Sound Like You

How to Use AI Music Tools Without Losing What Makes You an Artist

D@ni

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How to Use AI Music Tools Without Losing What Makes You an Artist

by D@ni

For every musician who ever had an idea trapped in their head and no way to get it out.

And for my daughters — who put up with all the weird sounds coming from the living room, and still asked me to play it again.

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Chapter 1: The Guitar in the Closet

There was a guitar in my closet for as long as I could remember.

It was old — beat up, missing strings, the kind of thing that ends up in the back of a closet because nobody knows what else to do with it. It sat there behind winter jackets and shoeboxes like it was waiting for something. Turns out, it was waiting for me.

I was thirteen when my dad pulled it out. I looked at it and asked him, “What do we need to make this guitar work?” He didn’t overthink it. He just said, “You just need strings.” So he drove me to the music store. We went in, asked the guy behind the counter what strings to get for it, bought a pack, drove home. Dad sat down with me and helped string it up and get it in tune. No big speech. No lessons lined up. He just got it ready and left it leaning against the wall in my room, like a quiet invitation.

I picked it up that night, and I didn’t put it down for months.

Learning by Feel

I didn't have YouTube tutorials. I didn't have a teacher breaking down chord progressions on a whiteboard. I had ears and an obsession.

I'd hear a song — on the radio, on a CD, wherever — and I'd sit there with that guitar trying to figure it out. Note by note. String by string. Over and over until my fingertips were raw and the sound coming out of that beat-up acoustic matched what I heard in my head.

Most kids my age were outside after school. I was in my room, hunched over that guitar, working through the same four bars of a song until I nailed it. And when I finally got it right — when the notes lined up and it *clicked* — there was no feeling like it. Nothing else even came close.

But here's the thing that set the trajectory for everything that came after: I didn't just learn other people's songs. Almost immediately, I started writing my own. There was something in me that wasn't satisfied with playing someone else's music. I wanted to hear *my* ideas come out of that guitar. And once I started writing originals, that was it. I was hooked. Not just on playing music — on *creating* it.

The Electric Switch

After months of wearing down that acoustic — playing it every single free minute I had — it became clear this wasn't a phase. My parents saw it. I wasn't just messing around. I was practicing like it was my job.

So I got my first electric guitar.

If the acoustic was the spark, the electric was gasoline. Everything opened up. The sounds I could make. The range. The speed. The sustain. I threw myself into it the same way I had with the acoustic — obsessively, relentlessly.

I didn't pick a lane either. I learned rhythm and I learned lead. I wanted to do it all. And the thing about learning both is that it makes you a more complete musician. You understand the architecture of a song — the foundation *and* the fireworks.

Guitar was the anchor, but it was never the whole story. Over the years I picked up bass, then drums, then piano. Each instrument gave me a new way to hear music, a new angle on what a song could be. Eventually I built a full studio — Pro Tools, Reason, Native Instruments, studio monitors, a subwoofer, headphones, more microphones than I can honestly justify. The kind of setup where you walk in and feel like anything is possible.

The problem with that, it turns out, is that it's true. And when anything is possible, finishing something becomes very hard. I'll get to that later.

The Distortion Pedal

Then came the day I got my first distortion pedal.

If you've ever played clean electric guitar and then stomped on a distortion pedal for the first time, you know exactly what I'm talking about. It's like going from whispering to screaming. The guitar didn't just sing anymore — it *roared*.

That pedal changed my writing overnight. I went from writing melodic stuff to writing heavy metal. Big, crushing riffs. Drop-tuned power chords that shook the walls. I was fifteen years old writing songs that sounded like they belonged on a metal album, and I loved every second of it.

The distortion didn't just change my sound — it changed my identity as a musician. I wasn't just a kid who played guitar. I was a kid who played guitar like he meant it.

Finding My People

Music is personal, but it's not meant to be played alone forever. I found that out when I met my first real guitar buddy.

He played too — and he was good. We started jamming together, trading licks, pushing each other. There's something that happens when two guitarists lock in on a dual lead that you can't replicate alone. It's a conversation without words. You push, they pull. You go high, they go low. It's pure chemistry.

That friendship turned into something bigger almost immediately. We looked at each other one day and the question was obvious: *Why aren't we in a band?*

The Band

By fifteen, we had a full band. And from the jump, something clicked. We weren't garage musicians that people tolerated at parties — we were the reason people came to the party.

We played house parties. We played the school. We played actual shows. And we got popular — not internet popular, not viral popular, but the kind of popular that matters when you're fifteen: everyone in your world knows your name, people show up when you play, and you realize for the first time that this thing you love can move other people too.

That feeling — standing in front of people, playing something *you* wrote, watching them feel it — that's the drug. That's the thing that never goes away, no matter how many years pass or how many tools change.

Why This Matters

I'm telling you all of this for a reason.

When people hear that I use AI to make music, some of them assume I'm taking shortcuts. That I'm typing a prompt and letting a machine do the creative work. That I'm not a "real" musician.

But you just read the story. I've been a musician since I was thirteen years old. I've played acoustic, electric, lead, rhythm, bass, drums, piano. I've written songs in bedrooms, garages, and on stages. I've spent thousands of hours — not on a computer — but with my hands on instruments, building something from nothing. My music has found its way to millions of people through commercial placements, sync licensing, streaming — but I'll save those stories for later.

AI didn't make me a musician. I was already one.

What AI did was give me a new instrument. A new tool in a long line of tools that started with an old guitar in a closet and a dad who drove me to the music store to buy strings. From acoustic to electric, from clean to distortion, from solo to band, from guitar to bass to drums to a full studio — every step of my journey has been about finding new ways to express the music that's always been in my head.

Suno AI is just the latest string on the guitar.

And this book? This book is about how to use that tool without losing what makes you *you*. Whether you've been playing for twenty years or you just picked up your first instrument six months ago, the core challenge is the same: the music in your head is always more fully formed than what you can get out into the world. AI changes that equation dramatically.

The biggest risk with AI music isn't that it'll replace musicians — it's that musicians will let it replace their originality.

I'm here to make sure that doesn't happen to you.

Next chapter: How AI Music Actually Works (And Why Most of It Sounds the Same)

Chapter 2: Being Creative Has Never Been This Easy

I want to tell you something that might sound too good to be true.

I wrote three albums in a matter of weeks. Not demos. Not sketches. Full albums — with production quality that sounds like I spent months in a studio with a team of engineers. And I did most of it sitting on my couch. One song I literally wrote on the toilet.

I'm not saying that to be funny (okay, maybe a little). I'm saying it because the entire point of this chapter — and really, the entire point of this book — is that **creating music has never been easier than it is right now.** The barriers that used to stand between you and a finished song? Most of them are gone.

And here's the thing I want to say upfront: this system works whether you have a full studio or just your phone. That matters, because I'll be sharing both ends of the spectrum in this book.

The Studio That Gathered Dust

Before I tell you about making three albums in a few weeks, I have to tell you the five years that came before.

I have a full studio. Pro Tools. Reason. Native Instruments. Monitors, a subwoofer, headphones, more microphones than I know what to do with. The whole thing. Took years to build up piece by piece, and every new piece felt like the thing that was going to unlock everything.

It didn't.

What actually happened was that I had too many options. Every time I sat down to write, I'd spend an hour going through drum presets. Then another hour tweaking a synth. Then I'd realize I hadn't touched the bass yet and go down that rabbit hole. By the end of a session I'd have one eight-bar loop that sounded incredible — and nothing else. No song. No structure. No beginning, middle, or end. Just a perfect loop that lived in a folder and was never heard by anyone.

For five years. Five years of that.

The studio wasn't the problem. The choices were the problem. When you can adjust literally everything, you end up finishing nothing.

What broke the paralysis was AI. Not because AI is better than a full studio — it's not, in a lot of ways. But because it changed where the creativity lived. Suddenly I wasn't a sound designer pretending to be a songwriter. I was a songwriter who didn't have to think about sound design at all. That shift changed everything.

So no — you don't need a studio like mine. You don't need a $3,000 guitar or a $500 microphone or a $3,000 computer running thousands of dollars worth of plugins. And if you DO have all of that and you're still not finishing songs, then you already know exactly what I'm talking about.

Album One: Twenty Years in the Making

My first album with Suno AI wasn't new music. It was old music.

Twenty years ago, I wrote an album. Recorded it rough, raw, limited by whatever gear and skills I had. The songs were good. The recordings were… fine. They captured the ideas, but the production couldn't keep up with what I heard in my head. For two decades, that album sat there. Finished but unfinished.

Then I found Suno.

I uploaded those old recordings as reference tracks and fed Suno the lyrics. Now — I used AI tools to help refine the lyrics, but I edited *heavily*. AI has a tendency to be wordy. It doesn't understand that lyrics aren't poetry on a page — they're sounds. The way a word *feels* in your mouth matters as much as what it means. A great lyric is simple enough to sing but deep enough to feel. So I shaped every line until it sounded right.

Every song came out sounding like my original recordings — same DNA, same feel, same *me* — but cleaner, more produced, more polished. The album I'd been carrying around for twenty years was finally what I always heard in my head.

Album Two: A Cheap Guitar, a Locker, and a Voice Memo

After that first album, something unlocked. The creative floodgates opened.

Here's my setup for album two: my daughter's acoustic guitar. A kid's guitar. Maybe $99. And my iPhone.

I sat in my living room, TV on, and just started playing. Riffs I'd had in my head for years. New progressions that came in the moment. When something clicked, I opened Voice Memo and hit record.

But here's where it gets interesting. I didn't just record single guitar tracks. I used a multi-track recording app called BandLab, and I started layering:

- **Track one:** the acoustic guitar riff
- **Track two:** a lead guitar part over the top
- **Track three:** vocal sounds — not lyrics, just textures and atmosphere
- **Track four:** percussion

And the percussion — this is the part I love. I didn't have drums. I didn't have a drum machine. I had my feet and a shoe locker. I stomped on the ground for the kick. I used the locker doors — left hand, right hand — slamming them to a rhythm. Natural, organic, human

drums.

When I uploaded all of that into Suno, something beautiful happened. Suno added the full ensemble on top — but you could still hear *me* in there. My guitar, slightly unprofessional in tone, sitting inside the final mix. My stomps and locker slams translated into this organic percussion feel that no drum machine could replicate.

I actually liked how it sounded. The imperfection was the point. It was me playing guitar inside a fully produced song, and it sounded real because it *was* real.

That's the thesis right there: **the more of yourself you put into what you upload, the more it comes through in the final product.** The more diverse your inputs — guitar, voice, body percussion, weird sounds — the less generic the output. The less electronic your source material, the more natural the final song sounds.

For lyrics, I tried Grok on this album. Grok had this personality — a dramatic flair that translated surprisingly well into Suno. But I never used AI lyrics as-is. I'd give it a concept, tell it what the song should be about, and it would give me a structure. Then I'd go through and strip it down — delete all the chaff, the filler, the auxiliary words that didn't need to be there. I'd change words so they'd rhyme differently, so they'd *sound* better when sung. By the time I was done, you couldn't recognize that AI had touched it.

Within one to three days, album two was done.

The Mouth Song

For one of the last tracks on the second album, I made the whole thing using nothing but mouth sounds into my phone. I'll explain the full story and technique in Chapter 4 — but the short version is that it worked beautifully, and it's one of my favorite tracks I've ever made.

Album Three: Cult

The momentum was too strong to stop.

Album three was a concept album — a narrative about a cult and its leader. I called it *Cult*.

The intro track? I wrote it on the toilet. The idea hit me and I started mouthing the sounds right there — something atmospheric, not quite a song, more like a curtain rising on a dark stage. Recorded it, fed it to Suno, and it became the opening of a concept album.

From there, back to the acoustic guitar. New riffs, new progressions. But my creativity was *pouring* now. Ideas came faster than I could capture them. Every riff sparked another.

Why I Finally Learned to Write Lyrics

Here's something I never expected.

For twenty years, I couldn't finish writing lyrics for a song. I'd write a verse and a chorus, maybe, and then it would sit there incomplete. I just couldn't get across the finish line. Why bother writing full lyrics when you're not a great singer? Who's going to sing them? Are you going to find a vocalist? Pay for studio time?

Suno changed that.

Suddenly I had a reason to write lyrics. I had an AI voice that would carry my words and make them sound *great*. That fear — that barrier of "I'm not a good enough singer to justify writing lyrics" — evaporated overnight.

And I got really good at it. Not by letting AI do it for me, but by using AI as a starting point and then making it mine. My process: give the AI a concept, let it generate a structure, then go through line by line and gut it. Delete the filler. Simplify the language. Change words so they rhyme in ways that *sound* better when sung — because I know how it's going to come out of the AI voice. I know what syllables will land and which ones will get swallowed.

By the time I'm done editing, you'd never know AI was involved. Because it wasn't, really. The AI gave me scaffolding. I built the house.

The Point

You can play. You can sing. You can mouth sounds. You can record percussion by stomping your feet and slamming locker doors. You can whistle, hum, clap, tap, and make every weird noise you've ever imagined.

These are the same natural methods people used to make music before there were studios, before there were recording devices, before there was any of this. When music was just something humans did for the joy of it.

I think that's coming back.

Whether you've been playing for twenty years or you just picked up an instrument recently — whether you have a full studio or nothing but your phone — the tools meet you where you are. My studio sat dark and silent for five years. My daughter's $99 acoustic and a free phone app produced an album in days.

The equipment was never the point. The music was always the point.

Musicians are going to stop worrying about having the right equipment. Stop saving up for studio time. Stop waiting for the perfect setup. They're going to focus on the only thing that ever actually mattered: **writing. Creating. Playing.**

The tools handle the rest. Your job is to be the musician.

And in the next chapter, I'm going to show you the single technique that changed everything for me — the secret weapon that makes the difference between AI music that sounds generic and AI music that sounds like *you*.

Next chapter: The Secret Weapon — Style Prompting

Chapter 3: You Were Already a Musician

Before we go any further, I need to tell you something that the AI music world doesn't talk about enough.

The reason my music doesn't sound like AI — the reason it sounds like *me* — has almost nothing to do with AI. It has everything to do with the years I spent as a musician before I ever opened Suno.

The guitar riffs. The ear I trained by learning songs without tabs. The instinct for when a chorus should hit, when a bridge should pull you sideways, when a song needs space. The taste I developed from years of listening, playing, writing, failing, and trying again.

That's the secret ingredient. Not the prompt. Not the tool. The musician.

And here's what I want you to hear, whether you've been playing for twenty years or you're six months into your first instrument: **you have it too.** Musical instinct isn't reserved for people who've put in decades. It lives in everyone who's ever hummed along to a song, tapped a rhythm on a steering wheel, or gotten chills from a melody they couldn't explain. You have it. You just might not have had a way to get it out of your head and into the world.

Until now.

The First Ten Minutes

People ask me what my creative process looks like, and they expect some high-tech answer. Like I'm sitting in front of three monitors with a MIDI controller and a wall of synthesizers, methodically engineering music through algorithms.

The truth is much simpler — and much more varied.

Some days, the first ten minutes look like me on the couch with a guitar, just playing. No plan, no concept. Just fingers on strings, trying different things, waiting for something to click. And when it clicks — when a riff hits that spot in your brain where you go *oh, that's something* — I grab my phone and record a voice memo. That's it. That's the beginning of a song.

Other days, I'm sitting at my desk with a DAW open — Ableton, Logic, Reason, whatever — putting together parts with virtual instruments. A bass line. A rhythm section. A melody. Maybe something higher, like a synth pad to give it atmosphere. I'm not trying to make it sound finished. I'm just writing the composition. Verse, chorus, bridge. Getting the bones down.

And sometimes? Sometimes I'm on the toilet.

I know I keep coming back to that. But it's important. Because the point isn't where you are — it's that the creative impulse doesn't wait for the perfect setting. It hits you when it hits you, and your only job is to capture it.

Six Ways a Song Begins

Over the past year, I've noticed my songs tend to start in one of six ways. Not rules — just patterns that might help you find your own starting points.

1. The Archive You've already written music. Maybe years ago. Maybe decades. Rough recordings, unfinished ideas, demos that never went anywhere. Upload them into Suno as reference audio. Those songs you thought were dead? They're not. They're raw material waiting for production they never had.

2. The Riff You pick up a guitar — expensive or cheap, doesn't matter — and play until something sounds right. Record it into Voice Memo. Thirty seconds of a verse riff that flows into a chorus riff. That's enough. That's a song waiting to happen.

3. The Voice No instrument at all. Just your mouth. Hum a melody. Make weird sounds. Record yourself mouthing the rhythm and texture of what you hear in your head. Suno will interpret it. And it will surprise you. (Chapter 4 goes deep on exactly how to do this.)

4. The DAW Sketch Sit down with your recording software and virtual instruments. Don't chase the perfect sound — just write the composition. Bass, rhythm, melody. Move through verse to chorus to bridge. Get the structure. The sounds don't matter yet. The movement does.

5. The Inspiration Grab You see a video, hear a sound, watch a scene — and something about it triggers a musical idea. I've literally watched AI-generated videos on Grok, liked the background music, learned the melody by ear, hummed it into a voice memo, and turned it into my own song with original lyrics. Inspiration is everywhere. Capture it.

6. The Found Sound This is my favorite. You hear something in the world — the hum of a microwave, the rhythm of a pool pump, rain on a window, traffic at a distance — and you start humming along. You start finding melodies that interact with that ambient sound. You start hearing music in things that aren't music. Record that. That instinct — hearing beauty in everyday sound — is pure musicianship. And Suno can turn it into a song.

The Trap I Lived In for Five Years

I want to be honest about something, because I think a lot of you are living in the same trap I was.

For five or six years, every single time I sat down to write a song in my DAW, I got stuck. Not on the music. On the *sounds*.

I'd spend an hour going through drum presets. Auditioning kick drums. Tweaking the attack on a snare. Scrolling through bass patches. Adjusting a synth until it sounded *just right* — and then changing it again. And again. And again.

I'd spend an entire evening on one loop. Eight bars. Maybe sixteen. And it would sound great — that one loop would sound incredible. But I'd never finish the song. Because I was so focused on making each individual sound perfect that I never moved the composition forward.

I was playing the *loop*, not the *song*.

That's the trap. The tools give you a thousand choices for every single element, and having a thousand choices means you make none. You just keep tweaking. Keep auditioning. Keep perfecting a fragment that never becomes a whole.

I lost years to that trap. Real years. Songs that should have been written, albums that should have been finished — all lost to the endless pursuit of the perfect kick drum.

What Changed

AI didn't fix my musicianship. I was already a musician. What it fixed was the *trap*.

When I started using Suno, something fundamental shifted. I stopped caring about the timbre of individual sounds — because I wasn't choosing them anymore. Suno would handle the production. My job was the composition.

And for the first time in years, I started moving songs *forward*. Not looping. Not tweaking. Moving. Verse to chorus. Chorus to bridge. Bridge back to chorus. Beginning, middle, end. A whole song. A finished song.

The magic of songwriting — I learned this the hard way — is based on the *linear* playing of the song, not the *loop* playing of the song. You need to move the music through time. You need it to go somewhere. To tell a story. To take the listener on a journey from the first note to the last.

Loops don't do that. Compositions do.

And that's what AI unlocked for me. Not new sounds — new *movement*. I stopped being a sound designer pretending to be a songwriter and became a songwriter who let AI handle the sound design.

The Bridge Principle

Let me give you a specific example of what I mean by moving a song forward.

A bridge in a song does something almost magical. It takes you away from the familiar — away from the verse and chorus you've been hearing — and puts you somewhere unexpected. A different chord progression, a different melody, a different energy. It *contrasts* everything you've heard so far.

But here's what makes a great bridge: it also leads you *back* to the familiar. It pulls you away just far enough that when the final chorus hits, it hits harder. You appreciate the chorus more because you left it for a minute. The bridge makes the familiar feel new again.

That's composition. That's songwriting. That's what a musician understands that a prompt can't generate on its own.

AI can produce a bridge. But knowing *why* a bridge matters, knowing *when* to use one, knowing how it should *feel* in the context of your specific song — that's you. That's the twenty years of listening and playing and absorbing music that lives in your brain whether you realize it or not.

Anything I Imagine, I Can Create

Here's what feels different now.

Before AI, my imagination was bigger than my ability to execute. I could hear entire albums in my head — complex, layered, beautiful — but I didn't have the tools, the budget, the time, or the studio to make them real. The gap between what I imagined and what I could produce was enormous.

Now that gap is almost gone.

Anything I imagine, I know I can create. And I can do it on a budget of about a hundred dollars a month — internet connection, a Suno subscription, a couple of AI tools. That's it. No studio rental. No session musicians. No mixing engineer. No mastering house.

A hundred dollars a month and my imagination. That's the new music production budget.

But — and this is the part that matters — the imagination has to be there first. The musicianship has to be there first. The taste, the ear, the instinct for what sounds right and what doesn't. AI doesn't give you that. But here's the thing: you don't need twenty years of formal playing to have it. Some people walk in after a year of obsessive listening with taste that most veterans would envy. If you've spent your life caring about music — really caring — you already have more than you think.

You were already a musician before you found AI. Don't forget that. It's the most important thing you bring to the process.

You Don't Need Permission

If you're reading this and thinking "but I'm not a real musician" — stop.

If you hum melodies in the shower, you're a musician. If you tap rhythms on your desk, you're a musician. If you hear the microwave hum and start harmonizing with it, you're a musician. If you hear beauty in the sound of rain, a pool pump, traffic, wind — you're a musician.

You don’t need a degree. You don’t need expensive gear. You don’t need anyone’s validation. You need your ears, your voice, and a willingness to capture what you hear in your head.

The tools will meet you wherever you are. But they need *you* to show up first.

Next chapter: Describe What You Hear, Not What You Know

Chapter 4: Your Voice Is an Instrument

I want you to try something right now.

Close your mouth almost all the way. Leave just enough space for air. Now make a sound — any sound — and slowly open and close your mouth while you do it. Change the pitch. Go high, then low. Let it wobble. Let it modulate.

That’s it. That’s a Suno input.

I’m serious.

The Night I Made Something with My Mouth

The kids were running around. The TV was on in the background. I was sitting on my bed with BandLab open on my phone, and I was thinking about Tipper.

If you don't know Tipper — David Tipper is an electronic producer known for making music that sounds like it came from a different dimension. The kind of thing you put on headphones at night and it feels like your brain is being gently rewired. Not harsh. Not heavy. Just… other.

I wanted to make something that felt like that. And I had no instruments, no plugins, no studio. I had my mouth.

So I opened a new track in BandLab and I just started making sounds. Big, open-mouthed sounds that modulated as I changed the shape of my mouth. High pitches that dropped to low pitches. Something like dubstep but light — not aggressive, not fast, just that wobbling, shifting, frequency-bending quality that Tipper gets. I let the recording run for almost a minute and a half. Then I layered another track of mouth sounds on top to give it some depth, a multitrack feel.

Then I fed the whole thing into Suno.

What came back blew me away.

Deep bass modulation. Heavy panning that moved sound around your head like something alive. Time signature changes. A kick drum that came in on beat every once in a while, almost like it was deciding to join the song rather than being told to. The vocals — and yes, there are vocals on this track — followed the same wobbling, modulating pattern I'd established with my mouth. The song is called *Survive Reproduce*. It's five minutes long. I gave Suno a minute and a half of reference material.

I play it in my car with the volume as high as it'll go. It bumps.

The lyrics are from a late-night Richard Dawkins phase — *The Selfish Gene*, evolution, reproduction as biological imperative. Grok helped me draft them but I edited heavily. They're not narrative lyrics. They're questions. *Why the endless spin? Survive, reproduce. Adaptation's shadow*. Strange, philosophical, repetitive in the best way. And they work

because the vocal performance Suno generated matches the sound I put in — that modulating, otherworldly quality that started as me, on my bed, making weird sounds with my mouth.

What Suno Is Actually Listening For

Here's what I've learned after feeding it a lot of different inputs: Suno isn't transcribing what you give it. It's feeling it.

When I gave it my mouth sounds, it didn't try to reproduce mouth sounds. It heard the frequency movement, the rhythm, the emotional texture — and it translated that into a fully produced track. It kept the *feeling* of what I'd made and built something bigger around it.

That's the thing most people don't understand about reference audio. You're not giving Suno a template. You're giving it a vibe.

The Locker Doors

On one of the Cult tracks, I banged on locker doors. Actual metal locker doors, hit rhythmically, recorded on my phone. I wasn't sure what would come back. What came back was actually great — Suno heard the metallic percussive quality, the space between hits, and built something with that energy baked in.

I've also recorded my electric guitar unplugged. No amp, no cable — just the acoustic resonance of an electric guitar with good strings, played close to the mic. The tone is different than a proper acoustic. Brighter in some ways, quieter, more intimate. Suno handles it beautifully.

The rule I've figured out: the more specific and unusual your input, the more specific and unusual your output. Generic prompt plus no reference audio equals generic song. Something weird from you equals something interesting from Suno.

The Ritual

There's a track on the Cult album called *Ritual* that taught me an important lesson about when reference audio matters most.

My first attempt was all text prompt. I wanted something with sitar — Indian-influenced, a little psychedelic, something that felt ancient and ceremonial. I described it in detail. I included sitar in the prompt. What came back was essentially Bollywood music. Technically competent, culturally recognizable, and completely without a soul. It sounded like it could have been made by anyone, about anything.

So I scrapped it.

I woke up in the middle of the night a few days later. Everyone in the house was asleep. I went to the living room, sat down cross-legged on the floor, closed my eyes, and waited.

That's not a metaphor. I literally sat there and waited for a melody to come.

It came. Three notes. Simple and repetitive. I hummed it into my phone in the dark, nobody else awake, the house completely quiet. Then I rebuilt the style prompt — still included some of those Indian sound descriptors, but now the reference audio was driving the car. The prompt was just giving it direction.

Ritual became one of the best songs on the album. I wrote the lyrics myself, completely from scratch, no AI — and I wrote them specifically for how the words sounded, not just what they meant. The sounds of the syllables became part of the instrument.

That's what happens when you bring yourself into it.

The Whispered Punk Song

Before any of this — before Cult, before the mouth songs, before I really understood what I was doing — I wrote a little punk song on acoustic guitar.

I sang it the way you sing when you don't want anyone to hear you. Whispered. A little off-key. No diaphragm behind it, just barely enough breath to carry the melody. I was embarrassed by it before I even finished.

Then I fed it into Suno with a dead-simple prompt. Pop punk. Metal. Vocal harmonies.

Suno didn't hear an embarrassing whisper. It heard a song. It built guitars and drums and harmonies around what I'd given it, and what came out was legitimately good.

That's when I understood something important: **Suno doesn't judge the quality of your input. It only judges the intention.**

A whispered, slightly off-key vocal has intention. A melody has intention. Mouth sounds made on a bed while your kids run around — that has intention. Suno reads the intention and builds from there.

The Hierarchy of Input

Here's how I think about it now, after making three albums this way:

Mouth sounds are my primary. They're always available, they're fast, and they carry emotional information that's harder to fake than you'd think. The shape of your mouth changes the sound. The way you breathe changes the rhythm. You're physically encoding something personal into the reference audio every time.

Guitar is my secondary. Not plugged in, not necessarily in tune — just played, recorded close to the phone. The resonance, the finger noise, the imperfections. All of it feeds in.

Field recordings are my third. I haven't gone deep on this yet, but locker doors, ambient room tone, percussion on whatever's nearby — I'm still exploring this territory. What I know is that Suno hears texture, and texture is everywhere.

And underneath all of that: **your voice**. Not singing, necessarily. Just humming in the dark at 2 AM, waiting for a three-note melody to arrive.

You Already Have Everything You Need

The most expensive microphone in my workflow is my iPhone. The most complex instrument is my mouth.

I've made music with mouth sounds made on a bed, a whispered punk song I was embarrassed to play for anyone, an electric guitar with no amp, and metal locker doors.

None of it sounded generic.

All of it sounded like me.

That's not a coincidence. Every one of those inputs carried something that can't be generated from a text prompt — the specific frequency of my voice, the particular rhythm of how I move, the emotional state I was in when I sat down cross-legged in a dark living room and waited for three notes to arrive.

You have that too. You've always had it.

You just needed a system that could hear it.

Next: Chapter 5 — Describe What You Hear, Not What You Know

Chapter 5: Describe What You Hear, Not What You Know

I was twelve years old, sitting in my dad's Chevy LUV pickup truck outside a bait and tackle shop halfway between the city and the mountains. He'd gone inside for bait, maybe beer, maybe cigarettes. He left the truck running. The radio was on.

And then Nirvana came through the speakers.

I didn't know the words. The lyrics didn't even make sense — and that was part of what made it hit so hard. There was no purpose behind the angst. No explanation for the anger. It was just a *feeling*. Raw, intense, electric. I felt it in my chest before I understood it in my head.

Up until that moment, I was an MC Hammer kid. Vanilla Ice. Friendly hip-hop that made you want to dance. But when "Smells Like Teen Spirit" came through the speakers of that little pickup truck, something rewired inside me. I went from a hip-hop kid to a rock kid in about four minutes.

I didn't think: *"Oh, interesting — drop D tuning, distorted power chords, a dynamic shift from quiet verse to loud chorus following the Pixies' soft-loud-soft formula."*

I thought: *"This is the most intense thing I've ever heard in my life."*

That distinction — between how music is technically described and how music is actually *experienced* — is the most important concept in this entire book.

How Civilians Talk About Music

If you walked up to a random person on a busy street corner and asked them to describe their favorite band's music, they wouldn't say "syncopated hi-hats over a four-on-the-floor kick pattern with a descending minor chord progression." They'd say something like:

"It's kind of dark and moody. Like driving at night."

Or: *"It makes me feel like I'm floating."*

Or: *"It's angry but in a beautiful way. Like breaking something you love."*

Normal people — civilians, not musicians — describe music in feelings, images, textures, and memories. They describe what the music *does to them*, not what the music *is*.

And here's what I discovered: that's exactly how you should talk to Suno.

The Technical Trap

When most people first open Suno and see the style prompt field, they try to be "correct." They write prompts like a music production textbook:

"Indie rock, 120 BPM, minor key, electric guitar, bass, drums, male vocal."

And they get back something that sounds… fine. Technically correct. Competent. And completely generic. Like a stock photo of a band — it has all the right elements but no soul.

The prompt described what the music IS. It didn't describe what the music FEELS LIKE.

Now compare that to:

"Driving through empty streets at 2 AM, windows down, angry about something you can't name. Raw guitars, loose drums, a voice that doesn't care if it cracks."

Same genre. Same general idea. Completely different result. Because the second prompt gives Suno something to *interpret*. It's not a technical specification — it's an emotional blueprint.

The Hybrid Method

I didn't figure this out overnight. It came from a specific moment — writing a track called "Survivor Reproduce."

For this song, I wanted something that sounded like Tipper — the electronic artist known for absolutely insane production. Wet sounds, stereo tricks, audio that moves around your head like it's alive. But I didn't want to just copy Tipper. I wanted to push past what he does and into something weirder.

I started with the technical approach. I looked up Tipper's style profile — the kind of description our Style Prompter tool generates. Genre tags, production characteristics, sonic qualities. Useful stuff.

But then I started adding my own words. Words that came from how I *experience* Tipper's music, not how the internet *describes* it:

Liquid. Because his music flows like water — no hard edges, everything melting into everything else.

Wet. Because the sounds feel like they're dripping. Like audio condensation.

Dripping. Because certain elements feel like they're falling, slowly, through space.

These aren't music theory terms. You won't find "dripping" in any production manual. But Suno understood exactly what I meant. The track came out with that same liquid, otherworldly quality that I hear when I listen to Tipper — but filtered through my imagination instead of his production techniques.

That's when I realized the method: **start with the technical description, then cut in the poetry.**

Use the Style Prompter or Google search to get the baseline — the genre, the instrumentation, the general sonic profile. That's your foundation. But then edit it. Add the words that come from YOUR experience of the music. The feelings, the textures, the images that spring up in your mind when you close your eyes and listen.

The internet describes music in technical ways. You experience it in poetic ways. The magic happens when you combine both.

A Dictionary of Feelings

Here are some of the non-standard words I've used in Suno prompts and what they actually produced:

"Liquid" — Smooth, flowing transitions. No hard cuts between sections. Everything blending.

"Wet" — Reverb-heavy, ambient, sounds that feel like they're in a space. The opposite of dry and clinical.

"Dripping" — Slow, deliberate elements that fall into the mix. Almost percussive in their pacing.

"Candlelit" — Warm, intimate, low-light energy. Acoustic, close-mic'd, like music performed in a small room by firelight.

"Underwater" — Muffled, submerged, dreamy. Low-pass filtered sound that feels like you're hearing it through water.

"Midnight" — Dark, moody, late-night atmosphere. Not aggressive dark — contemplative dark.

"Velvet" — Rich, smooth, luxurious tone. Usually vocals or bass. The opposite of gritty.

"Shattered" — Broken, fragmented, glitchy. Elements that feel like they're falling apart intentionally.

"Panning left to right" — A technical instruction, yes, but embedded in a style prompt it tells Suno to create width and movement in the stereo field.

“Brooding and sexual” — A vocal personality. Not a vocal range or technique — an attitude. The singer sounds like they’re thinking dark thoughts and enjoying it.

These words work because Suno was trained on millions of descriptions of music — and humans don’t describe music in textbook terms. They describe it in exactly these kinds of words. When a music reviewer says an album sounds “liquid” or “velvet,” that carries real sonic meaning. Suno has absorbed that meaning.

The Street Interview Test

Here’s something I want you to try — and honestly, this could be great content too.

Go somewhere busy. Ask random people: “What’s your favorite artist, and what does their music sound like?”

Nobody is going to say “polyrhythmic drum patterns in 7/8 time.” They’re going to say things like “it sounds like summer” or “it’s heavy but kind of beautiful” or “it makes me want to drive really fast.”

Those are style prompts. Every single one of them. The way normal people talk about music is closer to how Suno wants to be talked to than anything you’d find in a music theory book.

You already know how to describe music this way. You’ve been doing it your whole life — every time you told a friend about a song, every time you said “you HAVE to hear this, it sounds like…” and then struggled to find the right words.

Those words you struggled for? Those are your prompts.

The Two-Step Process

So here’s the practical takeaway. Every time you write a style prompt:

Step one: Get the technical foundation. Use the Style Prompter, Google the artist, or just write down the genre and basic characteristics. This gives Suno the musical coordinates — it knows what neighborhood to go to.

Step two: Add what the internet is missing. Close your eyes. Imagine the song you want to make. Not what it sounds like technically — what it FEELS like. What images come up? What temperature is it? What time of day? What emotion? Write those words into the prompt.

The first step tells Suno what to build. The second step tells Suno how it should feel to listen to it.

You need both. The technical description without the poetry gives you something competent but generic. The poetry without the technical description gives you something interesting but unpredictable. Together, they give you something that sounds like it was made by a human with taste.

Because it was.

Next chapter: Your Voice Is Enough

Chapter 6: Your Voice Is Enough

I told you about the mouth sounds in Chapter 4 — how I sat on my bed making weird noises into my phone and fed them into Suno and got back something extraordinary. My daughter called it “the soothing one.” It became one of her favorite songs.

But let me take it further. Because what I want to talk about in this chapter isn't just mouth sounds specifically — it's the broader truth that your voice, in any form, is already enough to make real music. Your phone is already enough of a studio. And the imperfections you've been trying to iron out? They're actually part of what makes the music human.

The Instrument You Already Own

There's a lie that the music industry has been selling for decades: you need expensive equipment to make real music.

I know what expensive equipment looks like. I have a full studio — monitors, a subwoofer, microphones, more software than I can keep track of. I spent years building it. And for five years, most of it sat dark and silent because I had too many options and couldn't finish anything.

Then I made some of my best music using my daughter's $99 acoustic guitar and a phone app.

Stop waiting for the perfect setup. You need the device that's already in your pocket. It has a microphone. It has a voice memo app. It has everything you need to capture the raw material that AI will turn into a finished song.

Your voice. Your hands. Your body. Your phone. That's the studio.

The Field Recorder

Let me tell you what it felt like to record the percussion for my album.

I was in my house, standing in front of the shoe lockers — you know, those metal cabinet things where you store shoes by the door. I had BandLab open on my phone, playing back the acoustic guitar track I'd already recorded. And with my right hand on one locker door and my

left hand on the other, I started slamming them to the rhythm of the guitar.

Left. Right. Left-left. Right. Matching the rhythm I heard, adding accents, creating a pattern. Like a field recorder on a film set — like the sound designers at Lucasfilm who go out into the world with microphones and capture the sounds that become lightsabers and explosions. Except I was in my hallway, banging on shoe lockers.

It sounded raw. Imperfect. A little chaotic. The timing wasn't perfect. The volume wasn't consistent. The metallic ring of the locker doors had this uncontrolled quality that no drum machine could replicate.

And when Suno processed it? It was *perfect*. Not perfect in the clean, polished, everything-quantized sense. Perfect in the sense that it sounded REAL. The imperfections came through. The organic randomness of a human hitting metal doors translated into percussion that felt lived-in, authentic, human.

Here's what I discovered: Suno doesn't just tolerate imperfection — it adapts to it. When my locker-door percussion was slightly off-beat, the AI adjusted the entire track to accommodate those imperfections. It didn't correct me. It followed me. And the result was a song that sounded like it was recorded by real people in a real room, not assembled in a computer.

That's the secret: **imperfection is a feature, not a bug.** The less "perfect" your reference audio is, the more human the output sounds. The amateur recording quality, the background noise, the slightly off timing — all of it tricks the listener's brain into hearing a real performance instead of an AI generation.

Everything Is an Instrument

Once you realize your voice is enough, something opens up. You start hearing instruments everywhere.

Your hands clapping. Your feet stomping on a hardwood floor. A pen tapping on a desk. Your fingers drumming on a table. A spoon on a glass. Keys jingling. A door closing. Knuckles on wood.

These aren't random sounds. They're percussion. They're texture. They're the raw material of a track that nobody else will ever make — because nobody else is recording *your* locker doors in *your* hallway with *your* sense of rhythm.

And beyond percussion, your voice can do things no instrument can:

Hum a melody that's been stuck in your head for years but you never had a way to record it properly. Now you do. Hum it. Upload it. Hear it played back by a full band.

Beatbox a rhythm — even badly. Suno doesn't need you to be a professional beatboxer. It needs the *idea* of the rhythm. The feel. The swing.

Make sound effects — whooshes, drops, rises, clicks, pops. The trippy mouth sounds that became my daughter's favorite song started as me just seeing what weird noises I could make.

Sing a rough vocal — even if you can't sing. The melody is what matters. Suno will replace your voice with a polished AI vocal that follows your melodic contour. Your job is to show it where the melody goes. It doesn't have to sound good. It has to sound *right*.

Whistle. Seriously. Whistle a melody and upload it. It works.

Multi-tracking on Your Phone

You don't have to capture everything in one take. Apps like BandLab — which is free — let you multi-track right on your phone. Here's what a typical session looks like for me:

Track 1: Acoustic guitar — a verse riff that flows into a chorus riff. Two minutes of the basic structure.

Track 2: A lead guitar part over the top. Or a second melody. Or harmonies.

Track 3: Vocal sounds. Not lyrics — textures. Atmospheric hums, breaths, tones that add depth.

Track 4: Percussion. Stomping, clapping, locker doors, whatever's nearby.

Four tracks. Recorded on a phone. In my living room. No studio, no engineer, no mixing board. Just layers of human sound stacked on top of each other.

When I upload that multi-track into Suno, the AI has so much to work with. It hears the guitar and adds complementary instruments. It hears the percussion and builds a drum pattern that follows my rhythm. It hears the vocal textures and weaves them into the production. And through all of it, my imperfect, organic, human sounds come through in the final mix — making it sound like a real recording by real people.

The more of yourself you put in, the more YOU come out.

Your Dusty Songs

I know you're out there.

You wrote a song ten years ago — maybe twenty — and you recorded it on a four-track, or a cassette, or a cheap digital recorder. The recording quality is terrible. The performance is rough. But the *song* is good. You know it's good. You've always known it's good.

It's sitting on a hard drive somewhere. Or a CD-R in a drawer. Or a cassette in a box in the garage. Collecting dust. Waiting for something.

This is what that something is.

Upload it. Take that dusty recording — however rough, however old, however imperfect — and upload it into Suno as reference audio. Write the lyrics. Choose a style. Hit generate.

The song you've been carrying around for years, the one that never had the production it deserved, the one that you always heard as something bigger and better in your head — you can finally hear it the way it was supposed to sound.

I did this with an entire album. Twenty years of songs that I loved but could never properly produce. Suno took those rough recordings and gave them the production they always deserved. Same melodies. Same DNA. Same soul. Just… finished. Finally.

If you have dusty songs, this chapter is your wake-up call. Go find them. Dig them out. Blow off the dust. They've been waiting long enough.

Start Here

If you've never done any of this before, here's the absolute simplest place to start:

Step 1: Download Suno on your phone or go to suno.com. The free version works. If you want more credits and features, $30/month — a dollar a day — is worth it to hatch out your ideas.

Step 2: Open Voice Memo. Record yourself doing ONE of these things: - Hum a melody that's in your head - Play a chord progression on any instrument (cheap guitar, piano, whatever) - Beatbox a rhythm - Make weird sounds with your mouth - Sing a verse — even badly

Step 3: Upload that recording into Suno as reference audio. Add a style prompt (use the techniques from Chapter 4 and 5). Write some lyrics or let Suno generate them.

Step 4: Hit generate. Listen to what comes back.

I promise you — the first time you hear your voice memo transformed into a fully produced song, something will shift inside you. The same thing that shifted in me. The realization that the gap between what you imagine and what you can create is no longer a canyon. It's a step.

Your voice is enough. Your phone is enough. Your ideas have always been enough.

Now you have the tools to prove it.

Next chapter: Why I Never Finished a Lyric for Twenty Years

Chapter 7: Why I Never Finished a Lyric for 20 Years

I want to tell you something that I'm a little embarrassed to admit.

I played guitar for over twenty years. I was in bands. I was a lead singer. I wrote music constantly — riffs, melodies, chord progressions, full arrangements. And in all that time, I almost never finished a complete set of lyrics.

Not because I couldn't. Because I didn't think it was really my thing.

The Singer Who Didn't Like Singing

Here's the honest version of my relationship with singing.

I would give myself a five out of ten. Maybe a six on a good day. I can sing in tune. I can project a little. But I find it strenuous in a way that playing guitar never is, and I am almost never happy with how I sound when I hear it back. I had a dream once where I was singing and I actually *loved* it — loved the feeling of it, the ease of it — and I woke up thinking: oh, that's what it feels like for people who really sing. That's not what it feels like for me.

I didn't start singing in a band until I was twenty-five. By then I'd already written an entire album — the songs that would eventually become *SEX by D@ni* — playing guitar, writing music, but mostly keeping the vocals minimal. Versus. Choruses. Short, catchy clips. Enough to communicate an idea, not enough to commit to a whole story.

In the band I sang, played guitar on some songs, played keyboards on others, triggered samples. But even then, even standing in front of a crowd with a microphone in my hand, I thought of myself as a producer. A musician. Not a lyricist.

So for twenty years, the logic was simple: if I don't really enjoy singing, why would I spend a lot of time writing lyrics?

The answer seemed obvious. You don't.

The Moment That Changed It

When I started remaking my old songs through Suno, something unexpected happened.

Suno needed complete songs. It needed intros, verses, choruses, bridges, outros. It needed the whole arc. And my old songs — the ones I'd carried around for twenty years — were skeletons. Great bones, no skin.

So I used Claude to write the first iteration of lyrics for every song that didn't have them. I'd explain what the song was about — the feeling of it, the story behind it, the emotional center — and Claude would give me something to work with. It wasn't always perfect. I edited heavily. But for the first time in my life, I was working with complete lyrics on my own songs. Hearing my music with a beginning, middle, and end.

And something clicked.

The songs were better. Not just fuller — *better*. The lyrics added a dimension that I hadn't realized was missing. I'd been making music with a hole in it for twenty years and gotten so used to the hole that I'd stopped seeing it.

I got addicted.

I can't imagine writing an instrumental song now. Every melody I hear, I start thinking about what could go over it. Every chord progression suggests something to say. The songwriter in me — the one who'd been sitting in a corner, unattended, for two decades — finally had permission to come out.

What AI Taught Me About Lyrics

Here's the unexpected part: AI didn't just give me lyrics. It taught me how to write them.

Specifically, it taught me what *not* to do.

When you're reading AI-generated lyrics critically — deciding what to keep, what to cut, what to rewrite — you develop an instinct fast. You learn to recognize when lyrics are trying too hard. When they're explaining instead of evoking. When the syllables don't sit right against the melody. When a line is grammatically interesting but rhythmically dead.

You edit enough AI drafts and you start to understand structure. Verse establishes. Chorus delivers. Bridge surprises. You learn that lyrics are not poems — they're designed to be heard, not read, which means the sounds of the words matter as much as their meaning. The consonants, the vowels, where the stress falls in a line, what it feels like in your mouth when you sing it.

I learned all of this by editing. And then one day I didn't need to edit AI drafts anymore, because I could just write.

Brains

The last song I wrote, I wrote with a notebook and a pencil.

Sitting at my kitchen table. Electric guitar unplugged. A blank page.

The song is called *Brains*, and it's the first track of a new album — a record about being fifteen, sixteen years old, the street I grew up on. Hamel Way. The summer it felt like the world was made specifically for me and my friends, that particular window of time before everything got complicated.

One afternoon on LSD, lying on my back in the backyard, I looked up at the clouds and they looked exactly like brains. Just enormous, intricate, folded brains drifting across the sky. I don't know if that's profound or just funny. Maybe both.

That image became the song.

I came up with the chords first — always the chords first, for me. And then I sat there with the guitar and a pencil and I wrote lyrics the way I'd learned to write them: fitting the words to the music, not the other way around. Adjusting syllables until they sat right. Simplifying lines that were too busy. Listening to how the words felt against the chord changes.

No AI. Just me, a pencil, and twenty-plus years of finally understanding what makes a lyric work.

The Training Wheels Theory

I think about what AI did for me with lyrics the way I think about training wheels on a bike.

Training wheels don't make you a cyclist. But they give you enough stability to figure out balance, momentum, what it feels like when everything works — before you're ready to do it without them. Once you've got it, you take the wheels off and you don't miss them.

That's what happened. AI scaffolded something for me. It showed me the shape of a complete song. It gave me something to react to, to argue with, to improve. And in arguing with it — in editing those drafts, in knowing what was wrong and fixing it — I became a lyric writer.

Now I write lyrics the old way. Notebook. Pencil. Kitchen table. Guitar.

It just took an AI to get me there.

And this is where I want to speak directly to two different kinds of readers, because this chapter applies to both:

If you're a veteran musician with a drawer full of unfinished songs — AI drafts give you the starting point you've been avoiding. The song that's been 80% done for ten years? AI will show you what the other 20% could look like. You react, you edit, you finish it. The backlog doesn't have to stay a backlog.

If you're newer to this — if you've been playing for a year and you've never written a complete song — AI does something different but equally powerful. It shows you what a finished lyric looks like. It teaches you structure the same way a good template teaches you formatting. You're not cheating; you're learning by editing. Every lyric you improve is a lesson in what makes a lyric work. The training wheels don't care if you've been riding for twenty years or twenty days. They meet you where you are.

What This Means For You

You might have a version of this — some part of your creative process that you've told yourself isn't really your thing. The lyrics, or the melody, or the production, or the mixing. Something you've left unattended because you decided early on that it wasn't where you were strong.

AI is a very patient collaborator. It will draft the part you've been avoiding. It will show you what it could sound like. And when you edit it — when you start pushing back and saying *no, not that, more like this* — you'll find out that you knew more than you thought.

Twenty years of unfinished lyrics. Then a few weeks of editing AI drafts.

Now I'm writing in a notebook with a pencil.

The pen was always in my hand. I just needed to pick it up.

Next: Chapter 8 — A Weekend Album

Chapter 8: A Weekend Album

Most of my best ideas start with a problem.

The third album started with two problems, actually. I'd run out of the music I'd always wanted to make, and I had a drawer full of songs with nowhere to go.

The First Two Albums Were Easy

SEX by D@ni and *Animal* — those were locked and loaded. I'd been carrying those albums around in my head for years. I knew what they were about, I knew the feeling I wanted, I knew the songs. When Suno made it possible to finally produce them properly, I just opened the drawer and got to work.

SEX was the first album — songs about ownership and desire, unapologetically sexual but not objectifying. Owning it rather than performing it. Then *Animal*, which followed the same thread: we're primal, we're biological, we're human in ways that civilization keeps trying to dress up. *Survive Reproduce* lives on *Animal*. So does everything that track is about.

By the time both albums were done, I had used up the creative reservoir I'd been filling for twenty years. Those were the albums I always wanted to write. I wrote them. What now?

The Song I Almost Forgot

I sat down with my guitar trying to remember a song.

Not a new song — an old one. Something I'd written years ago that I'd never recorded, never even learned the proper name of the opening chord. I just remembered that it sounded cool. That the chord shape was unusual, some kind of inverted fingering that I'd stumbled onto once and kept returning to. And that there was a feeling to it that I'd never quite been able to place.

I sat there trying to find it. Tried different tunings. Tried different positions. Nothing.

Then I dropped the guitar to drop D — altered tuning, lower bottom string — and something in my fingers remembered before my brain did. Muscle memory. The chord shape came back without me thinking about it. An arpeggio, up and down. And I knew immediately: that's it.

The rest of the song came back the same way. Not from memory exactly — more like from the body. My hands knew things my mind had forgotten.

But when I played it all the way through, I had the same thought I'd had about a few other songs in my collection: *this doesn't fit*. It was soft. Acoustic. Beautiful in a way that didn't belong next to the heat of *SEX* or the rawness of *Animal*. Same problem with a few other songs I'd been sitting on — electronic, studio-produced pieces that were too melodic, too luminous, too pretty for where I'd placed them.

I had a collection of orphan songs. Homeless music. Good songs with nowhere to go.

The Concept as a Container

Here's the insight that changed everything: **a concept album can give a home to music that has no home.**

If I could find a concept dark enough — a framework that could absorb beautiful, gentle, acoustic music and make it feel strange and unsettling — I could use all of it. Every orphan song. Every piece I loved but couldn't place.

The concept that came to me was a cult.

Not scary in an obvious way. That was the whole point. A cult that lures people in with beautiful music. Songs that start welcoming, start warm, start like an invitation — and slowly, over the course of an album, tighten into something you can't leave. The music stays pretty throughout. The darkness creeps in through the words.

Pink Floyd does this better than almost anyone. *Shine On You Crazy Diamond* is one of the most gorgeous pieces of music ever recorded. It's also about a man losing his mind. The beauty and the darkness don't cancel each other out — they intensify each other. You can have a beautiful listening experience and simultaneously be taken somewhere a little strange, a little uncomfortable, a little exciting. That tension is what makes it memorable.

That became *Cult*.

Alara Voss and the Arc

The cult has a leader. Her name is Alara Voss — young, a singer, famous early, wealthy early. Her parents died in an accident when she was around sixteen. Maybe she was responsible. The album doesn't say for certain.

She uses her music to draw people in. They come to live on the compound. They call her *the Collar* — like she's reaching out to them, calling them home. They follow willingly, then not so willingly.

The album follows that arc across eight tracks: the beckoning, the introduction, the running toward something that feels beautiful, the slow absorption into the compound's rituals, the surrender, the ceremony, the devotion — and finally, the lock clicking shut. The music stays warm and gorgeous the whole way through. That's the point. That's how a cult works. You don't feel the walls closing until they already have.

You can hear the full album by searching for artist D@ni on Spotify, Apple Music, or visiting dani.band.

The Production

Half the songs were acoustic guitar pieces — fully structured, verse-chorus-bridge, well-written melodies that I'd been sitting on for years. They had no production, no lyrics, no home.

The other three were studio-produced pieces. Virtual instruments, electronic elements, things that sounded a little too luminous for *SEX* or *Animal*. Songs that were almost embarrassingly pretty.

For all of them, the approach was the same: record what I had, feed it into Suno, and hold the style prompt steady across the whole album.

Late 60s influences. Mamas and Papas harmonies. Jefferson Airplane's psychedelia. Pink Floyd's darkness wrapped in beauty. Those were the sonic reference points. And because I kept those consistent — because every song on the album was processed through the same aesthetic lens — *Cult* sounds like a unified record even though it was assembled from years of disparate source material.

Grok helped with the lyrics. I edited heavily. The lyrics needed to function as a slow reveal, a gradual tightening, so the editing was as much about pacing the story as about word choice. What does a cult leader sound like in verse one? What does she sound like in verse seven? Those are different voices, and the writing had to carry that arc.

What Made It Work

I want to be honest about something.

None of those songs, on their own, were ready to be *Cult*. The acoustic piece I almost forgot — without the concept, it's just a nice song. The happy electronic pieces — without the framework, they're orphans again.

The concept didn't just give the songs a theme. It gave them a transformation. By deciding that this music would serve a specific story, told in a specific order, using a specific emotional arc, I turned a collection of unrelated pieces into a complete work. The music was the raw material. The concept was the production.

And AI made the concept viable. Because Suno could take an acoustic guitar track from one era, an electronic piece from another, and a song made from mouth sounds in the middle of the night — and produce all of them in the same sonic world. That consistency of sound across wildly different source material is what makes an album feel like an album instead of a playlist.

You hold the style prompt. Suno holds the sound. You tell the story. The music carries it.

The Real Lesson

You probably have orphan songs too.

Music you love that doesn't fit where you've put it. Pieces that are too happy, too soft, too strange, too electronic, too acoustic, too *something* for the project you originally imagined them for.

Don't throw them out. Don't leave them in a drawer.

Find the container. Find the concept that gives them a home.

And then drop your guitar to drop D and see what your hands remember.

Next: Chapter 9 — Sharing Your Music With the World

Chapter 9: Sharing Your Music With the World

Before I tell you this story, I want to be clear about the timeline — because this is not a story about AI music going viral. This happened the old-fashioned way, with a song I wrote about twenty years ago, that found its way to Netflix around fifteen years ago, and that I'm still learning the full impact of today.

I'm telling it here because it says something important about putting music into the world and trusting the long game.

I got a Facebook message from a stranger in Mexico City.

I didn't recognize the name. I had no idea how she'd found me. The message was in English: *What are the lyrics to your song?*

I typed back: *What song are you talking about?*

The one on the novella, she said. *On Netflix.*

I asked her what the novella was called. She said *Infames*. Infamous, in Spanish. I told her I'd check it out, and before I'd even finished typing the reply I was already on YouTube, searching.

I found an episode. Hit play.

My song. Playing over the intro. Not as a background cue, not buried in a scene — as the *intro song*, playing over every single episode of a Netflix series.

I sat there for a moment not quite believing what I was seeing. Then I started digging. Millions of streams. Millions of YouTube views. On Pirate Bay — a piracy site where people upload things they want but don't want to pay for — my song had been illegally downloaded ten million times.

Ten million.

The song was called *Tyranny*. I wrote it roughly twenty years ago. A song from before Pro Tools, before Suno, before any of the tools I'll talk about in this book. I'd put it out into the world and more or less let go of it. About five years later — fifteen years ago now — it showed up as the intro song on a Netflix series. I didn't know it was happening. Nobody called me. A stranger in Mexico City found me on Facebook.

The recording was, by my own honest assessment, not that good. My voice, captured years earlier, without the production I'd later learn to build around it. But the *feeling* was there. The concept was there. Something in that song reached through a rough recording and found people anyway. Hollywood found it through sync licensing. A stranger in Mexico City hunted me down because she needed to know who made it.

And I hadn't known any of it was happening.

The Slow Discovery

Here's what nobody tells you about putting your music into the world: you often find out it's working long after it already started working.

The commission statements I'd get from the publishing catalog — they'd tell me a song was used somewhere, but not always exactly where. So I'd go looking. I found my music on a water commercial starring Christina Applegate — I'd written a little Italian mafia song, and there was a joke in the spot about a hitman. My cello piece turned up in a documentary about a Black Swedish death metal band, musicians who heard something in a dark, orchestral piece I'd made and used it to tell their story. I've been on Pawn Stars. The History Channel.

Each discovery was a small shock. Not because I expected it — I didn't. But because my music had been out there, living its life, finding its people, without me knowing. I'd released it and let go. The world had taken it somewhere I never could have predicted.

That's not a strategy. That's just what happens when you put good things into the world and give them time.

What Changed With AI

The two singles I've released under D@ni — *Bloody Kiss* and *P!nk*, from the album *SEX by D@ni* — aren't pulling big numbers yet. I know that. I'm not pretending otherwise.

But here's what I also know: *Tyranny* didn't become a Netflix intro song until five years after I released it. The music industry doesn't move on your timeline. It moves on its own. Your job is to be in the catalog — to have the music out there, findable, available, when the moment comes.

One big change I made with the AI music: D@ni's vocals are female. I wanted the artist to be somewhat androgynous, leaning more feminine, and AI made that possible in a way that wasn't available before. The voice on *Bloody Kiss* and *P!nk* is not my voice — it's a persona I built, a character with a sound that fits the music. People who know me know it's AI. People who don't know me have commented without realizing it, which tells me the production is doing its job: it doesn't sound generic. It sounds like someone.

I'm promoting through Instagram. Not as aggressively as I could be. Life is busy. But the music is out there. That's what matters right now.

My Daughter's Favorite Album

My oldest daughter is eleven. She has one of the most particular taste in music I've ever seen in a kid her age. She doesn't listen to pop. She doesn't listen to rap or rock. She gravitates toward niche, specific things — music that most people her age have never heard of. She came to that taste on her own, and it's real, not performed.

Her favorite album right now is mine.

She listens to it every day.

My wife loves it. My youngest daughter loves the songs too. This is not me looking for validation from strangers on the internet — this is people I trust with my whole heart telling me that what I made is worth loving.

If my eleven-year-old daughter, with her particular and hard-won taste, puts my album on every day — I'm not worried about Spotify streams. I know what I have. Other people will find it. They always do.

Trust the Work

Here's the only advice I want to give you about sharing your music:

If you love it, put it out. If you love it, other people will love it too — maybe not all of them, maybe not immediately, but they will find it.

The world is better off having heard your music than not. That's not arrogance. That's the basic logic of creativity. You made something that didn't exist before. You gave it to the world. The world is now slightly more complete than it was.

Don't wait until it's perfect. *Tyranny* was imperfect. The recording was rough. I put it out anyway, and fifteen years later a stranger in Mexico City was tracking me down on Facebook to ask me about the lyrics.

Don’t wait until you have an audience. Put the music in the catalog. Let sync licensing, let algorithms, let word of mouth, let time do what they do. You cannot control the discovery. You can only control whether the music exists to be discovered.

Don’t watch the streams. Seriously. Check in every few months if you need to, but don’t refresh the dashboard looking for validation. The number on the screen has nothing to do with whether the music is good or whether it will eventually find the people it’s meant for.

Just make good music. Put it out. Trust it.

The rest takes care of itself — on a timeline you don’t control, in places you won’t expect, for people you’ll never meet.

Unless one of them tracks you down on Facebook to ask you what you wrote.

The Practical Part

When you’re ready to release:

TuneCore is what I use. You upload your track, set your release date, and TuneCore distributes to Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube Music, Amazon, and everywhere else. One fee, you keep your royalties.

Sync licensing is the quiet multiplier. Upload your catalog to a music licensing platform — there are several — and your music becomes available for TV shows, films, commercials, documentaries. This is how *Tyranny* ended up on Netflix without me doing anything. You upload it once and forget about it. Years later you get a commission statement.

Social media is the loudest option but not the most important one. Instagram, TikTok — yes, promote your releases. But don’t mistake promotion for the work. The music comes first. Always.

Your website. Get one. It’s your home base, your catalog, the place that exists regardless of what platform changes its algorithm or bans your account. Mine is dani.band.

Release it. Then make the next one.

The imagination age is already here. You don't need a label, a manager, a studio, or a budget. You need an idea and a system. You have both now.

Go make something.

Final Chapter: The Imagination Age

Let me paint you a picture of where we're headed.

Right now, in 2026, we're standing at the beginning of something massive. AI music tools are good — really good. Good enough that I've written three albums with them. Good enough that Timbaland, one of the most innovative producers in the history of hip-hop, became a strategic advisor to Suno and created an AI artist named TaTa Taktumi who just signed a record deal with Pacific Music Group. That's not some indie experiment. That's Billboard news.

But here's the thing: as good as these tools are today, they're about to get *dramatically* better. And that changes everything — not just for people like me who use AI, but for every musician alive.

The Excuses Are Over

For twenty years, I had music trapped in my head.

I had riffs I never recorded because I didn't have the right gear. I had songs I never finished because I couldn't find a studio, couldn't afford a producer, couldn't find a band. I had albums I never made because I spent hours — literal *hours* — twisting knobs on a plug-in trying to find the perfect kick drum sound. I'd get so deep into one tiny sample that I'd never get to the composition. The software had a thousand choices, and somehow having a thousand choices meant I made none.

Sound familiar?

That era is ending. Not slowly. Fast.

The tools we have now already remove most of the friction between having an idea and hearing it as a finished song. In two to three years, they'll remove virtually all of it. You'll be able to hum a melody into your phone and hear a fully produced, genre-accurate, sonically polished track in seconds. The fidelity will be indistinguishable from a studio recording. The customization will be granular enough that you're shaping every element.

Which means the only thing that will matter is the idea itself.

There are no more excuses. Not "I can't afford a studio." Not "I can't find the right plugin." Not "I don't play enough instruments." Not "I'm not technical enough." Those excuses are dead. The only question left is: **what do you want to create?**

Leveling Up: The Imagination Race

Here's where it gets exciting — and a little intimidating.

When every musician on the planet has access to tools that can produce studio-quality music from a voice memo and a text prompt, what separates the great from the generic?

Imagination.

Think about it. If the production barrier is gone — if anyone can make a song that *sounds* professional — then the competitive advantage shifts entirely to creativity. To originality. To the ideas.

For lovers of complex, progressive, experimental music — and I count myself in that group — this is thrilling. Because the tools don't just make simple music easier. They make *ambitious* music possible.

You want to write a twelve-minute progressive rock suite with time signature changes, orchestral breakdowns, and a key modulation in the bridge? You can do that now. In a day. Without hiring an orchestra. Without spending six months in Pro Tools. Without being limited by which VST plugins you own.

The ceiling just disappeared.

And that means the musicians who thrive in this new era won't be the ones with the most expensive studios or the most technical production skills. They'll be the ones with the most vivid imaginations. The ones who can think bigger, weirder, bolder. The ones who stop asking "can I make this?" and start asking "what if?"

The CGI Parallel

I think about this the same way I think about CGI in movies.

When computer-generated imagery first arrived, it changed filmmaking forever. Directors like James Cameron could suddenly create entire worlds that didn't exist — Avatar being the obvious example. Creatures, planets, physics-defying action sequences. Things that were literally impossible to film became possible overnight.

But something else happened too.

A flood of lazy CGI hit the market. Superhero movies where everything was green screen. Action sequences that looked like video games. The technology was used as a crutch, not a tool, and audiences started to feel it. The spectacle lost its magic because there was no soul behind it.

And what happened as a counterweight? Independent film thrived. Movies shot on handheld cameras with natural lighting and real performances. Films where the power came from the writing and the acting, not the effects budget. The Moonlights, the Lady Birds, the Rooms — intimate human stories that reminded audiences why they fell in love with movies in the first place.

Music is about to go through the exact same thing.

On one side, you'll see AI-assisted music reach extraordinary heights. Complex compositions that would have taken a team of musicians months to produce. Genre-blending experiments that were impossible before. Sonic landscapes that push the boundaries of what music can be.

On the other side, you'll see a renaissance of organic, non-digital music. Singer-songwriters with nothing but a guitar and their voice. Spoken word poets. Live performers who never touch a computer. Musicians who lean into the raw, imperfect, undeniably *human* quality of their work — because in a world full of polished AI productions, imperfection becomes valuable again.

And here's the beautiful part: **both of these things are good.**

They feed each other. The more complex and mind-blowing AI music becomes, the more people crave the simplicity of a human voice and an acoustic guitar. And the more people appreciate raw, organic music, the more it pushes AI-assisted artists to make sure their work has soul, not just production value.

What the Industry Is Saying

This isn't just my prediction. The biggest names in music are already positioning themselves for this future.

Timbaland — the man behind some of the most innovative beats in music history — went all in on AI. He became a strategic advisor to Suno in 2024, and in March 2026, his AI artist TaTa Taktumi signed a record deal with Pacific Music Group for distribution across Asia. When NPR criticized the project, Timbaland didn't flinch. He sees AI as the next evolution of production, the same way he saw the drum machine as an evolution of live drums.

Billboard predicts that 2026 could see the first AI-assisted track chart on the Hot 100. Not an AI-generated gimmick — a legitimate hit where AI was part of the creative process.

A **Sonarworks survey of 1,100+ music producers** in 2026 found that 70% see AI as a collaborative tool, not a replacement. Only 9% expected full automation and human producers becoming redundant. The overwhelming consensus: AI handles the tedious work, humans bring the taste.

Sound On Sound, one of the most respected music production publications, described the industry's attitude as "grudging acceptance of the inevitable" — but noted that the producers who are thriving are the ones who combine gut-level instinct with AI's capabilities. They're not being replaced. They're being amplified.

And **Forbes** laid out nine predictions for how AI will reshape music licensing, catalog valuation, and power dynamics. The conclusion? The artists who understand both the creative and technological sides will hold the most power.

The Rise of Something New

I want to make a prediction of my own.

In the next few years, we're going to see an entirely new category of musician emerge. Not a traditional artist. Not a producer in the conventional sense. Not a DJ. Something new.

These will be people who are part musician, part director, part sound designer. People who use AI the way a filmmaker uses a camera — as a tool to realize a vision that exists in their imagination. They'll write concept albums on their phones. They'll create genre-defying

soundscapes using nothing but their voice as input. They'll release music faster than traditional artists because the bottleneck isn't production anymore — it's creativity.

And here's the key distinction: the good ones won't use AI to avoid making music. They'll use it to make *more* music. Better music. Music they couldn't have made alone.

That's what I do. I don't type a prompt and accept whatever Suno gives me. I play guitar. I mouth melodies. I stomp rhythms into a floor. I write and rewrite and rewrite lyrics until they sound like something a real person would sing. Then I use AI to lift all of that into a finished product that I couldn't have produced on my own.

The tool amplifies what's already there. It doesn't create something from nothing.

Your Job Now

So where does that leave you?

If you've read this far, you already have something most people don't: the desire to create. You picked up this book because there's music in you that wants to get out. Maybe it's been stuck for years, like mine was. Maybe you're just getting started.

Either way, the path has never been clearer.

Stop waiting for the right equipment. You have a phone. That's enough.

Stop waiting for the right moment. You're sitting on the toilet right now? Great. Mouth a melody. Record it. That's how I started a concept album about a cult, and it turned out incredible.

Stop chasing perfection in the tools. Don't spend hours on one kick drum sample. Don't twist knobs until your ears go numb. Write the song first. The tools will handle the rest — and if they don't nail it on the first try, generate it again. And again. The magic is in the iteration, not the obsession.

Start trusting your imagination. If you can hear it in your head, you can make it real. That's not motivational poster fluff — that's the literal truth with today's technology. The gap between imagination and execution has never been smaller.

And don't forget to be human. Play your guitar badly. Sing off-key into a voice memo. Use your daughter's $99 acoustic. Slam locker doors for percussion. Put *yourself* into the music — your imperfections, your quirks, your voice, your weird ideas — because that's what the AI can't generate on its own. That's what makes your music yours.

The Next Few Years

Music is about to get very, very interesting.

We're going to hear compositions that blow our minds — things that sound like they were made by an orchestra of a hundred musicians but were actually created by one person in their living room. We're going to hear genre fusions that nobody thought to try because they were too hard to produce manually. We're going to hear concept albums and sonic experiments and ambient landscapes and progressive epics that push the boundaries of what we thought music could be.

And alongside all of that, we're going to hear a human with a guitar, singing a simple song, and it's going to hit us harder than anything a machine could generate. Because sometimes the most complex music in the world can't compete with the sound of a real person, feeling something real, and sharing it out loud.

Both of these futures are happening. Both of them are beautiful. And both of them need you.

So pick up whatever instrument you've got — even if it's just your voice — and make something.

The tools are waiting. The only thing they need is your imagination.

— Danny (D@ni)