PRESS RELEASE

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AI audit finds hits from Thriller to Hotel California linked to the wrong songs, raising questions over who gets paid

Nearly three years of AIMi research into The MLC's public data identifies a largely overlooked problem: recordings matched to the wrong songs, even on the best-selling albums of all time

GOLD COAST, AUSTRALIA: Recordings that appear successfully matched in public data from The Mechanical Licensing Collective (The MLC) can be linked to the wrong songs, potentially sending royalties to the wrong people, a new AIMi Labs white paper finds.

Who's Eating Your Lunch? Beyond the black box: are music royalties reaching the right people?, by Pete Whelan, founder of Program Music and AIMi, draws on nearly three years of research using AIMi, an agentic AI music-rights research assistant that has investigated tens of thousands of musical works and ingested nearly 6.5 billion rows of music metadata. The research set out to find missing registrations, but recording-level search revealed a different problem: recordings matched to work records that look complete but belong to a different composition.

The paper groups what it found into the Four Ms: Missing (a work, writer, publisher or share is absent), Mistaken (the data exists but contains an error), Misdirected (incorrect authorship or ownership information enters the ecosystem) and Misallocated (a recording is connected to the wrong underlying musical work).

Rather than testing on obscure releases, AIMi went straight for the crown jewels of the music industry: 111 tracks across ten of the best-selling albums of all time, including Thriller, Rumours and Hotel California. All were registered, with average recorded-share coverage of 99.3%. Yet **56 tracks (50.5%) were associated with more than one work record** requiring review.

111	56	50.5%
tracks across ten of the best-selling albums	linked to more than one work record	of tracks associated with more than one work record

The paper stresses this is a screening result, not an error rate: remixes and adaptations can legitimately involve several records. But individual investigations found recordings linked to unrelated compositions.

Fleetwood Mac's "Don't Stop" was linked to Christine McVie's work, but also to Queen's "Don't Stop Me Now" and Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'". Fleetwood Mac's "Dreams" has a complete work record crediting Stevie Nicks, yet its recordings were linked to eight further records for different compositions. Michael Jackson's "The Lady in My Life" was linked to the "Thriller" work record as well as its own; both are Rod Temperton songs. AC/DC's "Hells Bells" was attached to "Hell's Bells", a much earlier composition by bandleader Art Kassel.

The paper also digs into case studies involving Blur, Wang Chung, U2, Bo Diddley, Bruno Mars and Leftfield, including one The MLC has since corrected after Whelan raised it.

> *"This is the result of nearly three years working with The MLC's data, and it was only possible because The MLC opened that data to scrutiny.* ***Being matched to a song is not the same as being matched to the right song.*** *A registration can look complete and still point to somebody else's song," said Pete Whelan, founder of Program Music and AIMi.*

The MLC's public data does not disclose transaction values, so the paper does not quantify any financial impact.

For songwriters and publishers, the findings show that correct registration alone cannot guarantee a recording is linked to the right work. With The MLC planning to begin market-share distributions of remaining unmatched and unclaimed January 2021 royalties in April 2027, **rightsholders should have claims and corrections processed before the expected February 2027 snapshot.**

The paper credits The MLC's openness with making the research possible, and calls on collective management organisations, PROs and societies worldwide to open their data to the same level of scrutiny and make errors easier to report and correct.

> *"Improving match rates is only part of the challenge. We also need ways to independently verify the matches that already exist. We are all in it together, and we can fix it together," Whelan said.*

The paper is available at whoseatingyourlunch.com, with track-by-track research at whoseatingyourlunch.com/research (registration required).

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About AIMi

AIMi is an agentic AI music-rights research assistant and catalogue auditing platform, developed with support from a Creative Catalyst grant in 2023. Originally built to identify missing and incomplete US digital mechanical registrations, it has processed tens of thousands of works and, as of October 2026, ingested nearly 6.5 billion rows of music metadata. AIMi powers the Who's Eating Your Lunch? platform, scheduled to launch at the end of 2026, which will let songwriters audit their own catalogues free of charge.

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