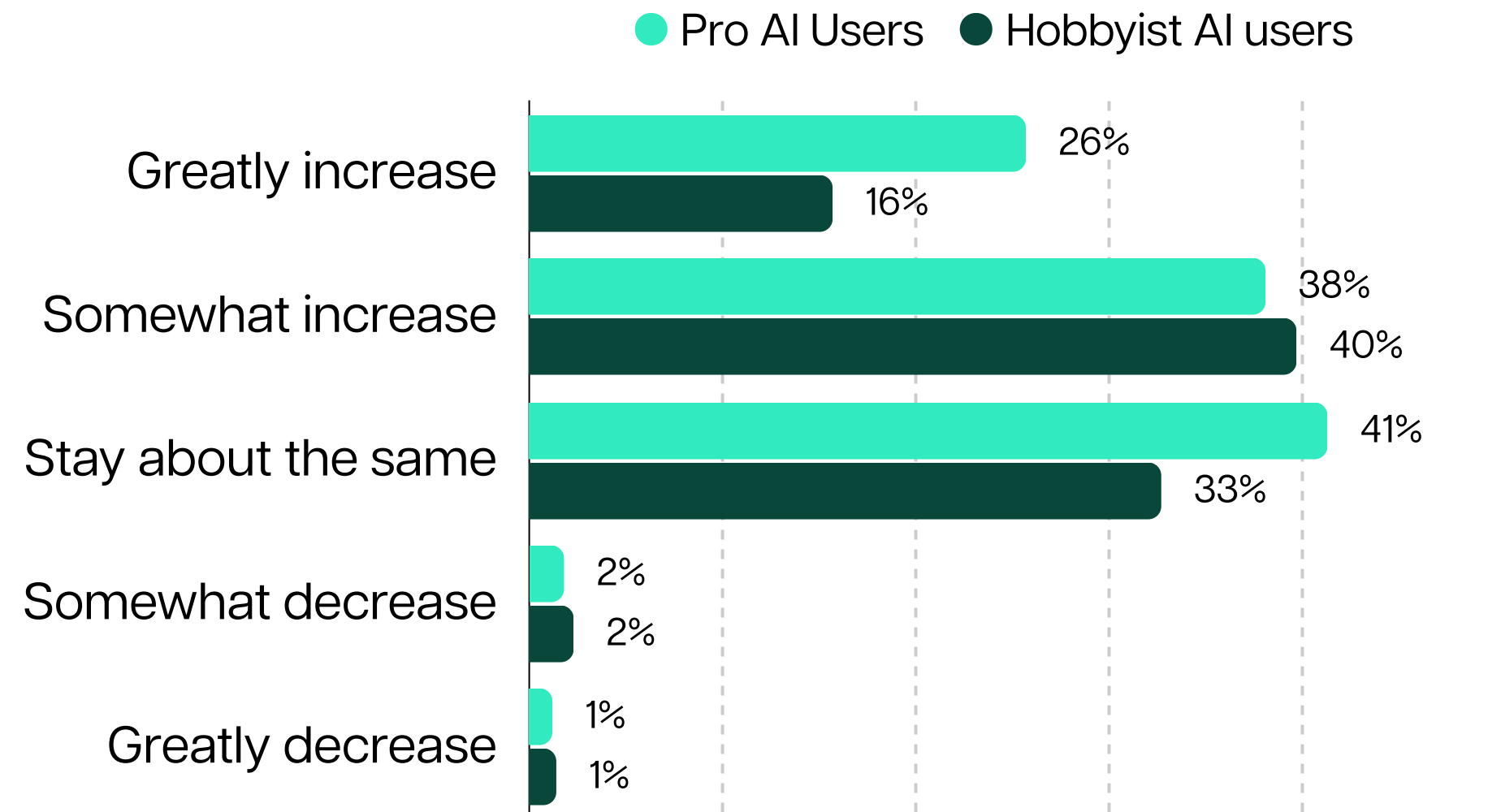
Pros vs. Hobbyists

AI Usage in Past 12 Months



n = 461 professionals, n = 552 non-professionals. Survey question: "Have you used AI for music-related work in the last 12 months?"

Plans for Future AI Usage



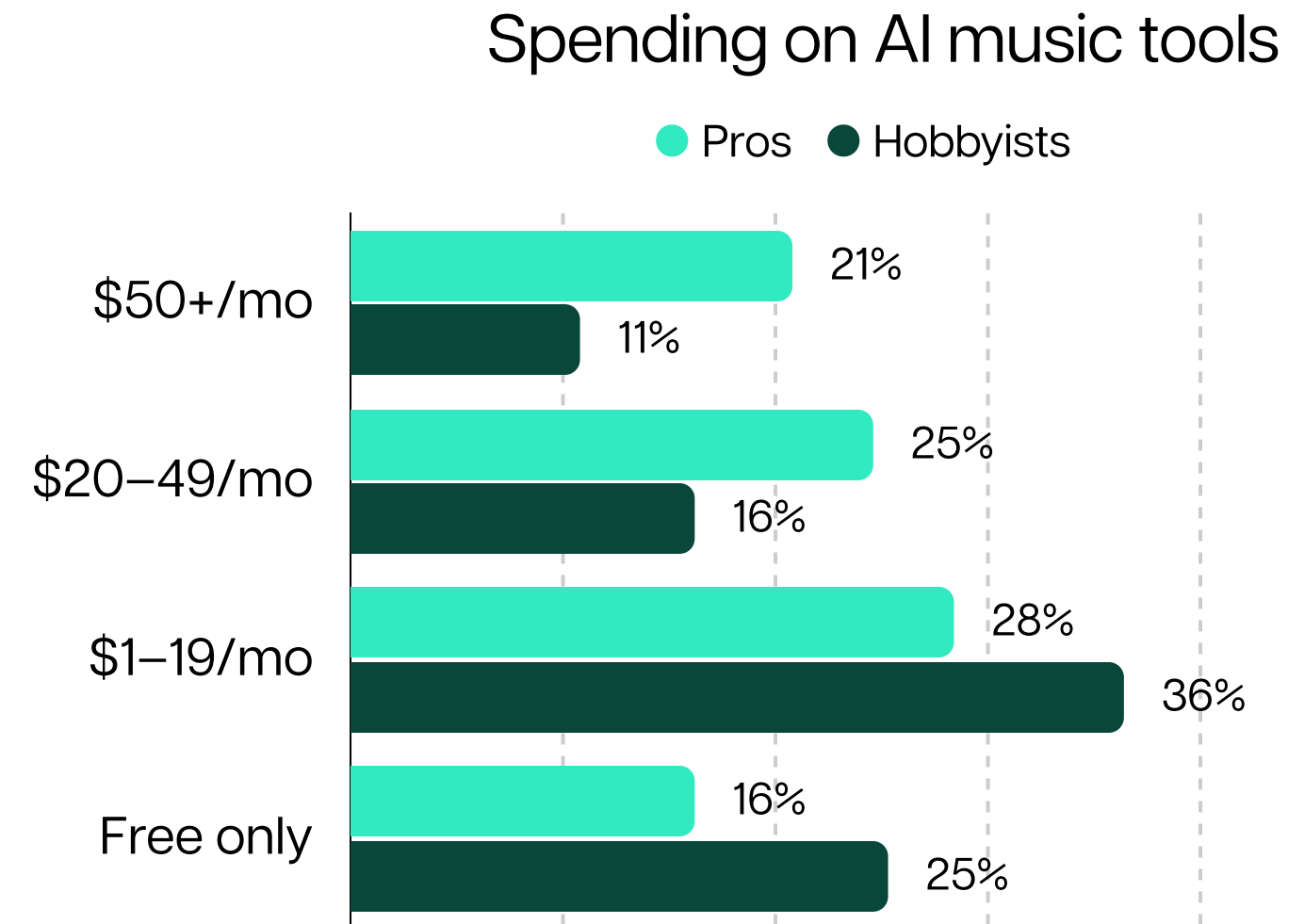
n = 461 professionals, n = 552 non-professionals. Survey question: "How do you plan to change your AI usage in the next 12 months?"

Pros spend more on AI tools

The spending gap between professionals and hobbyists signals a potential **market segmentation challenge** for AI tool developers.

Professionals pay for reliability. When your livelihood depends on consistent, high-quality output, a \$50/month subscription that shaves hours off a session is a no-brainer. As our data shows, this segment will pay premium prices – but they'll also churn fast if the tool underdelivers.

Meanwhile, hobbyists are not so much optimizing for performance, as they are experimenting with what's possible. With 61% spending under \$20/month and a quarter paying nothing at all, this segment won't convert on value propositions built around efficiency. They need low-friction entry points like freemium tiers, flexible pricing, and tools that reward curiosity over productivity.



n = 370 professionals, n = 352 non-professionals (AI users only). Survey question: "How much do you spend per month on music-specific AI tools?"

Barriers & Concerns

Adoption and ambivalence aren't opposites in AI; in fact, they coexist.

Nearly nine in ten AI users report at least one concern about the technology they're actively using. The top concerns reach far beyond usability or specific features, with issues around learning curves and interface design barely registering in our data. Instead, the friction runs deeper: in questions of authenticity (a concern for 58% of AI users), copyright (55%), and job displacement (37%).

Meanwhile, one in four non-adopters (26%) cite no specific barrier – they're simply not interested. That segment is unlikely to move.

Whether we're looking at full-time professional musicians or first-time hobbyists, artists across the career spectrum are asking themselves more existential questions below the surface – not just “Does this tool work?”, but also “What does using this tool say about me?”

The AI companies that earn long-term trust will be the ones that take these ethical questions as seriously as the technical ones.

Among AI users, 58% flag authenticity as a concern, while 55% cite copyright. Among non-users, those numbers drop to 30% and 21%, respectively. The gap likely reflects engagement, where active users are more likely to have confronted these questions head-on.

Interestingly, **awareness of these ethical stakes doesn't translate to rejection**; musicians are weighing the tradeoffs, and proceeding anyway.

Top 5 Concerns: AI Users

[multi-select]

[58.2% of respondents] Authenticity and artistic integrity

[54.8%] Copyright and licensing issues

[36.5%] Job displacement

[35.9%] Quality and reliability of outputs

[30.2%] Cost of tools

n = 1,021 (AI users only). Survey question: "What are your biggest concerns about using AI in music? Please select all that apply." Total of 11 possible options.

Top 5 Barriers to Adoption: Non-AI Users

[multi-select]

[29.8% of respondents] Authenticity and artistic integrity

[26.0%] Not interested

[20.5%] Copyright and licensing issues

[17.0%] Cost of tools

[16.8%] Quality and reliability of outputs

n = 453 (non-AI users only). Survey question: "What are the biggest barriers preventing you from using AI in your music-related work? Please select all that apply." Total of 11 possible options.

Pros worry more about quality; Hobbyists more about cost

One would expect professionals and hobbyists to worry about different things when it comes to AI. They do – but perhaps not where you'd guess.

Both groups share the same top concern: authenticity and artistic integrity, at nearly identical rates (~58%). The anxiety about what AI means for creative legitimacy cuts across professional status.

The divergence shows up in secondary concerns, and follows economic logic. Professionals are slightly more likely to fixate on quality and reliability (39% vs. 34%), which reflects how unreliable outputs can risk their reputations built over years. Meanwhile, hobbyists are more likely to fixate on cost (32% vs. 26%), as they're weighing every subscription dollar against other expenses.

Concern	Pros	Hobbyists	% Delta (Pro - Hobbyist)
Authenticity	60.0%	56.8%	+3.2
Copyright	58.6%	55.1%	+3.5
Quality/reliability	38.9%	34.4%	+4.5
Job replacement	37.8%	34.4%	+3.4
Cost of tools	25.7%	32.1%	-6.4
Complexity	7.0%	11.1%	-4.1

n = 370 professionals, n = 352 non-professionals (AI users only). Survey question: "What are your biggest concerns about using AI in music? Select all that apply."

Takeaways for artists

Our data suggests that musicians can be selective, strategic, and skeptical about AI – all at once.

1. Start where the friction is

Stem separation leads at 71%; full song generation sits at 24%. The highest-value AI use cases for you may involve handling tasks that eat your hours, without defining your sound.

2. Use AI to stretch your skills

"Learned more songs" (40%) topped our AI outcomes list, above "finished more tracks" (29%). Musicians are using AI to study arrangements, experiment with unfamiliar genres, and develop their skills. The question worth asking of any tool: what can this *teach* me?

3. Stay critical while you experiment

Authenticity concerns persist even among enthusiastic adopters. When evaluating tools, ask: What data trained this model? Do I own what I create with it? Does this tool enhance my voice or flatten it?

4. Track your own economic journey

Among creators in our sample who monetize their music, 26% report AI has increased their income, while fewer than 4% report a decrease. So far, the economic picture is stable – but it's worth tracking as AI adoption grows.

Takeaways for AI companies

Most musicians in this survey have already decided AI belongs in their workflow. The question now is which tools will hold their trust over time.

1. Build for workflows

Adoption of stem separation (71%) outpaces full song generation (24%) by nearly 3:1. The tools earning adoption solve specific problems inside of existing creative processes.

2. Track what the pros do

78% of pros use AI, and they're twice as likely as hobbyists to pay \$50+/month. When high-stakes creators adopt and pay, it signals a tool has crossed a quality threshold. If they churn, find out why.

3. Solve trust at the product level

Most AI users still worry about authenticity and copyright. Transparent training data practices, clear licensing terms, and respect for creative ownership will determine which tools retain trust in the long term.

4. Segment or struggle

Pros will pay more for reliability, and will churn fast if outputs disappoint. Hobbyists will cluster under \$20/month and respond to pitches about experimentation, not efficiency.

Thank you for reading!

For press inquiries, methodology questions, or to discuss the findings, please reach out.



Ryan Merchant, Head of Comms

Moises | moises.ai

ryan.merchant@music.ai



Cherie Hu, Founder/Editor • Michael Zhang, Data Scientist

Water & Music | waterandmusic.com

hi@waterandmusic.com