THE VELVET SUNDOWN

Modern mirage of music

by Hamza Zakir
CONTRIBUTOR
HE/HIM/HIS
vsi25006@uconn.edu

If you've spent enough time scrolling on TikTok, you've probably become accustomed to many songs without ever putting them in a playlist — through slideshows, art trends or edits of your favorite show. Listening to music has become something that begins on other platforms, before eventually becoming familiar enough to earn a spot in our libraries.

Finding the artist usually follows. For listeners discovering The Velvet Sundown, that search result led to a band whose members did not exist.

The Velvet Sundown appeared out of thin air in June 2025, releasing "Floating on Echoes" and "Dust and Silence" within mere weeks of each other. Its folk-and-country-inspired sound harkens back to 1960s and 1970s folk and psychedelic rock, bearing a resemblance to classics like Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. By early July, it managed to amass a following of 1 million monthly listeners on Spotify. With two albums and 26 total songs released, the band appeared to be doing remarkably well for itself in such a short time span.

Listeners soon found that the musicians shown in the promotional photos seemed to be doctored with the use of artificial intelligence. After a slew of criticism and scrutiny from listeners over its AI-generated photos and lack of live performances, the band changed its Spotify description, identifying itself as "a synthetic music project guided by human creative direction," acknowledging that AI was involved in its instrumentals, vocals and visuals.

Full-scale AI songs and bands are hardly new to the online music scene.

As far back as April 2023, "Heart on My Sleeve" circulated online, featuring vocals generated to resemble Drake and The Weeknd. The track was uploaded by a creator known as Ghostwriter and gained millions of views before it was removed after objections from Universal Music Group. Neither Drake nor The Weeknd were aware of the initial release.

These instances of AI-generated music are alarming but are merely a few examples. Deezer, a global music streaming service, reported 90,000 fully AI-generated tracks uploaded daily in June 2026 — more than half of all new uploads.

The sudden influx of AI music is propelled by barriers to entry for music production being lower than ever. Tools like Suno and Udio can produce vocals, lyrics and instrumental tracks just from a single prompt. In the past, tools like these might have produced simple songs; now anyone can make something that resembles a polished release.

While the percentage of AI music released is not proportional to the percent streamed — fully AI-generated music only accounts for 1% to 3% of streams on Deezer — a single percent is still alarming. But how do these tracks and bands gain traction in the first place?

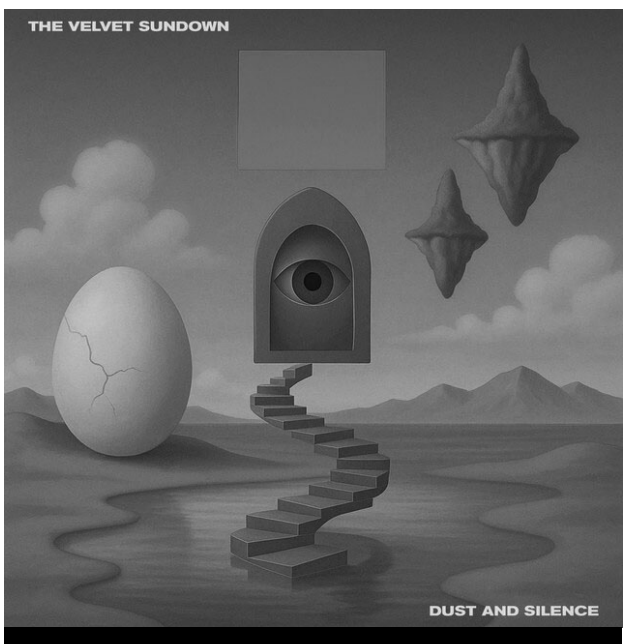
The answer lies both in the way that listeners are increasingly introduced to music online and the fact that many AI-generated tracks are not immediately obvious in their production.

Spotify recommendations and social media introduce people to new music without so much as a look at the band beyond a single song. AI music slips through the cracks of algorithm-generated recommended songs on streaming sites. On social media, people can hear songs dozens of times without even knowing their names or the artists behind them.

A Deezer-commissioned Ipsos survey published in November 2025 asked 9,000 people across eight countries to classify three tracks: two AI-generated songs and one human-made recording. A whopping 97% failed to identify all three correctly. Still, 80% of participants supported clearly labeling fully AI-generated tracks, and 45% wanted an option to filter it out altogether.

These statistics show that even if our ears can no longer tell the difference, people still demand transparency. The desire to label and filter this kind of music represents a desire for human-made art in a digital landscape shaped by algorithms and AI.

In today's world, it is no longer strange to discover a song before discovering its artist. Now, a listener may put a song on a playlist without knowing whether the singer, band, photos or person attached to it exists at all.



The Velvet Sundown's 2025 album, Dust and Silence. Its folk-and-country-inspired sound harkens back to 1960s and '70s folk and psychedelic rock, bearing a resemblance to classics like Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SPOTIFY.



A photo generated by Artificial Intelligence used for promotional content for the synthetic music project, The Velvet Sundown. Listeners soon found that the musicians shown in the photos seemed to be doctored with the use of artificial intelligence.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ELECTRIC BLUE.

'Survivor 51' premiere unleashes the 'open era' of permanent uncertainty

by Molly Daigle
CAMPUS CORRESPONDENT
SHE/HER/HERS
molly.daigle@uconn.edu

The two-hour premiere of "Survivor 51" aired on CBS on Wednesday, Sept. 23. This season features an assortment of 21 castaways, marooned on the islands of Fiji, who must push themselves to the limit to win grueling challenges, create strategic alliances and above all else, survive.

The player who can outwit, outplay and outlast the rest claims the coveted title of "Sole Survivor" and the million-dollar prize that accompanies it.

This season comes after the recent and historic "Survivor 50: In the Hands of the Fans," which featured countless legendary returning players spanning 25 years of the show's history. Last season, 40-year-old marketing director Aubry Bracco — originally featured on "Survivor: Kaôh Rōng," "Survivor: Game Changers" and "Survivor: Edge of Extinction" — rose to victory and claimed the largest prize pot offered on the show: $2 million.

During the opening of "Survivor 51," host Jeff Probst announced a new era of gameplay known as the "Open Era." In this new era, Probst explained, everything is in play, and players will experience "permanent uncertainty." This means that every twist and advantage ever featured on the show is fair game and can be implemented at any time. Stakes were raised to new heights never before seen on the show, adding an extra layer of paranoia for players to experience.

The first twist took place right as castaways arrived on the beach, where they quickly found out that they had to select one person to begin the game alone, without a tribe.

Lewis Kelly, a 28-year-old farmer from Dublin, caught everyone by surprise by volunteering, leaving the group to follow a mysterious path toward an unknown fate. He eventually reached Exile Island, and with no information, patiently waited to eventually receive the opportunity to earn an immunity idol.

The other players were divided into two tribes — the Savu and Toka tribes — and received a note saying that each tribe must elect a representative. The representatives of both tribes negotiated with each other to divide various survival supplies, including a pot, flint and machete, building supplies, camp supplies and fishing gear. Once the supplies were divided, the tribes were taken to their respective beaches and the game officially began.

Connections and alliances began to take shape as the tribes headed into their first immunity challenge. Players worked together to race through various obstacles and untie packs of balls that they would use in a tall shoot in order to release a key. The key unlocked heavy crates that players had to push under a heavy net to build a staircase up to a platform where a giant "Survivor 51" logo puzzle awaited.

Right before the challenge, Probst announced a few new twists. Castaways received the opportunity to vote whether or not they wanted to keep or remove the final four fire-making showdown. Originally introduced in "Survivor: Heroes vs. Healers vs. Hustlers," players must build a fire fast and high enough to burn a rope in order to earn their way to the final three. The concept has been controversial between fans online, as many preferred the show's original format of a simple final four vote, but players opted to keep the fire-making showdown in play.

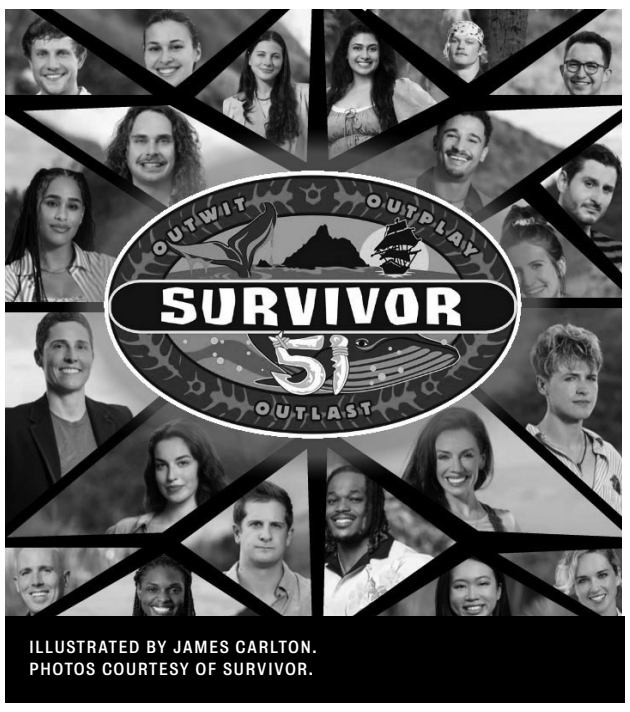
Probst also offered another interesting twist — one that only began last season — but the stakes were even higher. In "Survivor 50: In the Hands of the Fans," Probst invited YouTube content creator Mr. Beast to introduce a new twist to the game — a simple coin flip. One player must flip a coin and if it is in their favor, they are immune from being voted out that night, receive an immunity idol and the prize pot increases by $1 million. However, if the coin flip is not in the player's favor, they are immediately eliminated.

The twist became one of the most memorable moments in the season with 42-year-old newscaster Rick Devens securing the doubled prize pot for the players. This season, Probst added to the stakes. If the coin flip fails and the money isn't doubled, the extra money carries over to the next season, potentially setting up what could be one of the largest prize pots ever awarded on any reality show.

In a close race, the Savu tribe earned the first immunity win of the season, resulting in the Toka tribe going to tribal council, where they were faced with voting out one of their own. New alliances were tested, suspicions of lies began to form within the tribe and people made mistakes, trusting the wrong people with information — all leading to a climactic first tribal council, where people were whispering amongst each other until seconds before the vote.

The premiere episode perfectly introduced the new "Open Era" of the show and set up the season for many twists and unknowns for players to experience at any given moment, truly highlighting Probst's idea of "permanent uncertainty."

New episodes of "Survivor 51" will stream Wednesdays at 8 p.m. on CBS.



ILLUSTRATED BY JAMES CARLTON.
PHOTOS COURTESY OF SURVIVOR.

SUBOG Weekly Events:

September 27th - October 4th

Homecoming Parade – 9.27 @ 1:30 PM along Hillside Road
Homecoming Carnival – 9.27 @ 2 PM at Founders Green
Homecoming Pageant – 9.28 @ 6 PM in the Student Union Theater
SUBOG x USG Voter Registration – 10.1 @ 11 AM at the SU Mall
Coffee House – 10.1 @ 4:30 PM at the Benton
Homecoming Lip Sync – 10.1 @ 7 PM in the Jorgensen Theater
Fan Fest Friday – 10.2 @ 1 PM at the SU Mall

Any questions? Email subog@uconn.edu