

ESN DAILY DISPATCH

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The Chocolate Factory Has a Voice-Consent Department Now

Gene Wilder's authorized AI voice, a German dubbing dispute, and the increasingly complicated meaning of consent.

There is an almost suspiciously perfect ESN story sitting in plain sight this weekend: Netflix has released *Wonka's The Golden Ticket*, and the voice welcoming contestants into the chocolate factory is an AI recreation of the late Gene Wilder.

That fact is interesting. The timing is much more interesting.

VERIFIED

Netflix worked with ElevenLabs to create the Wilder voice, and reporting says the project was done with the cooperation of Wilder's estate. The series premiered September 23.

That distinction matters enormously. California's AB 1836 prohibits covered commercial digital replicas of deceased performers without estate consent. So, on the publicly known facts, Wilder is close to a textbook example of the emerging *authorized digital-replica economy*: dead performer, recognizable synthetic voice, negotiated estate permission.

AND THEN WE CROSS THE ATLANTIC

SOURCED CLAIM / ACTIVE DISPUTE

Germany's professional voice-performer association, the VDS, announced in September that it had filed a complaint with the Bundeskartellamt and was supporting performers' privacy complaints over Netflix's AI-training provisions. According to the VDS, dubbing performers working on Netflix originals have faced agreements allowing recordings to be used for AI training; the association argues that the arrangement raises competition, privacy, and bargaining-power questions.

Netflix disputes that characterization. Reporting on the complaint says the company considers it meritless and points to negotiated protections with a German actors' union concerning voice use and consent.

Complaint does not equal a finding of wrongdoing. No regulator has established the VDS allegations as fact.

But look at the juxtaposition.

One side of the company is publicly demonstrating what synthetic-voice consent looks like when the person whose voice is being reproduced is **dead**: negotiate with the estate, announce the partnership, and turn the technology itself into part of the publicity story.

Meanwhile, living dubbing performers in Germany are arguing about what **meaningful consent** means when the party asking for voice rights is also a major source of the work.

That is not proof of hypocrisy. It *is* a genuinely useful comparison.

THE YOYO CONNECTION

Here is today's rabbit hole: the interesting question may no longer be, "**Did somebody consent to AI?**" It may be: "**What kind of consent was economically possible?**"

Gene Wilder's estate can say yes or no to a new synthetic performance because Netflix wants something identifiable and scarce: **Gene Wilder**.

A working dubbing actor negotiating over training rights occupies a radically different bargaining position if refusing the clause also means refusing access to the job.

Legally those situations may be quite different. Ethically and economically, putting them beside one another exposes the problem with treating the word **CONSENT** as though it ends the inquiry.

Consent has a supply chain.

And, extremely 2026 sentence incoming: **the dead movie star may currently possess clearer negotiating leverage over his synthetic voice than the living person standing in the dubbing booth.**

That is an inference from the contrasting situations - not an established legal conclusion - but it is the part I would circle in red marker.

ONE MORE ODDLY TIMELY PIECE

California added another brick to this wall in September: Governor Gavin Newsom signed SB 1050, requiring clear disclosure when covered audio or video advertising prominently uses AI-generated performers. The measure is scheduled to take effect January 1, 2027.

So the regulatory vocabulary is becoming surprisingly coherent: **permission -> specificity -> representation -> disclosure.**

Those concepts keep appearing because the technical question - *can we manufacture a convincing human performance?* - is rapidly becoming the least interesting question in the room.

We obviously can.

The fight is moving toward **who owns the inputs, who had bargaining power when permission was obtained, what uses were actually described, who gets paid, and whether the audience knows what it is hearing.**

Which, inconveniently for anyone hoping AI would simplify production, sounds an awful lot like labor relations.

ESN EVIDENCE BOARD

VERIFIED

Netflix is using an authorized AI recreation of Gene Wilder's voice in *Wonka's The Golden Ticket*.

VERIFIED

California law protects performers' digital replicas and requires estate consent for covered commercial uses involving deceased performers.

VERIFIED

The VDS has publicly announced a competition complaint and support for privacy complaints concerning Netflix's German dubbing agreements.

CLAIM, NOT ADJUDICATED FACT

VDS says performers effectively must accept AI-training provisions to continue receiving certain Netflix work.

NETFLIX'S POSITION

Netflix disputes the German complaint and points to negotiated protections with a German actors' union.

INFERENCE

Comparing Wilder's estate-negotiated synthetic performance with the German dispute suggests that the next important chapter of the dubbing/AI story is less about whether a consent form exists than about the conditions under which consent is obtained.

ESN / YOYODUB CONTEXT

This intersects directly with the existing Yoyodub thread concerning Netflix, dubbing labor, AI training, and the changing economics of voice performance. It does **not**, by itself, validate any broader ESN allegation.

No mythology required today. Reality has obligingly produced Willy Wonka's licensed AI ghost voice during an international dispute over whether living dubbing actors can meaningfully refuse AI training.

Yoyo can take Saturday afternoon off.

SOURCE TRAIL

Key source trail used for this edition: reporting on Netflix and ElevenLabs' Gene Wilder voice recreation; California AB 1836 materials concerning digital replicas of deceased performers; the German VDS announcement concerning its competition complaint and privacy complaints; reporting containing Netflix's response; and California SB 1050 materials concerning disclosure of AI-generated performers in advertising.

Editorial note: This edition deliberately separates verified facts, sourced allegations, company responses, and ESN inference. Allegations described here are not presented as adjudicated findings.