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Handledare: Susanne Rosenberg

Anna Fält

How To Sell A Product?
Solo Folk Singing, Personal Branding And Spiritual Journey
Skriftlig reflektion inom självständigt arbete
ABSTRACT

In this thesis I’m trying to to find out whether we need to make our art into a product and I am using myself and my career as an example of a product. I wanted to use the word “product” in a positive way and inspire people to think about music management and personal branding as something they could use as a tool when working with something creative. I’m writing about my own journey as a folk musician and solo artist and wish to turn something personal into something common and shared.

I approached my research question “How much of a product would you have to be in order to be a successful artist at the Nordic folk music scene?” from three angels. Firstly, I’ve gathered information that I have from my years as a freelance musician. Secondly, I interviewed a few professionals, and finally I read a lot of material and wrote about the basics of music business and working life of a folk musician in the Nordic countries.

My theory is that we’re all selling a product when selling our music and playing for money, that is why we need to know this product, love and respect it and have a need to share it. I believe that finding your artistic me is a spiritual journey and when you start searching for your “core” you’ll become a better musician since you’re getting better in recognising and handling your own emotions.

I’m trying to diminish the polarisation between music business and being a genuine artist. I believe that knowing your core gives you power to work better in the field which is continually changing and demands a lot. This spiritual journey into yourself is also an artistic journey and I see personal branding as a fun and inspirational tool for anyone who wants to get to know oneself and build a personal brand which is true, likeable and also selling.

Key words: Music management, Music business, Personal branding, Solo, Singer, Solo artist, Folk music, Folk singer, Artistic development, Personal development
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1. PREFACE

After years of freelance career I became a student again when starting The Nordic Master in Folk Music -education autumn 2015. I knew early in the first semester that I’d like to write my thesis on the themes personal branding, music management, freelancer life, the field of Nordic folk music facing modern challenges of making a living.

For me being a freelancer has been relatively easy and absolutely a choice that I´ve made. That’s why I guess not everyone can relate to my quite positive picture of freelancer work. Nevertheless, I believe that even people with a position as a full-time music teacher and everyone working with something creative can find familiar things within these themes I’m pondering on the following pages.

The reasons for me to start writing about the subject of music business and personal branding were many. Main reason however was the practical need for myself to gather and sum up all the information from my past years of experience. All the courses, workshops, lectures and meetings I’ve been to around Sweden have left me with so many notes, hand outs and text files on my computer that I felt it is time to start collecting these pieces of information. Therefore there’s probably also lots of bits and pieces where there are no informant or source, I simply can’t say where all the things come from. I have also attended so many courses and lectures with same information so it’s hard to say where I learned what first.

So I would like to thank Ta Plats and Katapult For Mångfald -mentor programs 2012 - 2014 for all the music business knowledge I´ve gotten from their experts whom I cannot name all since they were so many. But also, thank you for all of my colleagues on creative business, the talks and peer support has been priceless.

Also, thanks to all of my teachers and supervisors when working on this thesis and the master degree, especially the Nordic Master coordinators.

Most of all, I’d like to thank Kalle Partanen and especially Pasi Raassina. Without your professional views I probably wouldn't had the strength to study nor work and sing. Thank you.

All the translations from Swedish, Danish and Finnish are my own.
1.2 BACKGROUND AND STARTING POINT

First of all, this is a highly personal thesis. I had a need to look into these themes deeper to explain to myself how to work in the best possible way on this field of freelance arts and folk music. But also, to write from a personal perspective I hope to inspire others. I believe that it is important for an artist to turn something very personal into something common and shared. My idea was to share things I’ve experienced to be help for others, to use myself as one example.

Secondly, this text is written very much of a perspective of a solo artist. All this might not apply to the person playing bass at the back of a group but then again, it might. I would like to advise and inspire all creative people to search into themselves, their artistry and their deepest core. I wish the thesis to be an encouragement for studies of music and music management, hopefully fade away the myth of “the irritating business world”.

I guess the things in common with my story and the people reading this text is the need to create and to express oneself. And to do this as profession. That’s where we come to the concept of selling a product, working for money, the need to meet the marketing world. In this thesis I’m trying to find our whether we need to make our art into a product we are selling to others, and if we can do it willingly, happily and satisfied.

When I had a burn out February 2016, everything changed. Before that I was determined to make it as a singer and take the world by storm. All of a sudden there was something more important: to learn how to live with myself. To be able to get out of bed and not cry all the time. This put things to perspective: who was this girl who wanted so much to stand on the stage in front on people, who was ready to do Anything to became the best singer in the folk song world? Why would she let that goal kill her on the way? I got too tired because I loved my work too much and could not stop in time.

In this same period of soul-searching, two highly important and influential books came to my notice: Drunkna inte i dina egna känslor by Maggan Hägglund and Doris Dahlin and The Effortless Mastery by Ken Werner. The first one is about Highly Sensitive Persons (HSP’s) and particularly the small part of people who are HSP but also very ambitious and outgoing. After getting out of the hospital and getting the diagnose of burn out this book literally changed my life. For the first time someone really understood me, to the core! This gave a whole new point-of-view to music management, personal branding and my master thesis: What is this “product” in relationship to You. What if all starts from knowing yourself and loving the product so much you have the need to show it around and share it? In comparison to going around asking for applause and approval, begging for a job, selling one’s soul for the attention of the right media/audience/producer/booker…

The Effortless Mastery was very much based upon this idea that I was now thinking so much of: you putting your whole self-worth to your music and career, you being overwhelmed and not being able to do the thing you love the most, music. This book starts with Kenny Werners own live’s path and assured me of the idea it is essential to start writing and analysing from your own very personal point-of-view.
Moreover, I’m tired of all the music management classes and courses always starting with a monologue of this subject being “the compulsory irritating thing we just need to live with”. It’s like a thing we have to put up with although no-one would like to. I Don’t believe it is so. It is an essential part of finding one’s own musical identity and to clarify your vision, to find these things, analyse them and to put them into words. And to be able to work, find jobs and have a long-term career which will actually pay your rent.

Personal branding and music management are tools and they can be fun, creative, enjoyable and they are definitely needed. I wanted to try and define these words for myself, within my own genre and within my own head to understand my work better.
1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My main research questions was “How much of a product would you have to be in order to be a successful artist at the Nordic folk music scene?”. When using the term successful career I’m writing about having a work that seems to pay off for the artist who seems to be enjoying the career and having good life standards. Successful career is this case would be having a positive personal brand and image which people in your field know of and respect. Mostly, I’d like to distinguish the word successful from a career where you are making some money with music but don’t really have a name, play at small venues with small pay check and most of all, are unsatisfied with this situation themselves.

I wanted to find out whether a real, honest product really sells itself. I would want to believe that there is no need for great business plans and sugar coating something you don’t even believe in. That a credible product is something that comes from the heart but has a back-up of talent, hard work and a lot of driving force.

Product is something that is easy to understand. Think about “an elevator pitch” - explaining your work/projekt within an elevator ride. A product is something not too complex but too too sempel either. For example “a musician” or “a singer” is not a product. Product is the added value to what you do, a combination of your personal brand, your talent, the contents of your art. This is how I define the concept of product, I see myself as a product and feel that the word is a positive one. The contents and the subject of this product are positive and valuable so the product is also.

My theory is that finding your artistic “Me” and creating your own artist product is a spiritual path of finding yourself as a person and it can be a fun, inspirational, giving journey and most of all, compulsory! Take yourself to this ride, otherwise you’ll go around listening to others opinions and will never know who You are and what You want to be. Everyone has to find peace within oneself to be able to work with oneself, when you’re creating and working with your emotions, you need to be able to recognise and handle them.

The questions that follow my research question are: How much of the product is Real Me and what do I choose not to show the audience, which sides will I emphasise? But also: When do you get too much of a product which is just false? Obviously, no one in the folk music scene just creates a product out of nothing and sells an empty shell, the circles are too small for that and the request and demand for naturalness is too big. But how does this go together with what I see around me in my working environment, when I feel that the marketing forces are, taking a strong grip of us folk musicians? The expensive promo pictures, outstanding scene clothes and tactical thinking of selling oneself have been increasing with such a pace the recent years.

I started thinking about the concept of “core”, to find your most sincere Artist Me and trust yourself being real. But is it possible to keep your core and still be a product? How to find this core and what is this core? And what if my core, me as an artist and my music, are simply not interesting enough for a bigger audience and I won’t find a lasting career as a musician?
For something to be artistic research you need to ask questions that are relevant to either research field or within the art world (Rosenberg, 2013). And here indeed I choose these research questions because of their relevance. The never-ending dichotomy of the marketing world and the artistic work is something I discuss on a regular basis with my musician colleagues. That is exactly why I chose this subject, it is important for me and my work but also a subject important for the whole field. And because I don’t want to settle for this polarisation of marketing and art being some kind of opposites I want to take a closer look of marketing and personal branding as art practise and as a spiritual path. My theory is that this whole commercial process of creating your artistic me, your product, is also an artistic process.

“Art practise qualifies as research if its purpose is to expand out knowledge and understanding by conducting an original investigation in and through art objects and creative process” (Borgodorff, 2006). So now that I’ve been doing art practise for years, I’ve been “searching”, now follows the “researching”, the analyse of my career until now. Writing this thesis is kind of like a culmination of the spiritual and artistic process I’ve been the latest two years, during my master studies.
1.4 METHODS

My methods for writing and processing knowledge were writing notes on one text file called “master degree”. It was anything that had something to with music management, personal branding, freelancer life or marketing. I collected web pages with interviews and articles but also a list of a list of books and essays I wanted to quote to this same file. Thru the education we had an ongoing course called “Artistic research” where I had been taking notes. I also notes from music management -lessons and the old bits of information I had from previous years before school that I had in my head not at all organised.

To get more perspective, I’ve also interviewed some solo artists who I feel have succeeded with their image and brand (Jullie Hjetland Jenssen & Pekko Käppi) but also one mentor/musician who had worked for years at record and music industry (Kalle Heikkinen). I did ask several other artists for interview also, but never got the answers so I had to do with the ones I got. I made an e-mail interview with Jullie and had a face-to-face conversation with Kalle and Pekko. The meetings become more of discussions around the theme and I didn’t even ask most of these questions when the talk went on to many directions. Mostly I wanted to have others opinions on the subject to avoid writing only about myself. The questions I send by mail were:

1. When and how did you became aware of such things as music management/music business/personal branding in folk music World/personal branding?

2. How conscious have you been working with your artist image and how?

3. How important you think your image and everything outside your music is to you being an artist?

4. In your opinion, how much of a product you have to be in order to “make it” on the Nordic folk music scene?

5. How much of the product is real me? What do you choose not to show the audience, which sides you want to emphasise?

In the first question Jullie answers getting aware of this when in Nordic Master education whereas Pekko who doesn't have a musician education says he probably noticed the idea of he own brand/image “When I needed to explain it to someone else for the first time.” (Käppi, 2017). What I understand from the answers and from my own experience is that schools are getting better at thinking about needs of the work life while a lot of musicians also can be “free-riders” quite a log time and get jobs even without a personal brand. Some people are always asked to join projects, some have to find jobs themselves and create projects.

In the second question Jullie chooses visuals around her artistic alter ago Lukkif and admits that the visual parts are conscious. Pekko agrees to some extend but adds that a lot is coincidence and just things that feel good: “It kinda feels like the brand just formed itself” (Käppi, 2017). Both also talk about choosing gigs and being conscious about what kind
of a thing would work in this occasion: “Since I’m taking part in many different constellations, and seen in many kinds of scenes, I want Lukkif to be clear in expression, both by being electronic, but also image-wise.” (Hjetland Jenssen, 2017).

I guess question 3 on the importance of the image is where Pekko and Jullie had the most dissenting opinions. Jullie answered an obvious yes whereas for Pekko I didn’t really set this questions as it is but from everything he talked about it felt very clear that it is quite a minor thing for him. He does little conscious work around this whereas Jullie works a lot with image-building. I could myself relate to Pekko and realised how little time and effort I’ve really put into really taking action in personal branding. Jullie uses the same graphic designer in all her work, for example (Hjetland Jenssen, 2017) where me and Pekko think more about the music in a particular project and think about the visual part around that.

With my second last question we all seem to share the idea of folk music being a world where the hard business values haven’t taken over yet “…when it comes to folk music as such, I think we are lucky. Within in folk music its often about being “yourself”, have your own sound, and doing it you own way” (Hjetland Jenssen, 2017). Pekko is also talking about his first small success within the underground music scene and it seems understandable that within a small genre it’s more about being your self without a made product but something quite homespun.

When asked “How much of the product is Real Me” I really loved the quote from Pekko: “I can kinda always notice that there’s this “little crying one who’s after mother’s care”… that it’s from that same place everything comes from.” (Käppi, 2017). Where we ended up talking about the concept of an inner child, that it is a basic human need to be heard, seen and taken care of and that is the very essence of art making, also.

Kalle Heikkinen, with his experience from the music business -side, also talks about something inborn, “A Thing” someone has, like a natural charisma. “I belong to the group of people who believe that you shouldn’t Try and Create to much. All starts from you not being externally controlled, the you can be real. In the end, the music business is in search after those who have A Thing.” (Heikkinen, 2017).

Jullie writes: “I allow myself to play on many stages, and be many things, but always with the same starting point, ME. The sides I emphasise is often connected to the scene, stage and audience…” (Hjetland Jenssen, 2017).

All in all, all my three interviews where a lot about talking about being real and honest, loving music and enjoying what you do and not forcing to do anything. Everyone seems to call for authenticity and self-determination, that record label, social media or others opinions shouldn't affect on one’s art.

The biggest work with the thesis has been sitting with all of this material and putting it together, formulating these notes, my thoughts and others words into a master thesis. Then I cut the longer chapters into smaller pieces and formulated my texts to fit better into the template of Kungliga Musikhögskolan after doing an assignment “50 words” I got from
Susanne Rosenberg. In this method you need to explain your main thoughts in only 50 words and I re-arranged a lot of texts to fit this ideal.

Since I’m writing about myself as a product, the artistic work I’ve had alongside this thesis is my solo repertoire and analysing all the work I’ve been doing with these songs but also coming back to old songs and renewing them. More of that at chapter 2.4. The very obvious method I’ve used has been practising on my singing, recording and filming, analysing and making concerts, working as a musician and discussing about that with my colleagues (in this group I count both my fellow students but also my teachers and musicians I’ve worked with).

Although the emphasis on the thesis is all the time on the analyse of music management, personal branding and challenges of working life, not my artistic development. This is mainly because I find the subject of my work, the singing, the repertoire and the music, to be the strongest side where as there is a lot to develop on the “business side”. I concentrate on singing in my daily student life but on the working life outside school, in my life before my master studies.

I have also kept a personal diary since 2003, pretty much everything that’s going on in my life is there and although I’ve never thought about it as a research method retrospectively I understand now that indeed it is.

One method I almost forgot to mention was yoga, pilates and exercising: the spiritual path as I call it, coming closer to ones core and learning to know myself has been a very physical thing for me. I have worked a lot with my insomnia problems and sensitivity problems with light/smell/sound/getting too much mental input as well as censoring things over-sensitively but also with my posture and breathing. All my mental work in trying to find my core has been very much attached to trying to find a bodily balance. I haven’t had one method along the whole two years but different routines in all the four different places I’ve lived in depending what is possible and convenient there.
2.1 CHILDHOOD AND GROWING UP

To find one`s core, I believe, you have to start from the very beginning. You are your own story. Your product is a collage made of everything you´ve ever experienced. You are a filter of your experiences and how these things are combined in you and how you filter them is your art and your music. Every time you have to write or tell about yourself, it´s a small story of you, where you come from.

I come from an artistic family. My dad has been a freelancer musician his whole life and therefore the challenges of a musicians life are familiar to me from very early age. I don´t believe anyone would have encouraged me to a musicians career so keenly unless they´d known that I know the realities.

Later on music became a serious thing and a career choice as I started studying my first degree in pop/jazz music in Kajaani Conservatorium year 2003. I´ve often thought my passion for performing was always bigger than the anxiety of failing. As much as I was suffering of the cramped world of popular music, music education and my own insecureness I never really doubted what I wanted to do.

I always wanted to be on stage. I guess you could call it a calling. Often I´ve wondered, how come I was so sure. Why did I seem to know in early age that this is what I should do even though I probably didn´t have any more musical skills than any other kid. But I had courage and determination. I just knew what I wanted, by intuition. And I was bull-headed enough to follow that intuition. I often come back to the sentence people often blur out when seeing modern or abstract art “I could do that!”. Yes, you Could but the difference is you did not. This artist did. I keep coming back to the idea that there might better singers out there but they are not doing it.

“Often it is the courage, not as much the talent that makes one an artist”
- Julia Cameron (Cameron, 1992)

I found folk music thru theatre friends in Kajaani and a few years later the path was crystal clear to me and I applied to only one higher education: The folk singing pedagogy studies at North Karelia University of Applied Sciences. Again, it was very much by intuition.
2.2 MUSICAL TURNING POINTS

The first very strong moment when I realised the power of my voice was spring 2002 when I sang at school graduation. I had a music teacher who was very supporting and he decided I would sing solo. After the graduation ceremony a girl that I did not know at all came to talk to me. She was a teenager goth, one of those girl who had scarred her arms so badly you could hardly see healthy skin and she literally never spoke to anyone. I had never heard her say one single word to anyone. She stepped at me and said: “Anna, you are a…. star”.

From all the feedback I’ve even received that is one of the most powerful experiences. She didn’t have to say that. She was probably scared to do that. Yet she did walk up to me, open her mouth and choose those words. That sealed the deal for me: as a singer I can actually affect people’s emotions.

“That connection to another person is so strong, that movement comes from your heart and not from a brain to a brain —The point is having the ability to have a connection to another person”
- Interview with Kalle Heikkinen 2017

The next big turning point was autumn 2007 when I was on my second grade of folk music education. We had a project week when everyone had to book 5 concert for themselves. I put up a band and played 4 great concerts with them but the very last one was a solo a cappella concert I managed to organise at a art gallery Art Anna in my home town Iisalmi. First of all, it felt like an important experience as a becoming professional, that I myself had booked all the gigs like a real musician. In the world of a 20-year-old this was a big thing.

But half an hour before due-time of my first solo concert ever I was sitting back thinking: what had I been thinking? Having a folk singing solo concert at a little town like this, who would ever come and listen to some Anna Fält no one knew?

After a very successful concert where there was actually a whole audience from small children to old grannies sitting and enjoying Karelian jojk and rune singing concentrated and silent, I wrote to my diary: “Now it is certain. I am going to be a singer.” I had found the art of a cappella solo and although for years I also worked with various different concepts, I kept coming back to this.

When I moved to Sweden autumn 2012 after being an exchange student in Malmö Music Academy 2010 - 2011, I understood I had a concept no one else had and I should concentrate on that. Before this, a couple of important things had happened. Spring 2011 we had opening night with the performance Vallpiga - Paimentyttö which is a co-operation with my sister, a visual artist who is live-painting on stage when I’m singing. When I understood the possibilities of combining a cappella, folk songs and solo singing to other art forms it opened a lot of new doors. Both mentally, what it comes to my artistic development and in practise, when I understood how much wider my working field can be.
Our collaboration, which led us to perform internationally and do several improvisation gigs, has been one of the most important work I’ve done. Looking back, trying to find the core in my work, Vallpiga is the performance which had mould me most.

The same summer 2011, when touring with Vallpiga, I got a job from a folk music project at the North Carelian Art Commission in Joensuu which actually made me a professional folk musician. I was a touring, educating, singing, creating, composing folk music freelancer one month after my graduation.

But also, in this same period it was my father who in his ambivalent way kind of said in between doing something else that I should focus on a cappella solos. He just kind of threw it out there, and I believed him. I kept coming back to the idea of this unique style of performing as my main work. Hearing it from someone else made this thought more real.

My inter-disciplinary work with Vallpiga is probably the reason I had the courage to start improvising with flamenco dancer Pia Pohjakallio spring 2013. Our combination of Finno-Ugric singing and flamenco dance led us to the huge stage of Palladium in Malmö and Folk- och Världsmusikgalan 2014 in Umeå but also got us nominated at Folk- och Världsmusikgalan 2015. My work with Pia has been a changing point for my work in Sweden since her network and wide artistic knowledge has made me more aware of the importance of music management. We met each other at a mentor program “Ta Plats” organised by Equality And Plurality On Stage (EPOS) and therefore for the very beginning we were studying the working life of folk/world musicians in Sweden together. Ta Plats and also Katapult för mångfald (by Riksförbundet för folkmusik och dans, Rfod), another mentor program I got accepted a year later, were the deepest music management educations I’ve ever had.
Both Ta Plats and Katapult för mångfald took me to places where I could have contact with bookers, producers and festival organisers. Thanks to this I’ve played solo concerts on some of the biggest folk music festivals and stages in Sweden. The personal meeting with people on the branch were irreplaceable: I got to show my work instead of trying to e-mail empty words about what I’ve been doing and what I can.

The musical turning points that I’ve had on my career between 2012 - 2015 taught me the meaning of music management, personal branding and having a good artistic image but most of all how one has to have the musical and artistic contents to back these up. Networking, small talk, cool web page, and writing skills means nothing if you don’t have the musical quality. Luckily, I had been studying music full-time for 8 years before moving to Sweden.

But what I also learned that having singing skills, an interesting, unique concept and a lot of willpower was not enough. I needed to learn how to put myself into a package I could easily sell to those who would be interested. And find all of them who could be interested.

“You need to have contents, and talent, something special to offer you fans, followers and buyers.”
- Maiken Ingvarsson (Ingvarsson, 2015)
2.3 MY RECENT WORK

From 2007 on I’ve carried on having several solo concerts and/or tour(s) every year, mostly in Finland and Sweden. My first work with performance and creating/producing a whole show was with Vallpiga. Vallpiga was an organic and logical continuity to my work until then: to add something extra to me singing solo a cappella.

Of course that wasn’t only the case, to add some paintbrush lines on the top of the song. The deeper meaning of the whole cooperation didn’t come clear to me until we had been working with the performance for years and been developing it in two artist-in-residency periods. The things that were essential to Vallpiga and to multi-disciplinary work were the ability to improvise, to listen, to react, to analyse the audiences role in this performance and in general, and to work together with someone who is not only as passionated with her work as I am but also as passionate with my work. We are each others biggest fans. This gave a whole new perspective to my sometimes very lonely work: to share my ideas and thoughts and to receive someone’s. I found a new deeper level in my work thanks to a colleague I could trust completely.

The same continued when we started working with the dance performance ¡RÅ! together with Pia Pohjakallio. Most of all, working with ¡RÅ! taught me about my biggest strengths and assets, about my expertise. I realised when working with this someone who was one of the best in what she is doing, that I am in fact also an expert in my field and our cooperation became more. One plus one became three!

I’ve been often thinking about this period 2012 - 2014 of moving to Sweden, being involved with the mentor programs and in a way being very out of place but also outside my comfort zone. The thing that happens when you move to a whole new surrounding is also that you are very vulnerable and helpless in the beginning. When you aren’t in control all the time, when your outside your comfort zone. When I moved to Malmö I was forced to be bad at new things, I needed to ask for help. Kenny Werner used in his book Effortless Master a term “sincere but ego-ridden musicians” which I think suited me perfectly. When you are surrounded by new things all the time you are forced to leave your old roles, your old ego.

“Sincere but ego-ridden musicians - -
they are defeated by their self-centredness lack of vision and purpose”
- Kenny Werner (Werner, 1996)

These years were a period of a good flow and high self-esteem. I would say things went on very fast and my career rocketed within just 2 years from being a fresh-from-school girl to one who actually does all the things I had been dreaming of doing. I needed to go a bit deeper in to the concept of flow: “The spiral journey upwards between challenges and competence, that you are so into something you forget about everything else” (Newsome, 2016).

As I investigated the term a bit further I found a part of a sentence of flow not being a static thing (Csikszentmihaly, 1990) and understood the natural flow both in life and work: you have good periods and those so good ones. In periods things progress fast and sometimes
things need more time. In those years of my “good flow” I did not only have very low expectations I also had a lot of free time and an enormous need for asking help. Things I guess are not that common for most musicians and at least not for me. But when I was new in this country and in beginning with everything I just used that competence I had and faced those challenges I had and I was indeed “so into something I forgot about everything else”. I was fully aware of my hard situation struggling to find paid jobs but at the same time I had a great belief in my competence and because of the brave choice I´d made when moving abroad made my confidence rise like never before I ended up to a spiral of good things happening one after another.

“The thing that makes it sound good is your love and acceptance of it”
- Kenny Werner (Werner, 1996)

As I did my first wider Scandinavian tour in Iceland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland summer 2015. I could use all the knowledge I had from working with production together with Emma and Pia. I had learned about marketing, social media, press release, tv-, radio-, and magazine interviews, applying for fundings and planning a bigger production like an international tour. But at the same time, I was still missing my core. I was not sure about how to focus and to what to focus. I wanted to be a part of everything that happens. I would bend myself backwards to be able to say yes to everything so that everyone would like me and accept me. I was too attached to others opinions and to my own feelings and could get extremely overwhelmed by my emotions.

“If your not attached you can look clearly on what you do well and what you don’t do well”
- Kenny Werner (Werner, 1996)

My latest and absolutely most important work artistically is my solo performance called Finnskogarnas magi which combines storytelling, theatre, incantations and singing. The process of making this show summer-autumn 2015 was unique for me. It was a synthesis of everything I had ever done: my years in theatre, a cappella singing, going into archives and field recordings, doing research, creating something new from the base of ancient traditions, performance and performing.

It was after two shows when I realised all of this, thanks to a dear friend who´s feedback of Finnskogarnas magi was “This had everything you are best at”. The friends who had heard me in different concerts and played together with me for years could see the synthesis I hadn´t myself put into words.

In the process of creating Finnskogarnas magi I could also see how important my work felt like. When I was at the archives digging up information about this culture I was doing something that no-one else has done and these songs need to be taken out for people to see. I believe all artist sometimes suffer for the feeling of questioning the importance of ones work. “When people are suffering in the world would I not be of better help if I´d be a nurse or a teacher or a psychiatrist?”. And then we get reminders like this: our work is highly important
to our whole culture around us. I needed to drop the ego and work for this music instead. It’s not about me.

But what Finnskogarnas magi also combined was the whole marketing around the artistic work. Now I knew how to work as a producer to my performance but also ask for help with things I couldn’t do myself such as the poster and the flyers. This is one of the biggest things I’ve learned along the way: ask for help. Now the solo artist-me could take a break at least from being a poster designer and a graphic designer.

The latest summer tour I was in four Scandinavian countries and for the first time I had a coherent visual image for the whole tour, both pictures and my stage clothes. I wanted to take the personal branding a bit longer and try to figure out what would be the core of this tour. The tour got the name “The Nordic Voice tour” and all summer I walked around in all whites. It felt like some kind of a closure for all the work I’d done until and looking back I guess it was kind of a celebration for me to recover from my burn out and be able to travel, perform and work almost full-time again.

“What you think, you become”
- Buddha

One of the last gigs was in July at a very underground festival at Denmark, Fanø Free Folk Festival. Right before getting on stage I got a flash-back from summer 2014 when I was at back stage at Urkult Festival. I remember thinking: “What am I doing here?”. My though was, this festival books all the most amazing artists and then….me. That I don’t belong here and I’m not worthy of this.

At Fanø I looked around myself and thought this festival was of the most spectacular things I’ve ever taken part of. Then I breathed deep and told myself: And you are invited and payed to be here. You are here because they need to hear these songs, go and give them the songs.

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others”
- Mahatma Gandhi
2.4 DEVELOPING AS A PRODUCT CALLED “SOLO FOLK SINGER”

But most of all, it is all about singing. There is no product without the contents. You cannot sell emptiness, you have to have a trustworthy subject in your product which you believe in and get people to believe in.

I could very extremely simplify my product as “an a cappella solo folk singer”. And the contents of the product is the material I perform: the ancient Finno-Ugric and Scandinavian traditions combined with my own composed material. Therefore my principal task as a master student and as a musician has been developing that material.

I have an active solo repertoire of 17 songs that I’ve been singing and developing since 2006 - 2013. The essence of my product, the concerts, are build upon this repertoire. I choose the songs that seem to have a perfect spot in my concert and some have stayed with me for a decade. Thru the years, I have learned to know my audience. I know what sort of material is wanted and appreciated. I can’t just choose songs I happen to like. But then again, the third and a very important reason is to choose songs that I like, songs that speak to me and touches me. When you have a long relationship with a song, it gets deeper you can play with it, change it, improvise on it and come back to it like to a familiar place.

In a way I feel as the stages I perform at grow bigger and the people who are following my career come in hundreds and not in dozens, the responsibility to improve my instrument feels bigger. I have to develop for them. The product has to be worthy its stage. I also have to improve my instrument in order to be able to work. To have a long-lasting career I have to know I can handle my voice with such professionalism there’s no way it would betray me.

The things I’ve been focusing a lot on are the not-singing-related: movement, the visual world around my works (such as PR-material/clothing/promotion photos), building a sustainable story line for the whole concert… Nowadays when I trust my voice and my capacity to sing as good as I can on almost every gig, the icing on the cake has been something I’ve been wondering for a long time: how to make this experience even better for the listeners. How to offer something extra? How to develop the product outside the singing-part?

It is important that I need to know I can use my voice in the exact way I want to, to master my voice even when tired/anxious/nervous/ill. My instrument can still fail me when the situation is unusual such as too hot, horrible sound technic, restless audience and so on. But still I can’t force the development.

I keep coming back to the same theme: On stage, in life, inside yourself, learn not to be affected. Find the peace within yourself and share that with the audience. Don’t try to give them Happenings or Events, don’t let yourself become a part of this carnival of society we’re living in. Don't be afraid of slowness and boredom. As long as you keep loosing yourself affects from the outside, you cannot be present.
Here I could find help in the archaic material I perform, where the whole concept of time is different from our modern time and the aesthetics is based on simple things and repetitive sounds. I still need to remind myself, though, that if I can allow the piece of repetitiveness for the audience, it is like a sanctuary for them. It is too easy to fall into the trap of thinking about things outside. I have to be present in the song and in the story, not get carried away by my own ego.

Again, I’m trying to peel off and simplify. To take away some extra instead of adding things. Wanting and trying too much has been my biggest problem as a singer. Now I’m on a path towards “less really is more”. The same thing I’m also trying to keep in a bigger scale. I find it courageous to do similar work for years where as some might say it’s boring and staying at safety zone. I find it fascinating to get deeper to things and allow oneself to get into them slowly. This is a very important lesson I’ve learned in school: I am very slow and need a lot of time to internalise. Maybe I’ll be singing these same songs still after ten years.

"Nature never hurries, yet everything is accomplished”
- Lao Tzu
First I would like to open some terms. When writing about music management I am writing about the whole world of music business and the working life of a musician. This includes all the work outside artist work: the personal branding, image building and creating one’s artistic me but also the everyday things such as e-mailing, applying for fundings, thinking about layouts and visuals of web sites, PR-fotos or new letters.

When writing a business plan, project description or budget for your artistic project you are managing your musician work. You could say that you are doing the job of a manager, being your own manager. Most of folk musicians in The Nordic Countries do this since there are not many booking agencies, managers or PR-professionals who work on the field of folk/world music. Whenever talking with colleagues I notice we keep coming back to this same theme: everyone’s tired of the administrative work and would wish more time for music.

Eve Newsome, Lecturer in Woodwind Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University has developed a so called FLOW Music Method for practising (Newsome, 2016) and also Susanne Rosenberg uses in her artistic thesis the concept of flow as a method for artistic process (Rosenberg, 2013). My advice is that in the same way as us musicians are searching for a flow when doing artistic work we should seek for the same feeling when working outside it. Newsome quotes researcher Csikszentmihaly when explaining that flow means “that you are so into something you forget about everything else” (Newsome, 2016). But also, when doing your computer work you might just end up to a state where everything flows.

Newsom explains that us musician are good at setting goals that are exactly perfect for us in that time. Music management is also a skill that you are learning and getting better at. Make yourself goals and think big - then set realistic mid-goals. The challenges will only be enjoyable if they are set at the ‘just-right’ level (Newsome, 2016).

“By setting clear, realistic goals musicians can notice the feedback of improvement quickly and feel the resultant sensations of fulfilment and satisfaction. This feedback is important for the recognition of completion of tasks and maintaining a positive motivation for future tasks”
- Eve Newsome (Newsome, 2016)

As in artistic work this is about “the spiral journey upwards between challenges and competence” (Rosenberg, 2013), about learning new things such as how to approach bookers/ producers, and getting better. Your competence gets better on the way and at the same time challenges get bigger. It is a slow travel upwards with many ups and downs but you are mostly in charge of always reaching upwards although the spiral sometimes takes you down for a while.

How do I create the flow, then? For me the answer has always been volition. When you have such a passion for standing on stage would you not do anything to get there? This is not about you calling people and selling yourself. This is about art, experience, emotions, tradition and all the people who get to be a part of it. If you sit at home thinking you are too tired/shy/busy/
unqualified to pick up that phone, you might need to have a complete re-boot on your artistic work and career and really think about what it is that you want.

Of course it is impossible just to make a flow experience occur. However, you always have the power to create the circumstances that set it up to happen. Train yourself to have a mind that is ready - train yourself to be open, train yourself to feel, train yourself to be sensitive! Instead of playing that instrument in a small practise room, train your mind to be able to handle the world outside the room.

Set yourself goals on getting out there and present your work and you have a clear focus for your artistic work also, you know to which direction to go. Should you focus on festivals, theatres, teaching, tradition, modern music, solo or ensemble? In this kind of direction searching you´d probably benefit a lot of working with your own personal branding.

My view for this controversial and maybe unpleasant term changed completely when I read the book ORIGINAL - Personlig branding og syndlighet by the Danish Maiken Ingvordsen. She is a jazz musician but also a professional in branding and so called PR, Publik Relations. “Life that can feel like chasing after likes and shares on social media is actually sharing your views, ideas and beliefs in form of music.”, she writes. Personal branding is how people see you: your products and services leave an impact to others which creates different feelings (Ingvordsen, 2015). It is not about selling yourself and shouting how great you are, it is about sharing. And when a big number of people get impacted there´s a possibility to really affect more than just your own musician career. A strong brand changes the markets. Think about what Björk did to Iceland´s music export or how all the young boys wanted a “Beatles haircut” in the 60’s!

“Personal branding is to work with your professional identity and the images others have about you. — You can’t decide but you can affect it positively”
- Maiken Ingvordsen (Ingvordsen, 2015)

The word brand (and the actual action of burning) originates from the American tradition of marking ones kettle so that you could differ it from the neighbours ones (Ingvordsen, 2015). And this is basically what we work with nowadays: distinguish ourselves from the other artists around us.

Ingvordsens writes about how working to get attention should be your daily focus. Regardless if you are presenting a business or yourself personally it is beneficial for you to catch others attention in order to maintain a professional career. Or maybe use the word visibility instead of attention. Many artists have the tendency to think that if they are “good enough it should sell itself” (Ingvordsen, 2015). But you can sell yourself without being a sellout!

You need to work with the visibility of your thoughts and ideas. And here’s the critical point: if you are sharing your music with people you have to be clear what it is that you are offering. Personal branding can be your gateway to clarify your core thoughts. Ask yourself: what do I believe in? What is my main goal as a musician? What are my values?
“Brand has to support your personality, music and message”
- Sirpa Lahti (Lahti, 2016)

And then: How would you describe all of this in a promo picture? On a record cover? What is you color or font? Make it an artistic research and journey, a creative roadtrip to yourself! You can define the word “product” for yourself in a positive way and throw off the negative association with the term.

“Your product is something that awakes feelings and fascinates people, therefore it is very essential to understand the importance of personal branding: you are not “just” a product but the person behind the product.”
- Maiken Ingvordsen (Ingvordsen, 2015)

I am not saying defining terms and yourself is easy, these are very complex things as us human beings are. Often it feels like we need to be all over the place and be able to do everything and anything. At the same time we would both need to concentrate and be versatile. But as producer Matti Nylén put it: “Your brand can be that your not obvious and clear!” (Nylén, 2016). He continues: “If there’s one attribute running thru everything you do, although your versatile, it’s all You”. You are allowed to be complex and hard to define, many artist are. Don’t try to push yourself in a too small of a box just to fit into something simple. Think about Laurie Anderson, David Bowie, Björk or Madonna, thru the years they have created very different things and still people know their voice, their work, their art.

“It’s both what you do and what you don’t, that creates you brand”
- Maiken Ingvordsen (Ingvordsen, 2015)

But when thinking about who you are as an artist, who you want to be and who you definitely are not it is also essential to plan your time and prioritise. You can’t be everything and you can’t be involved with everything. This is a basic little tips for your mental health: concentrate, concentrate and concentrate! Ask yourself: Which is you Primal Audience? Which is your niche? What is your biggest expertise?

“Is this festival taking you towards your goal? Don’t waste your time on things that aren’t your priority”
- Minna Huuskonen (Huuskonen, 2016)

Ingvordsen has developed the concept of “The brand statement” (Ingvordsen, 2015). What are your brands values? Write them down to a statement! Don’t say yes to everything, think about does this fit together with my brand statement. Write yourself one and be true to yourself, what is it that you want to communicate? On a lot of music management -lectures thru the years I’ve learned about the concept “Top-In-Mind”, to be the first artist people get into their heads when they think about your branch. Whatever is your niche, make sure you work with your visibility and let people hear about you, then you will be Top-In-Mind to those who might need your services.
In my case, I’m beginning to be the one who people call when they need Finnish singing in Sweden and obviously, it takes a lot of work with visibility to get to this point. Often it is the non-paid jobs that help with visibility work. Would it be a good idea for you to do a free concert at a new town/area to get your name out there? Should you write to a magazine to be known of your expertise? How would your expertise in other fields be a part of your brand?

It is your job to create a brand which is true and positive. The brand is not you as a person but the images of you so you need to focus on the positive sides of you, to emphasise. You are an original already, so now your task is to introduce the interesting sides in your work and leave it for people to see. You don’t have to aggressively sell yourself and give yourself away for any price. Think about two different marketing techniques: the so called push- technique which basically says “buy me!” and then the Push&Pull- technique which communicates “This is what I present, as you can see it sounds good, you can follow me and introduce to your friends as well.” (Ingvordsen, 2015)

“*A brand works if it’s true*”
- Matti Nylén (Nylén, 2016)

The author Seth Goding has since 2008 been known as the father of a theory of “The Tribes” (Ingvordsen, 2015). People have a natural need to be a part of something and you as an artist and as a personal brand could think about your followers as a tribe. We need fellowship and community by nature and charismatic artists have always been needed to bring people together.

“*People are yearning for unity, for oneness as experienced in mothers womb*”
- Kenny Werner (Werner, 1996)

Our world today as well as internet is filled with tribes, your task is to make people want to be a part of your tribe. You need to give some kind of added value and find the people who might be interested in the same kinds of things as you. Ask yourself questions like “How do I want to inspire people, what kind of things in them I’d like to validate?” Again, it doesn't have to be about you. You can turn the focus away from your self and to others.

“*Show interest then the bonus might be that people get interested in you*”.
- Maiken Ingvordsen (Ingvordsen, 2015)

But I keep often coming back to the same realisation: it is my name and face on the poster. It is up to me to keep up the good work because I can’t hide behind a band name. Whenever I collect my artist pass from a festival office or look at festival posters I can’t help but to shiver a bit. It is my duty to be worth this brand of Anna Fält. So firstly it is my essential duty to appreciate and like this person who created the brand Anna Fält. I have to be aware that the audience gets the best sides but also accept the bad ones though I don’t have to share them.

Basically the whole marketing should be about appreciating yourself, for you to be able to say “I am talented! I deserve to get paid! I deserve a good career”
3.2 SPIRITUAL JOURNEY AND MENTAL GROWTH

When I started reading Drunkna inte i dina egna känslor by Maggan Hägglund and Doris Dahlin right after having a burn-out I was like woken up from a dream. That I had been living nearly 32-years and not knowing myself. That there is actually a diagnose called “highly sensitive person” seemed to explain all I had been struggling with my whole adult life.

I remember being really annoyed to my former therapist who always said my ability to feel so deeply is my treasure and would help me with my music. At that time I just wanted to give away my feeling and live in peace, I tried my everything to be someone else and not to be on a constant mental roller-coaster ride. After reading this very influential book I knew my therapist was right: emotions are exactly was a good artist works with. I just need to learn how to divide, limit and process them.

Later on I´ve been able to analyse my artistic processes from a whole new perspective as I´ve understood my highly sensitive personality. I´ve always worked really intuitively and used improvising as an important tool. I´ve always found it easy to express emotions and relate to song lyrics and different feelings in music and art and it has been relatively easy for me to throw myself to new things: new genres, new songs, new groups, art forms, since my intuition is strong and I just follow along with that.

I believe the seemingly simple archaic music appeals to my chaotic head: I have a great need of simpleness. And then again, I have the need for big emotions and thrill so the great big worlds that you can find in minimalistic music is like a bottomless well of treasures. Since I ´m censoring all the small details from my surrounding all the time, the peeling and concentrating in simple melodies feels most natural to me. My artistic processes are often just walking or sitting and singing four note melodies over and over. It is like a safe world I can escape to when the society outside feels a bit too much with too many visual stimulus, smells, lights and sounds.

Trying to find one´s core, and trying to define one´s artist me is a journey into yourself. The question “How to define yourself” kept following my research questions. I had a revelation that it is not thru music and art you define yourself but thru everything you are and have ever done. To get too tangled with your music can restrict you. You as a person are a mixture of many things. Buddhist talk a lot about the idea of getting too attached to things and this is the thing Kenny Werner is also writing about in Effortless mastery. Music can´t be your all. Do not define yourself only thru music or your art practise. Do yourself and your music a favour and go deeper.

“If your not attached you can look clearly on what you do well and what you don´t do well.”
- Kenny Werner (Werner, 1996)

As I wrote in the introduction: you need to love the product so much you have a need to share it with people. Your self-worth does not rely on your artistic practise but all practise should start with appreciating yourself and being happy with who you are. For me this really started
when I started accepting myself as highly sensitive: this is something I am, not something I
do. Singing is something I do as that person who I am but I also do a lot of other things and
would exist without music.

“Creativity is an experience and specifically a spiritual experience”
- Julia Cameron (Cameron, 1992)

The single most important thing one has to start with is to get away from the shame. When
introducing your art it is like standing naked in front of people, whether it is on stage or to a
producer/record label. It is like telling a secret, sharing your inner thoughts, and a secret
always includes shame.

It is quite usual, that artists start a work but then leave it in some point before it’s done
because they understand the vulnerability of exposing themselves (Cameron, 1992). They
have already done the artistic work but to actually go out and expose it reaches the point
where the threshold just feels too high. They start to feel ashamed of what they’ve done. It’s
not good enough, it’s not really ready, it needs a bit more work. Something you often hear in
creative environment is that if something is “good enough” it should be able to sell itself. But
what do you do with thirty breads if you don’t have a oven to bake them? You can continue
playing alone in your room but if you want to share your ideas and thoughts, you got to get
them out there.

So first we have to come to the point where we are not ashamed to actually finish the work.
Then we need to share it with others. Then we need to be able to handle the possible feeling
of shame and non-acceptance in the case of hard critics. Here we come back to the idea of not
being too attached, if you’re not building your whole self-worth on this piece of art, you won
’t fall if it’s criticised.

“When we define our core thru distancing ourselves we can more easily express our
own boundaries, dreams and goals. We become more flexible and we won’t be so
subordinate to others caprice”
- Julia Cameron (Cameron, 1992)

One of the most important revelations with Drunkna inte i dina egna känslor was exactly this
idea of not getting too attached with your emotions, feelings and doings - nor to others. I don
’t think I´m the only one to claim that it is often us singers who do this constantly. Maybe
because we are by nature attached to our instrument that reveals our feelings all the time?
Distancing, to see one´s work and action from the outside gives us space and peace to exist.
We don’t need to act on everything. This was also one of my big new thoughts after getting
out the hospital: You don’t Need to. Your feelings is not “you”. In the same way as your
singing is not you, this mistake you made here is not you, your mental illness or anxiety is not
you.

“The antidote for shame are self-love and self-glorification”
- Julia Cameron (Cameron, 1992)
“It’s not about narcism but about using your whole potential to find and maintain the career you want.”
- Maiken Ingvordsen (Ingvorsen, 2015)

It is important to differ this self-glorification from being egoistic. I think one of the most radical things you can do in this society is to love yourself and really show it. And in my opinion, art is about being radical, about questioning the norms, about swimming against the stream. Your career, image and personal brand should be a statement “I love and appreciate myself, I have gifts and a will to take them further”.

“The safety net is never in the World, it is inside you” says Kenny Werner in a master class for New York University students 2005. And this should probably be our number one task in live, to re-program our brain to trust and self-value. Sadly, we’ve all learned self doubt somewhere along the way.

“The most important is to come back to oneself, before any scars, influence or words from others. You need to come back to a kind of a child-like state where you see yourself and others as creative, open and intrigued by Everything. This inner-child is the You that created long before your own inhibition and social restrictions. Start digging, remember what was it that made you took up music in the first place!”
- Julia Cameron (Cameron, 1992)

I think it is important also to distinguish the spiritual core and me as a private person. Maybe as a person you are multilateral and miscellaneous but as a person quite easygoing and not complex? Maybe your artistic core is very condensed although as a person you are all over the place? This was my challenge for a long time: my concept as a solo artist was quite simple, ready and “a ready to sell -package” but I had a hard time doing the work because my head was constantly spinning millions of thoughts.

It is a comforting thought, also, that the audience and my listeners don’t have to know all my sides. They can get the brand, the best of me, without worrying about my million thoughts. On stage and when working I don’t have to be that private person anymore. The Finnish folk musician Pekko Käppi told me a story how a man had come to him after a festival gig and said “You are so different now than what you are on stage” and Pekko didn’t even know what to answer. “He can’t possibly Know how I really Am”, he says and continues, “Like, it’s not a really natural place to be… on stage!” (Käppi, 2017).

“You change in interaction with others, that is human. But that we have some kind of basis that we lie on… Like think about artists like Madonna who changes all the time but can see that she wants to embody different sides of her personality”
- Interview with Kalle Heikkinen 2017

Some kind of a stage role can be extremely sincere but then again not the whole person as who one is. The “you” is also changing all the time. You can be a lot of things at the same time and different things in periods, depending on emphasis on different sides of your personality.
“When it comes to the work there is not space for the bullshit Marina at all. It’s about strength and being a warrior. And when it comes to the research, when I’m trying to uncover different cultures – especially ancient cultures, which interest me very much – then it is the spiritual Marina. And then, when I’ve done all the work and I have time in between, then comes the bullshit Marina”
- Marina Abramovic (Abramovic, 2016)

As I’ve been writing about distancing and “the core”, I’d also like to add how important it is to turn your regard away from yourself and instead to others. I often feel like being a musician is a very egoistic field of work. It is so many hours of analysing yourself. But as Maiken Ingvorsden puts is, the most important question is: “What do I want to share with others?” (Ingvorsden, 2015). After finding your deepest, dearest values and dreams it is not about you anymore, it is about sharing them, it is about the audience. A very comforting thought.

“He quotes Keith Jarret at a New York Times Article: “The original musician was not looking for his image; he was using his voice to learn about the world. - fewer and fewer musicians let us know who they are by the expression of music”
- Kenny Werner (Werner, 1996)
3.3 THOUGHTS ABOUT MUSIC MANAGEMENT WITHIN NORDIC FOLK MUSIC

Since this text is from a Scandinavian folk musicians point-of-view, I would like to point-out some maybe obvious but vital working-life facts. Firstly, it is not about the money. I’ll probably never sell 100 000 records anyway so in my work and in this thesis I wanted to concentrate on having a career where one can live as a folk musician, earn money for basic living, enjoy one’s work and be satisfied with the career choices one makes. I could try and apply the business thinking from the commercial world and quote marketing literature but find it unusable. Folk music is a small business and no one starts their career with the idea of getting rich so there is a huge gap between these two worlds. Having said that, I do believe there are lots of things one can include to folk music management from the marketing world and make a synthesis between these two things with ones own premises.

I wonder why it seems to be so common in folk music that people aren’t even striving for commercial success? The folk musicians who seem to perform at real big venues, such as Estonian Maarja Nuut, the Finnish quartet Sväng och Danish/Swedish Dreamer’s Circus are very much a minority. It actually took me quite a while to think of these three names - it says a lot. I wonder if the folk/world music world still sees commercial success as something a bit shameful? Is music less worthy if it sells a lot? Or are we afraid of failing when trying to reach the bigger stages? I wonder if the surrounding somehow devalues music? It seems to be a common though. In commercial contexts folk music would be of less value?

I would wish to see more Think big - mindset in at least Finnish folk music. I notice often a far too modest approach to our own work. Maybe we should apply the same thinking lots of my colleagues use when applying for grants “apply for 2000 so you might get 1000”. Maybe we should reach the stars to get at least “quite high”? We should remember that a personal brand should inspire people! Be the one who leads the ways for others.

One big realisation I’ve had since graduating as a folk song pedagog 2011 is how much it helps to have a pedagog qualification and how many of artists also work as a teacher. This was probably the biggest reason for me to start studying the pedagogy studies in the first place: to be realistic and get a “decent job”. But it is also an asset when applying for gigs at all the folk music festivals, generally they love the combination workshop&concert. Also, it is often the people who’ve been my students who also come to concerts, follow me on Facebook and want to buy a record. I would also apply the word “successful” on having a successful career as a folk music teacher. There are not many full-time jobs in that field and the ones who work in those jobs are indeed the best of the best. And they are the ones educating the future stars. There is, unfortunately also the educators who have seemingly wanted to be artists and are stuck in the life of a music teacher. So if you don’t feel like teaching, do not do it for the money. There are other things you are good at besides music.

After just a few years in working life I understood what a wide range of skills a freelancer has to have and how seamlessly many seem to apply all their knowledge and expertise to their work. A musician is often also a researcher, a photographer, a video editor, driver, you name
it! Be aware of your special know-how and use that but also surround yourself with people who have different skills.

“Make sure you get paid for your work! The thing you think is easy and natural is often unique and very competitive”
- Maggan Hägglund (Hägglund, 2012)

“If there’s a special doctor or consult then people will come to him and he deserves the expert pay check, but you can of course do those pro bono things, also”
- Interview with Kalle Heikkinen 2017

Probably the most important tool for a freelancer is networking skills. Sometimes one needs to be forced a bit to go out mingle. But it pays off. You should in early stage of studies start thinking about who are your “resource persons”, people who can help you in some way (Lönnroth, 2016). People as resource can sound cold and calculating but in the same way you are a resource person to those you know. You share expertise, skills and knowledge with each other. From a solo artists point-of-view it is even more important to start gathering people around you, you cannot work all alone.

You cannot work constantly but a freelancer has to be alert all the time. And this is often the hard part in musician life, the need of kind of being available all the time. You also have to keep the faith and keep working and developing yourself even when the phone isn’t ringing. The constant doubt sits on the shoulder of many musicians.

Many professionals tell about how they ended up to this business by coincidence. There has been talent and there has been practising and favourable conditions but what was the thing that actually started the career, how did these people get the for between the door. Many claim it was a coincidence.

“I´ve happened to be in a place where something new happens. It was very surprising that as first country in Europa this kind of folk music education came to Sibelius Academy. I happened to come there and then there happened to come amazing pupils as well. What can you do. It was one of those things you can’t repeat” tells Heikki Laitinen about how he ended up being the director of folk music department in Helsinki as the first person ever to do such a job (Laitinen, 2008).

Julian Cameron refers to C.G. Jung and his theory about synchronicity in her book The Artists way (Cameron, 1992). Synchronicity is a concept developed by psychiatry C.G. Jung which holds that events are "meaningful coincidences" if they occur with no causal relationship yet seem to be meaningfully related (wikipedia, 2016). Basically Cameron writes how often contingency and fortune lead us to things that we are already open to. I often quote a saying “Coincidence favours a mind that is prepared”. You can be at the right place at the right time but you need to take yourself to that place. If you apply for every show case and e-mail every single producer you can think of, the synchronicity is more likely to towards a music career. When I think about my young female colleagues in Sweden I notice it is the very driven
persons who then have managed to accomplish a lot, such as Bridget Marsden and Emilia Amper. There’s been coincidences, such as Bridget ending up to a place like Sweden, but there’s a lot of work and determination.

Jarmo Liukkonen, who is a professor in pedagogy and has worked as a coach within sports and business world told in an interview for Helsingin Sanomat how people get motivated about things either from the inside or from the outside.

“Only a person who genuinely likes ones job can become a top professional — The inner motivation comes from three things: that you feel you are talented, you feel you have autonomy and you get to decide on details such as working hours. The thirds one is feeling of togetherness”
- Jarmo Luukkonen (Luukkonen, 2016)

To me, one of the biggest problems with music education has been the tight frames. I never really seem to fit in and got too tired to the demands coming from outside. The thing I never found in school but could with my work was being my own boss. Being an entrepreneur combines exactly these things Luukkonen writes about: autonomy, feeling of being talented and in best case you have the tribe of your listeners and followers.

All in all, selling and marketing are normal skills that you can learn. It’s about things that all entrepreneurs know they need but few really master. Such as pricing, selling, finding customers, product and service design, strategic thinking and planning as well making calculations, taking care of your well-being and stress management skills, ability to build effective routines and getting rid of the non-functioning (Särki, 2016). But unlike selling actual physical products an artist cannot cope by only mastering the sales and marketing techniques, the first priority is always having a great product. First you need to be a great musician, then a salesman.

“Only to master sales and marketing would be enough. They would be enough even if your product and services would be total rubbish (which they hopefully are not)”
- Jevgeni Särki (Särki, 2016)

The interesting question is, why there are so many who actually make millions by just selling music that has no artistic value whatsoever. Everyone who works for something they feel very passionated for understands that we could not live with ourselves if the we don’t stand behind the product. The personal relationship to your services is the thing that differ you as an artist from a salesman who sells just a product. Maybe we would be able to sell a musical product that was especially designed to make money but most of us would not want to. Not on the expense of our artistic integrity.
4. THE RESULTS

Do What You Love

“The times that we live in, is all about Image, but, If you wrap it in with really good music, you can cheat people to have a good taste... - - Of course it’s not the whole truth, but I think the eyes listen just as mush as the ears, or maybe just quicker - the cover of a cd can actually make you buy it, before even listening”
- Interview with Jullie Hjetland Jensen 2017

Think of David Bowie or other pioneers who first did something that sounded like a completely crazy thought (a man in tights with a name Ziggy Stardust - honestly, who was expecting that?) and then it just worked, for the audience, for the media, for the markets. They did not compromise their art but the world seemed to compromise their thought of what’s good and acceptable and bought this new wild idea. You can actually change the markets instead of changing yourself for the markets, that is what strong brands do.

But a thing to be taken in consideration is also: maybe to follow your calling doesn’t have to be All-in? “Don’t leave your day job they say in USA” (Ingvorsen, 2015). Maybe it is the day job that gives you the extra energy to be a better artist? The musicianship can remain an identity although it wouldn’t be a day-job. Maybe you should do what you love in a way that is not obvious from the start? For instance, getting a day-job can feel like giving up or loosing but it might be just the thing that makes you focus more and better to your career? What if the biggest act of love would be to let of old thoughts and dreams?

Time, Changes And Acceptance

Your whole story has maybe already taken 20 years, maybe polishing your product will take five years more. Be patient. When practising, when developing spiritually, when searching for a new job, we need to work although we might only get to collect the fruit next year or in a few years time. It often helps me to go back to my older work: to listen to old recording or see old live videos. I see the development and understand how long I could come if I work hard for a year still, for 5 or 10 years still...

The thought about the spiral thinking feels inevitable, we do not go linearly or in circles but spirally towards the next challenges. Finding the core is something we’re all working with all the time, the whole life. We’ll probably meet the same challenges in freelance life year after year. We are in constant movement and as good as we become at accepting changes and being in present movement, we feel about ourselves and about our lives. Hence, the essence of marketing your own personal brand is being flexible but mentally strong. And being mentally strong is not something you can do alone, you will need your resource people: colleagues, family, teachers, maybe a therapist, a special doctor, yoga instructor...

And thru your own private changes, the society is also changing and we artists have to adjust to that. As Heikki Laitinen tells in an interview about the time when he was asked to be the head of the Folk Music Institute in Kaustinen while being just a student at Sibelius Academy: “At that time there basically was no professionals within folk music. I was one of the first
ones who actually got a monthly pay check to think about folk music things. Thru these decades (from the 70’s) the change has been so big you can never know what happens in the next five years.” (Laitinen 2008). And so it is still: the changes in work life and in our society are so great you can’t plan ahead too much. I can’t help but to think, the best way to build a career is to stick to what you are best at and the time will come when it is needed.

Also, I believe the branding and being very conscious about music business is very much a generation thing. I am a part of the 80’s generation who has been brought up with MTV and popular culture, lived thru recession of 90’s and been brought up with the idea “You can be anything when you grow up”, to us it’s more natural to run after our dreams, think big and market ourselves.

Intuition

One of the most important conclusion for this thesis was to start thinking about intuition, to understand how sometimes you have to take away all the utility thinking in arts. You don’t have to build a product, you need to give time to the product to present itself to you when you are ready for that. To give more space for intuition and trust the coincidence makes you more open, more sensitive and therefore a better artist. That’s when your product is reliable, genuine and has the likebility that makes people want to buy it, they will relate and rely on it. It is a lot about trust. About listening to your inner voice and trusting it is right.

As Julia Cameron quotes the poet W.H Auden in her book: “The core which I can’t find is a friend of my unconscious mind”.

Steps and Goals

On a music management lecture at Sibelius Academy september 2017 I learned that for most in the class room getting in to this art school was the dream come true whereas I was the only one thinking it was a step on the path. During my work with this thesis it has come very clear to me how all work should be put to mid-goals and small steps, both mental and spiritual work with oneself and the very practical, concrete tasks. “An elephant is eaten in pieces” I often remind myself but with non-concrete things it can be harder to remember.

What have I learned from this process as an artist

Determination about going my own way has been an ongoing theme when doing research and when writing. Especially with the interviews we’ve always ended up talking about being honest to yourself and others.

A lot of emphasis on my singing lectures 2012-2017 was on finding a relax sound and not trying too much. At the same time as I was learning this exact same thing in my private life and trying to find the balance between work and rest I also needed to learn not to push too much on the music business- side. To let things happen in their own pace was indeed my theme for the whole master studies. And will be for a long time still.
I am still working with the minimalism, the peeling and concentrating. Although these are all my strong sides as a singer I still haven’t completely internalised the very important rules: Dare to wait for things to happen. Don’t force. You are enough.

And to take this thought even longer, as I wrote at chapter “Spiritual journey” I find it extremely important not just to think I’m enough but to really start loving myself, feeling my product is something so amazing everyone should have it. I could be a counterforce to the capitalistic system which makes money on people being unsatisfied with themselves.

The Core

After a very good gig last summer in Malmö a young woman came to me and said: “First time soul singer makes sense” and left me quite baffled. I kept thinking if I am really singing from my soul, if I am in fact being real and giving all of myself. Or am I performing? Giving them an image which is a polished sugar-coated version of me? Now I’ve come to conclusion, there’s nothing else I can do. I sing how I sing and perform how I perform, maybe today it was being real, maybe tomorrow I’m a bit shallow and next week something in between. Yet again, I was reminded about the need of being insecure and incomplete.

And maybe this is my core: I am insecure, I am, as all living beings, changing all the time. You get who I am now, today, in this moment. Maybe fake, maybe failing, maybe not even true to myself but nevertheless, me.

My Product and Brand

A cappella solo singing as a concept is both extremely sensitive and vulnerable but also truly powerful and courageous. I cannot help but to think it’s not a coincidence a highly sensitive person like me choose this art form. I am one of those who need the challenges but is often afraid and melancholic, who wants experiences but often needs to be alone and reflect, who is social but gets really tired in company. Just like my personality, my art form is very extreme to many directions. Maybe my brand is there: the counter-feelings, the ups and downs, the high notes and the low ones, the shouting and whisper, maybe I need to share this to people. And maybe my brand is to be imperfect like the human voice? Maybe my brand is saying: Here I stand, I am not perfect, I am human.

And this is what really comes out from my thesis: to even more consciously start my own artistic process of “developing a product”. Throwing myself to the interplay of the spiritual growth, music making, learning more and more about the branch, and creativity. I am very much in the beginning.

To Be A Better Singer, To Find Peace In Music

One important theme that arrises time after time is the lack of time that I and many musicians use on actually making music. I found myself writing about all these challenges in a musicians life and first after quite a while coming back to the question “How can I be a better
singer?” There is something really twisted in this. We forget about the music when we are so lost in ourselves and the outer world and its demands.

Of course, the whole point of master studies is to develop as an artist so I need to face the question what did I do really and have I gotten forwards. Most of all: How will I continue to go forwards?

My goal as an artist is to find a place within myself that I can return to and where I can rest, where there’s a wall I can lean onto. It is the place where no outer affect can shake or unbalance me. This core is Me and on the other hand something outside of my body, something bigger than my thoughts and feelings and my personality. This core is that place in music where I can forget about myself. During last years I’ve managed to be in that place many times, when practising and when on stage. I still don’t really know how exactly and when to get there but I’m sure I’ll have a better idea when the visits to that place will be more frequent.

But to be able to sing and work freely one needs to feel safe. First I thought I would need to be safe in my life in general and have all the bits of pieces of my private life in order to be able to be a good singer, to develop my career, to be able to work hard. Later on I realised it is music that can be the safe place for me even if nothing else is.

The one thing that became clear to me was that in order to get into my core I needed to start peeling off the layers of everything I was doing. My need to be more than I actually could be (trying to be more effective, advanced and mentally strong that I am, to have more energy than is healthy and possible) and my need to express, need to be heard, loved and understood, all of this had gotten me in to a stage where I was adding things to myself when instead I should be taking away things. My desire and hunger for the singer career what I wanted would steal that away from me. I stumbled across to a text in an unknown buddhist book:

“thus the terms “thirst”, “volition”, “mental voition”, all denote the same thing: they denote the desire, the will to be, to exist, to re-exist, to become more and more, to grow more and more, to accumulate more and more. This is the cause of deriding dukkha” (dukkha in the Indian worldview means the basic suffering of the human being)

THE MOST IMPORTANT IS TO FIND PEACE AND TO SHARE IT WITH OTHERS

-Thich Nhat Hanh (2012)
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