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# **The Light of Christmas**

Developing my self-esteem through producing  
a Christmas album

Skriftlig reflektion inom självständigt, konstnärligt arbete

Det självständiga, konstnärliga arbetet finns

dokumenterat på inspelning:

The Light of Christmas -CD



# THANK YOU

I want to thank all of you who have supported me with this project. First of all I want to thank all those people who worked with me; Jenna Ristilä, Miri Miettinen, Anne Yrjänä, Jari Heino, Rodert de Godzinsky and Christina Billing. Thank you family and friends. Love you all.

Thank you my school, KMH (The Royal College of Music), for giving me the possibility to make this CD.

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# ABSTRACT

In addition to the written report, my debut album *The Light of Christmas* is included in this Master thesis. The album was released 15<sup>th</sup>. November 2014 and it was a success.

I worked as an artist and as a producer in this album project. The album consists of thirteen songs. It includes three different Ave Maria songs from Schubert, Bach-Gounod and Caccini and other Mary songs in Finnish (Kalliokoski, Reger) and in Swedish (Hahn). I also recorded traditional Finnish Christmas songs.

The written report of this thesis describes the most important part of this project, the production of the CD from the beginning till the end. The artistic self-esteem is also in focus. My instrument, voice, is in me. It develops all the time. It is never the same. I needed to accept this fact and believe in my skills as a professional singer.

I am a mentally stronger singer today than I was a year ago. I believe in what I am doing and I also believe in my future as a professional singer. The feedback from my album supported me as an artist and in my career.

## Keywords

Production, Self-esteem, Mental training, Stress, Nervousness, Album, Voice

# 1 INTRODUCTION

I am a Finnish coloratura soprano and I graduated as a singing teacher in 2010 from Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences, Kokkola, Finland. I worked as a freelance musician three years before I started my master studies in the Royal College of Music (KMH) in Stockholm. I had done a lot of work with my singing and thought about what to do next. I decided to make a Christmas album, which would help my career in the future. It was the next step I needed to take. (Appendice 1: Short description about Johanna (Blue Music Group 2014).

This CD, my debut album “The Light of Christmas”, was self-financed. It was a huge financial risk for a student but I decided to take that risk. Since I also worked as a producer for the CD it took a lot of working hours to get this CD published and out for the Christmas market 2014.

I wanted my album to be full of joy, light and I wanted people to experience different feelings through my singing. We succeeded well in that, both the album and it’s cover, are beautifully made.

This thesis is about the CD project and production. I reflected on some specific questions: What kind of project was it? How did I work as a producer? What did I learn from this project?

I will also discuss self-esteem, stress and mental training in this thesis. Before I decided to record an album, I needed to work with my self-esteem so that I believed in myself. How did my self-esteem develop through this project? How did I manage in stressful situations?

I started to plan my debut album in a very early stage of my master studies. I wanted to make something that would help my career after my graduation and I also wanted to learn how to work as a CD producer.

## **2 SELF-ESTEEM, STRESS AND MENTAL TRAINING**

### **2.1 Self-esteem and stress**

I discuss self-esteem in this thesis from a musician's point of view. We all have different roles in our lives and at the same time all of those roles have their own self-esteem; I have my private self-esteem and also work self-esteem, which I call my artistic self-esteem.

Reporter, Hilikka Heikinheimo, says that practising music is rewarding but when people work as musicians it is physically and mentally a very heavy job. Musicians stress affects the quality of the performance. (Heikinheimo 2004.) I wanted to include stress management in this thesis because working with my debut album was a really stressful time for me. Stress can affect to the result (in this case to the CD) and the feedback from it can totally either ruin your self-esteem or make it even better.

Finnish Doctor of Music, Päivi Arjas (1997) has made a research about musicians' self-esteem problems and stage fright. She wrote that self-esteem is a wide and complex subject, which every musicians should focus

thoroughly. A realistic self-image is the key to building up a healthy self-esteem. Developing our self-esteem is difficult without the knowledge of our individual strengths and weaknesses. Weaknesses are not things that we should be ashamed of, instead they are challenges. Personal self-esteem and artistic self-esteem does not always go together. We can all think of reasons behind the self-esteem problems, how big the problems are and how we could solve those. It is very human to create boundaries and limits to yourself without any logical reason for it. Usually boundaries/limits are not based on reality. (Arjas 1997, 57-66.) People can convince themselves that they need to be better even though they are already really good.

Speech trainer, Christina Stuart (2001), writes about the performer's self-esteem. The cold truth is that everyone is nervous and afraid to make a fool of themselves before a performance. Acknowledging this can be very calming. You are not different from any others. You need the excitement and fear, which you can use as a positive force, so that it does not control or depress you. (Stuart 2001, 122-123).

Business education trainer, Anneli Kansanen, has written a book about speech communication. There are many similarities in all types of performance – no matter are those performances the CD recording projects or athletic training. While the performing artist is exposing themselves to the audience, each performer is observed, although not necessarily in a critical way. Nobody is perfect and we all make mistakes. The truth is that we can not please everyone. An advanced performer with a good self-esteem can stand all kinds of criticism. (Kansanen 2000, 36-37.)

Interaction with the others will get easier when the individual learns to distinguish essential from unnecessary, understands their limitations and appreciates the good things they already have. A critique can help the individual to develop themselves and keep the performer's feet on the ground. (Kansanen 2000, 36-37.)

Christian Nordqvist, Editor of Medical News Today, writes about stress. Stress is the word that we use when we feel that everything seems to be too much. Stress also has an effect on a person's body, thoughts and feelings. It affects also negatively on a person's behaviour. When we are stressed our blood pressure and heart pulse rises, breathing becomes more rapid, immune system goes down, muscles become tense and we may suffer from insomnia. (Nordqvist 2014.)

Musicians usually know how to work with stress. They handle stress mentally, socially and physically. They usually consider the problem and try to solve it with humor and reason. They also exercise and have social surviving methods. Unfortunately some people can't handle the stress so well. They try to heal their anxieties and depression with alcohol or medication. (Heikinheimo 2004.)

Performers can achieve their best if they are mentally calm and physically relaxed, believe in themselves, are highly concentrated in the performance and they feel that they are strong and energetic enough to succeed. Performers need to put other things aside. They need to give their full concentration in the performance. (Hyvämäki 2014.)

Courage trainer Särki also writes in his blog that there will always be people who do not like you. Whatever you make – they always think that it is not enough. You cannot change that. You just have to do your best. Concentrate on those things that you think are right. Your own opinion and doings are more important than what other people say, think or do. (Särki 2011.)

## 2.2 Mental training

Athletes and musicians live very similar lives. They both need to practise a lot and concentrate on their performance. Mental training are forms of training which they both can use. They can mentally go through the performance in beforehand.

In 2011 I attended for the first time to Päivi Arjas's lessons in the Sibelius-Academy, Helsinki. She spoke about the stage fright and how to work with that, so that artists do not need to be so afraid. She told us about mental training -method. We students should keep a diary about how we practise, what we really do when we practise and at the end of the rehearsal day we needed to go through those things in our minds. She also told us that we can just sit on the bus and go through the next rehearsal or next concert by using this method. (Arjas 2010.)

I use a lot of mental training in my work as a singer. I use it to learn things by heart, in focusing before the concert or in this case before the album recordings and thinking through my album songs. I also use self-suggestion. Through self-suggestion I have worked with my artistic self-esteem. I can tell good things to myself about my singing and when I believe in myself – others will too.

Hyvämäki, an athlete, wrote his thesis about volleyball and mental training. There were many things in his thesis what we musicians can use too. The mentally strong person always wins. It is natural for people to compete with others or with themselves. People try to be perfect, they challenge themselves from the childhood. Children want to learn the same things that others can do and we all want to succeed. (Hyvämäki 2014.)

Great performances require a lot of exercises, mental victories and physical denials; for example, as a singer I have to think all the time do I get enough sleep and what do I eat or drink before concerts. When someone fails, they might have tried too hard, they were unsure or they were not relaxed. (Hyvämäki 2014.)

Only the individual can help themselves to figure out how they could do their best in all kinds of performances. They can work mentally with their thoughts. They need to practise that; an artist needs to handle stress, they need to have time to relax, need to know how to work with different emotions and need to have skills for a live performance before a concert. (Hyvämäki 2014.) Mental training is a method that artists can use when they go through the live performance before the concert. Päivi Arjas told us that it is good to think through the concert in your mind a few days before the concert, for example; what do I sing, in which order, how do I walk to the stage, what kind of audience could there be and how will I use my hands while singing. (Arjas 2010.)

## **2.3 Developing of my artistic self-esteem in this album project**

My instrument is my voice. Singers develop all the time and I think that I am never ready as a singer. Singing is so personal because I am my own instrument. My instrument and my body will change during the years. It is different now than what it was five years ago and it will be different all the time. I work with my body and it is getting older all the time. I need to take very good care of myself.

In the Royal College of Music we had a course called “Mental training”. We musicians need the following things;

1. Sleep and rest (not just practice all the time)
  2. Diet (good food, water to drink)
  3. Physical activity (exercise, sport)
  4. Psychosocial perspective (taking care of myself in psychological and in a social way)
- (Mental training –course, spring 2014, The Royal College of Music in Stockholm)

I have tried to follow these things in my life. They help me to concentrate and if I am physically in a good shape I can work longer. The period when I was recording the album was a stressful time but people around me wanted to help me. I slept well, made good food for all the people who worked on recording days and we had breaks when needed between the recordings.

Previous feedback can affect a long time in a singers life. It depends who gives the feedback. If someone who is very important to the singer gives very critical feedback after some hard work, it can affect negatively to the singer's thoughts about what kind of singer they are. Feedback can also be too positive, so that it does not give a realistic picture of the situation where the singer really is right now. It is very important to consider the situation when to give feedback because singing is such a private instrument. All singers need to build up a realistic artistic self-image. We all want to be better but we cannot develop without realistic feedback.

My parents have always believed in my skills in singing. Many people in my hometown (Kälviä) knew that I can sing but probably many people did not think that I wanted to be a professional singer. I was 4-years old when I said that I was going to be an opera singer. I have dreamed of that my whole life. I have done a lot of work to reach this point where I am right now with my singing. I have studied a lot and have tried to develop myself as a singer all the time since the year 2000 when I started my singing lessons.

I was 14-years old when I applied to singing lessons in Kokkola Conservatory, but because my home town, Kälviä, is a very small village I did not get in because Kälviä had only a few conservatory places and those were always full. When I moved to Pori in year 2000 to study social work, I

applied to conservatory again and I got in. On that moment my hard work began. I wanted to sing as a professional singer but in Finland one needs to have conservatory background to get further with music studies. I have not got anything for free in singing. That is probably the reason why I have thought that I am just an average singer. A singer who can sing and who has a beautiful voice, but there are many sopranos like that. “An average singer” sounds very bad in my ears even though it was me who thought like that.

I thought that I needed to work with my artistic self-esteem before making the decision to record this album. First I thought that I was not good enough yet and needed to develop more even though I had studied and worked a lot with my singing. It helped when I realized that highly respected music professionals really wanted to work with me. They wanted to help me and they really wanted to make a high quality CD together with me. Many asked me how come the people behind this CD are so awesome: “How did you get them to work with you?” they asked. I have answered “I just called them and they said yes”. I realized that all of these people who I worked with thought that I am a professional singer and they think it was good to work with me.

I was also wondering who would buy my CD. Is it boring with only a voice and a piano? I was thinking about how people would react, what they expected from me and how I could stand all the pressure and stress that comes with a CD production. I was nervous about the financial aspects. The budget was huge for me and I was afraid that I would waste all my money.

The sound engineer in this project and an established drummer, Miri Miettinen, helped me by saying “In the summer 2014 you will sing like you sing. Next summer it will be different. This CD will be a picture of that time how you sang in the summer 2014.” I needed to accept this and believe in my skills.

I handled stress very well in this project. I made time for myself before the recordings. I had enough time to practise all the songs which I recorded on the album. I worked with negative thoughts and changed those into positive

thoughts. I thought that I had learned so much as a singer so far in my life, and I have been working already as a professional singer – people like me and my voice. Little by little my confidence got stronger and I felt that I was good enough to make this CD. I accepted the place where I am now as a singer.

I also tried to make everything as easy as possible for everyone while making this CD. The sound engineer, Miri Miettinen, and I went to see the church and we tested the acoustics with the organist from the Jokela's church.

I also wanted to live a normal life around the recording days. I wanted to be around the people who believed in me and who gave me the positive energy that helped me to relax. I also prepared well for each day. We wanted to create a very good album together.

There was full trust between the singer, the pianist and the sound engineer. It felt easy to sing with the pianist, Jenna Ristilä. I also tried many different microphones before starting the real recording session so that the sound engineer would really know all about my voice. I could be totally myself with them and I was not nervous on those days.

Personally, I think that the mental training methods are the best methods to use if musicians have any issues with fear, or if they have self-esteem problems. Mental training includes a number of methods where the people themselves can go through those hard situations in their own mind. We all need to find the best method in which we can use for ourselves. You can use them everywhere and at any time.

I worked with my artistic self-esteem through mental training. I thought about the reasons behind my way of thinking regarding my singing, why I felt like that, and how I could be better without these thoughts. I needed to feel safe. That is true also in daily life – when I feel that I am safe, then the result is always better. I found answers and I noticed that it is me who has built up those boundaries. I needed to trust myself and my skills.

I usually use the mental training -method at home, or when I need a break in the practise room. Sometimes I do mental training while travelling, for example I learn things by heart when I travel or prepare mentally for the next concert. For example in this recording project I prepared myself many weeks before by closing my eyes and thinking about the situation and the people who I am working with. I also tried to go mentally through how I feel in my throat when I sing these songs.

I do not say that it is easy to go through your own self-esteem and things which have happened in the past, but people can learn to handle their feelings and thoughts. I cannot work as a singer if I think that I am at a lower level than others. I have to believe in myself, all the time.

I did not put focus on nervousness or stress on those recording days. I just concentrated on doing my best. I did not think whether it was good enough, or whether I could do it better. I felt that the environment was supporting me and different takes were discussed together. I trusted my technique as a singer. I knew those songs really well and I could sing for a long time. Recording days were long; 7-10 hours per day. After the recording sessions we made a plan on how to work later in the studio with the songs.

I want to work as a professional singer. I work with my voice and with my body. I have learned to build up my own artistic self-esteem which is not the same thing as my personal self-esteem. Feedback regarding my work is not the same as feedback regarding me as a person. I can take also negative feedback regarding my work and grow as an artist. Criticism does not break or depress an artist. It should make the artist much stronger and better in their work.

I have good social skills so it is easy for me to make new connections. I am always well prepared to every little gig and usually those gigs lead to more work. This is the reason why my calendar is quite full. It is also a thing which makes my self-esteem better. People like to work with me because I am a good co-worker who has a good motivation.

I usually set goals for myself and work hard to achieve them. Usually I set

goals for my singing. If I do my best, goals usually are possible to reach at some point of my life. The most important goal in this project was to create a high-leveled CD. Later the feedback showed me that I was able to achieve that (Appendice 2: Feedback on my CD).

The most important thing is what I think about my singing and what I think about myself as a person rather than what other people think. I try my best and it is enough for me.

## **3 MAKING A CHRISTMAS ALBUM**

### **3.1 Background**

I worked as a freelance musician in Finland before starting my master studies in Stockholm. Everything was fine, I had work and I was happy. However, in Finland you need to have a very high level degree of education - especially if you are a classical soprano. I moved to Helsinki in 2010 and suddenly there were a lot more sopranos, the competition was much harder and when I tried to get gigs, they always asked if I had done a masters degree. This was the impulse to study more; I wanted to develop as a singer to get a job anywhere I wanted.

Some years ago I met Miri Miettinen who runs his own studio (Miricle Studio). We were discussing our careers. He has a long career behind him as a professional drummer and he has recorded over 1500 songs in different

studios. He encouraged me to apply to schools, even though I thought I might be too old for that.

When I entered the Royal College of Music (KMH) Miri told me he wanted to record my first album. I thought; “What a great idea, but maybe after ten years!” He asked; “Why not now?” and I could not answer. I kept thinking that I was not good enough for recording an album yet. He told me that I was good enough.

Initially, when I for the first time started to think about what my master thesis should be, I decided that I would make an album. I wanted to do something that could be good for my career, even after my graduation.

I decided to record a Christmas album. Music is a very important thing at different celebrations. Especially during Christmas time people tend to listen to Christmas music. Miri Miettinen told me that nowadays albums do not sell so well, but Christmas music is something that people want to have and own as a real CD. Usually people have traditions that include going to Christmas concerts. I think music creates the Christmas atmosphere around us.

My album was self-financed. I worked as a singer and as a producer in this album.

## **3.2 Planning**

First of all I just want to sing. Second of all, it is not possible to “just sing”. Musicians have to organize and produce things if they want to live off of music.

I needed some help because producing a CD was so big and new to me. Miri Miettinen helped me with everything I was not sure of. I totally trusted to him. He said he would stand behind this project in good and bad. We had

many meetings and we listened to my songlist (3.7 Songlist) together. We also listened to my favourite singers and their versions from these songs. Miri said to me everytime “you could do this so much better!” and I started to believe in him.

I wanted this CD to be very fresh and clear; full of light. That is how I am also as a person. I listened to many versions from these songs and I realized that I do not like the previous versions of them that much. Many of them were too clean, without any expression. I could not hear anything that the singers were thinking or feeling. I said to Miri that when people listen to my CD I want them to feel something and I want them to hear my feelings; happiness and probably also sadness. Music can express something that can not be put into words, such as beauty and holiness.

The name of the album; “The Light of Christmas” comes from these thoughts. I wanted to give people joy in the middle of the darkest time of the year. We also planned the cover design so that there is something fresh and new. Jari Heino designed the cover. He usually makes the cover designs for heavy metal bands. I told him what I want and he said “If you trust me totally, then I will do this”. Of course I was nervous before I got the cover design in my hands, but I trusted to him.

Deciding on the recording place was not such a huge problem for me and the sound engineer. I teach once a month in Tuusula so I called to their church musician and asked about the church. She offered three different options (Paijala chapel and churches in Tuusula and in Jokela) and I spoke to the sound engineer about those places. The recording place should be a place with not too much echo, not too big room, situated in a quiet place also during daytime. We decided to go to see Jokela’s church and it was a great choice for the recording place. There was not any echo and the acoustics was quite dry. People who work there made sure everything was quiet during daytime and we had everything that we needed there. There was a small grand piano which we used in this project. The pianist could not test the instrument before the recordings but we trusted to Jokela’s church

musician's opinion. We also asked opinion from other pianists who had played on that instrument.

### **3.3 Producing process**

As a CD producer I followed NCB's (Nordisk Copyright Bureau) instructions. The producer has to take care of all agreements with the people who work on the CD. They will also have to make sure that all the basics are ready so that the recording will be possible; this includes booking the studio or the place where the CD is going to be recorded. Producer needs to make sure that all needed recording licenses are requested. They also need to make sure that all the markings on the CD are in a correct form. A producer is the person who takes care of the practicalities from the beginning till the end. (Nordisk Copyright Bureau 2014.)

Master of Political Science, Paavo Viirakorpi, has written a lot about producing processes. The producer will consider the project as a whole; what is the product they will start to do, what has to be done in order to achieve good quality, and with whom they will work. The producer also needs to consider all the risks which are possible and whether the project is worth doing. Then they will think of the funding and plan all the practicalities. (Viirakorpi 2000, 10.) In the case of my album, I was thinking where the recording was going to be made, if all the instruments were fit for the purpose, whether it was possible to handle this project and which people I would need to make this project happen. At the end the producer plans schedules together with all the people involved in the project and makes sure that the product is finished according to the planned schedule. (Viirakorpi 2000, 10.)

### **3.4 Me as a producer**

When I started this project I could imagine that there would be a lot of work. I planned everything from the beginning till the end. I communicated with all the people who worked in this project. I sat down and drew up contracts with the photographer, the cover designer, the sound engineer and the pianist (Appendice 3: Co-workers). I tested many microphones with the sound engineer. He checked that the tone of my singing voice was soft through the microphones and that there was not any possible outside sounds interfering recording (for example piano sound should not come from my singing microphones). He used ribbon microphones in this project. I wrote all the CD cover texts both in Finnish and in English. After planning, I sang, made sure the people who worked with me had food, drove hundreds of kilometres, made all the marketing, sold albums, practised for the concerts in Sweden and in Finland (Stockholm, Jokela, Turku), created Facebook events, sent CDs to customers, wrote invoices, checked out the payments, sent other invoices et cetera. My working days were 12-17 hours per day from the beginning of November till the end of December.

I realized the real work starts after the recording. Now the sound engineer, Miri Miettinen, helped me by using his collaborators and he called to the distributors, and suddenly, we had many business partners who wanted to get hold of my CD and sell it. That was probably the first victory. Second victory was when we went to meet Robert de Godzinsky, who mastered the album. I looked at his studio walls and saw the faces of many famous classical singers there. He has mastered many CDs with famous artists, such as Karita Mattila. I was little bit nervous what he would say, but he liked very much what we had done. Getting these important business partners in this project with me was good for my artistic self-esteem. People want to work with musicians who are good and that is what I was now.

I knew what I wanted when we made recordings, mixing, editing and also mastering. I told what I was looking for from my CD, and I did not like all the options Miri offered me, for example some echo options he suggested. It was good that the environment was so open and full of trust that I could say all the things I thought.

### **3.5 Schedule**

Well planned schedule is one of the most important aspect in producing. Producer needs to plan two different schedules; the bigger schedule for the whole project and a smaller schedule for recording dates. (Mäkelä & Stenlund 1995, 187-188.)

The schedule was quite hard to make. I was really busy and the sound engineer was really busy. We decided together three different options for the recording dates and I offered those to the pianist.

Recording dates were 21-23 of July, before that I practiced with the pianist. In the end we used only two days for recording, 21-22 July 2014. I planned carefully what we would do on those days and in what order. We managed to keep the planned schedules.

The album was finished on time for the Christmas market 2014. Concerts were during the Christmas season. The release concert was on 9<sup>th</sup>. December 2014 in Finnish Church in Stockholm.

### **3.6 Budget**

As a producer, I paid everything by myself. I saved money as much as I could. Budgeting helped me to plan this project financially. Budgeting helps with long- and short term projects. It helps people to avoid financial crisis. It also makes you understand your financial opportunities. Budgeting helps you get the most from your money and it usually gives people peace of mind. (Investopedia 2015.)

My debut album was self-financed. I needed to count all the benefits together so that I was not going to lose all my money. I knew before I started this project that the budget and work would be huge, but I saw only good things in this project. I kept thinking how much it would help my career.

I was really nervous that I would run out of money. I received a scholarship from school and I got a very good sponsor from Finland. These helped me a lot, they actually made this project happen.

Before releasing my album – I felt that I took a big risk and I thought maybe nobody would buy the album. But that was a risk that I needed to take. I knew I already had fans who would buy the album and I had done many concerts.

### 3.7 Songlist

1. Marian kehtolaulu (M. Reger, Finnish lyrics by K. Solanterä) 1.33
2. Neitsyt Marian tuutulaulu Jeesukselle (J. Kalliokoski, lyrics unknown) 3.13
3. Ave Maria (F. Schubert) 4.14
4. Tuikkikaa oi joulun tähtöset (P. J. Hannikainen / E. Koponen, arr. J. Hakulinen) 1.54
5. En etsi valtaa loistoa (J. Sibelius / Z. Topelius, Finnish lyrics unknown) 3.22
6. Marias vaggvisa (G. Hahn / B. Setterlind) 1.28
7. Marias väntan (G. Hahn / B. Setterlind) 2.45
8. Kanske det är natt hos dig (G. Hahn / B. Setterlind) 2.46
9. Ave Maria (J. S. Bach – C. Gounod) 2.24
10. Varpunen jouluaamuna (O. Kotilainen / Z. Topelius, Finnish lyrics by K. A. Hougberg) 3.29
11. Mökit nukkuu lumiset (H. Kaski / E. Leino) 3.38
12. Oi jouluyö (A. Adam, Finnish lyrics by K. Solanterä) 4.00
13. Ave Maria (G. Caccini, arr. N. Ingman) 4.26

I wanted to record famous Ave Maria –songs from Schubert (3), Bach-Gounod (9) and Caccini (13), even though those are not practically Christmas songs. I can use these songs every time when I want to promote myself and in all of my concerts. I collected other material around that theme so that all the songs would suit together and this album could bring Christmas atmosphere to people's hearts.

Schubert's "Ave Maria" is very famous and most people know it. Many people want this song to be sung at their weddings. I have sung this at church when the couple walks down the aisle or just after the blessing.

Bach–Gounod’s “Ave Maria” is the song I have performed most from the albums Ave Maria -songs. I have done many baroque-concerts and people always hope to hear this song. Caccini’s “Ave Maria” has an atmosphere which is very beautiful and peaceful. I have sung this also in different church concerts.

I also wanted to sing a new Mary song (2) which was composed by my friend Juhana Kalliokoski. I have sung this song in earlier Christmas concerts together with Reger’s beautiful Mary song (1).

My singing teacher Christina Billing gave me Gunnar Hahn’s Mary –songs (6-8) which I liked a lot and after these songs I started to think traditional Finnish Christmas songs which could suit this combination. I definitely wanted to sing “Oi jouluyö” (Oh Holy Night) (12) because it is one of my favorites. “Tuikkikaa oi joulun tähtöset” (Shine Forth, Ye Stars) (4) was at my parents wedding 37 years ago, “Varpunen jouluaamuna” (Sparrow on Christmas morning) (10) and “Mökit nukkuu lumiset” (Frozen sleepy cottages) (11) are just part of my favorites from the traditional Finnish Christmas songs.

When I planned my song list I thought carefully what I like and what do the planned songs have in common. After the sound engineer accepted my song list, I needed to ask permission from publishers to record for some of the songs. Usually performers need permissions only for new recordings. I wrote to Juhana Kalliokoski (composer) and he gave me his permission to record his song (2). Then I wrote and called other publishers (Gunnar Hahn Musik and Gehrmans). Gunnar Hahn’s songs (6-8) were already recorded but I wanted to make sure that I had permission to record them.

I planned the order of these songs with the pianist. We wanted that the beginning is clear and full of light. We wanted to mix Ave Maria –songs with other traditional songs. Hahn’s songs were together in the order what the composer had originally planned. We decided to end the album with Caccini’s Ave Maria because it was different from the others and there was so much emotions in it. (Appendice 4: Description about the CD)

### 3.8 Problems

There were some problems in this project. Almost everything was new to me, but I managed to solve the problems by talking and asking my questions from different people. The biggest help came from the sound engineer. Working with recorded music was so familiar to him. He could answer almost every question.

The biggest problem was the schedule. We were all busy. Sound engineer and I found a few options for the recording dates and finally the pianist found one good time out of those dates.

I knew in the beginning with whom I would want to play on my CD. The pianist said yes, but two weeks before the recording days he cancelled his part. He had a very important concert at the biggest chamber music festival in Finland. He asked a new pianist, Jenna Ristilä, for this project. She was very flexible with the schedules and she could play on the planned dates. She is also an excellent pianist and our co-operation has continued after this album project.

The pianist change also affected my self-esteem. First I thought maybe this project was not so important to him and I wondered how he could do something like this to me, but after those thoughts I was happy that he arranged a new pianist for me. Sometimes we cannot keep all our promises, but the most important thing is how we can compensate that. He handled the situation well by asking Jenna to replace him.

I was quite tired of all the work that producing required. Luckily I could concentrate solely on this project during that time. I tried to rest as much as I could.

We recorded Caccini's Ave Maria last on the first recording day. I was not all happy about the song on that day. It was the first recording day and we had already worked many hours. I was not sure if this album was going to be good or not. It was hard to imagine the result because my singing was so dry (recordings were

made from really close), there was not any echo and the result was not ready. I was used to singing with echo on the acoustics. I am not used to hear my singing without any concert room acoustics and this was practically my first recording session ever. I usually do not need any microphones because I am a classical singer. I could not hear the result like the sound engineer could. He asked me to trust him, because he knew what he was doing. I started to love the Caccini's song when I heard it the first time after the recording. Even though there was not any echo yet, it sounded beautiful.

## **4 CONCLUSION**

What an awesome feeling I have after this project! Hopefully next Christmas will be as good as the Christmas 2014 was. My debut album was sold out in one week. 500 copies! I ordered another 500 copies and it sold very well also. Even after Christmas it was selling very well. People from all over the world are buying it from me, from the internet or from different business partners. Totally 760 copies were sold in the Christmas season 2014.

Now people see me as a professional singer. Maybe they saw me like that already before the CD but now I feel that I have earned my place in the music world. I made a good CD together with the people who worked in this project, I produced it and did that well. It gave me more concerts and hopefully it will keep giving them also in the future. I have now an album, new business partners and also a very good new pianist in Finland, Jenna Ristilä.

What did I learn during the process? Mostly I learned from myself as an artist, how I handled all the stress and how I can control it. I also learned how to produce an album. I learned that even though I want to do many things by myself, there are people who also want to help me. This CD project was the best decision I could have ever done to my career. I think I developed a lot during this project.

I know that I can't reveal all. But I made my best to make someone happy with this CD. I enjoyed about all the moments when we worked with the album. A little nervousness is a force which you can use in a positive way in the performance. The adrenaline grows and it gives you strength to do your best. I competed only with myself. When I started to plan this project, all I wanted was to succeed.

I am a mentally more secure and braver singer than I was before. I believe in what I am doing and I believe also in my future as a professional singer. The feedback supports me as an artist and in my career. (Appendice 5: Review from Huvudstadsbladet)

Would I do this again? Anytime. I had an amazing group of professionals working with me. I am content with this project. I have good social skills and I was able to use those as well when I worked as a producer. We had a good time when we made this CD. I also received new fans, got in the press and was interviewed by the biggest radio station in Finland.

In September 2014, I sang Carolina's role in Cimarosa's opera *Il matrimonio segreto*. Finland's biggest press, *Helsingin Sanomat*, made a review of the opera and they really liked me as Carolina. It was a good review also for my career. People were interested in my singing after that. This review was a good advertisement for my CD which was released in November 2014.

I really did something for my career. Now I am much braver than before my CD. Everytime when I feel that I am not good enough – I just look at all the things that I have done, and those are good.

If you decide to do something, do it the best way that you can on that day. The audience will enjoy your performance if you enjoy it. Make sure that there is an interesting start and a memorable ending in your performance. (Phillips 1995, 40.)

I totally challenged myself both mentally and physically; mentally with my self-esteem and physically so that I had enough energy for those long recording days.

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Appendice 1: Short description about Johanna (Blue Music Group 2014) (Blue Music group 2014)

“Johanna Lehesvuori, coloratura soprano, is one of the most expressive voices of her generation. Soon, she will graduate with her master’s degree in classical singing at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm. Her vocal performances range from several opera and lied concerts to church recitals (i.e. numerous solo concerts, and also as a soloist to the choirs and to the orchestras). Moreover, she has performed in several Finnish opera and musical theatre productions since 2006. Johanna also works as a freelance musician and as a singing teacher in the Helsinki area. In addition, she has produced several concerts.” (Blue Music Group 2014.)

“Johanna Lehesvuori practically suprised me with her fresh and beautiful lyric soprano, combined with her advanced technical skills." Hannu-Ilari Lampila, Helsingin sanomat 6.9.2014 (Cimarosa; Il matrimonio segreto. Johanna made the role Carolina). (Blue Music Group 2014.)

Appendice 2: The feedback on my CD

The Feedback from my debut album has been very good. One man wrote to me; “Album of the year. Actually - of the all years!”

I was prepared to critique and expected that also, but I never heard that a lot. Press wrote of my CD (Appendice 5; Review from Huvudstadsbladet) and the album songs were played in the radios. Finland’s biggest classical radio Radio Classic asked me to be their quest. It turned out the CD was very good thing to my career.

Here is the feedback from some listeners:

- *Beautiful and atmospheric album. Album design is very elegant and dignified*
- *Beautiful, sensitive, professional, clear*
- *Create a very nice atmosphere in our home. Professional and beautiful voice*

- *Competent, melodious, atmospheric, song order is well done, nice to have new Christmas music and traditional music as well.*

I asked from some people, what was their favorite song on the CD:

- *I have never liked so much of Schubert's Ave Maria but you sing it very well. Bach was different and beautifully sung, I got chills. The third (Caccini) is really beautiful, goes deep in to my soul, I got tears, Awesome! All are so different, I do not mind if there is a three Ave Maria in the CD.*
- *Caccini's 'Ave Maria'. That song (and especially its interpretation) opened the "new window" to the Christmas atmosphere. Christmas holiness and this song touched more deeply than any song I have ever heard. You sung like an Angel. It was angelic. Tears just fall down every time I listen to it. This song (exactly as it is on the CD) could not better tell the essence of what the Christmas is all about: the collective longing joy and above all matter raising desire to understand something supernatural great, a motherly love towards a small miracle.*
- *Caccini's Ave Maria was from another world. Can not even describe - Run out of superlatives*
- *Whole album is very good. It will take (or, in fact, requires) more listening time. The interpretation, accompaniment, and the technical implementation of the disk is made so subtly that all the nuances do not open with one listening time. This is the sign of great entity. Album is definitely in the all-time top 10, in Christmas albums in TOP3 and Caccinin 'Ave Maria' is simpliest the most beautiful song I have ever heard.*

### Appendice 3: Co-workers

I worked with these people;

Pianist; Jenna Ristilä, Helsinki

Sound engineer; Miri Miettinen, Miricle Studio, Porvoo

Mastering; Robert de Godzinsky, Kirkkonummi

Photos; Anne Yrjänä, Kokkola

Cover design; Jari Heino, Kotka

Recording place; Jokela's Church, Jokela

Recording dates; 21-22.7.2014

### Appendice 4: Description about the CD (Blue Music group 2014)

"The Light of Christmas" is soprano Johanna Lehesvuori's first solo album. She made it with pianist Jenna Ristilä. Johanna wanted to record famous Ave Maria –songs from Schubert, Bach-Gounod and Caccini. She was also inspired and excited to sing 2 Maria-songs in Finnish and 3 in Swedish. She also enjoyed singing traditional Finnish Christmas songs, and new music that has never been recorded before, making this CD fresh, bright and full of "The Light of Christmas". (Blue Music Group 2014.)

### Appendice 5: Review from Huvudstadsbladet

<http://hbl.fi/kultur/recension/2014-12-17/696526/skivrecension-de-flesta-julskivor-ar-alltfor-mjakiga>

HBL 17.12.2014

Skivrecension: De flesta julskivor är alltför mjäkiga

Wilhelm Kvist

HBL:s musikredaktör förargar sig över usla julskivor – men finner också några godbitar.

Av bl.a. Lauri Tähkä, Soile Isokoski, Kammarkören Kaamos, Cantinovum, Nina Åström, Robin Hund, Nationaloperan.

Den 18 augusti i år – mitt i sommarhettan – fick jag årets första mejl om julskivorna. Det var en inbjudan att närvara när popartisten **Lauri Tähkä** visade upp nya jultyger och -produkter som han designat för Vallila Interiors räkning. Tillställningen skulle äga rum den 11 september och under den skulle han också framföra musik från sitt nya julalbum som skulle utkomma den 7 november.

Så tidigt börjar det numera och det blir bara värre. Självfallet gick jag inte och tittade på tygerna. Däremot försökte jag lyssna lite på albumet *Jouluni laulut* – med mycken möda och stort besvär, skall tilläggas. Tähkäs fragmentariska fraser och skrällande röst gjorde inget vidare intryck.

Nu kanske nån tror att det här är en sågning av Lauri Tähkä men så enkelt är det inte. Tähkä är nämligen bara ett barn av sin tid och ett offer för vår tids förhärskande fenomen.

Varje år brukar jag få en bunt med julskivor på posten och det är med varierande entusiasm och förväntningar tar jag mig an högen. I allmänhet brukar där finnas några guldkorn, men i år verkar skörden mycket mager.

Årets julskivor lider av främst ett problem: de är nästan alla för snälla och konstnärligt feiga, mjäkiga helt enkelt. Det är tragiskt att sätta på skiva efter skiva och tvingas bli besviken för att ambitionerna saknas eller för att den där samma bekanta julvisan skall matas i ännu en version. Grovt taget kan man säga att julmusiken just nu lider av ett alltför patosfyllt och pompöst dundrande eller billiga arrangemang och en sångstil som helt enkelt låter förfärlig.

**Kommersiellt slagfält**

Julmusiken som så mycken annan musik har dessutom blivit de kommersiella aktörens slagfält och artister av alla de slag skall ge ut sina julskivor. Och när det gått tillräckligt länge sedan sist, är det dags att ge ut nästa skiva. Låt mig ge några exempel.

Sopranen **Soile Isokoski** gjorde en populär julskiva på Finlandia Records 1989, *Kauneimmat joululaulut*, som senare stöptes om och utkom med ny pärm och nytt namn i flera upplagor. 2006 spelade hon in en julskiva med Ylioppilaskunnan laulajat som sålde guld och nu har hennes senaste utkommit, denna gång på Ondine med Lapplands kammarorkester och **John Storgårds**, Isokoskis samarbetspartner sedan länge.

Det finns ingen orsak att desto mera börja kritisera LKO och Storgårds insats i den här repertoaren. Det räcker mer att konstatera att **Ilkka Kuusistos** arrangemang sitter perfekt för den lilla orkestern, men ger ett genomgående nätt, skört och lite försiktigt intryck. Soile Isokoskis röst har kanske inte samma glans som förr, å andra sidan artikulerar hon bättre nu, vilket delvis kan vara inspelningsteknikens förtjänst. Men varför i fridens namn ska allt detta spelas in än en gång, speciellt när repertoaren inte förändrats särskilt mycket?

Ett annat exempel är finlandssvenska Karlebybördiga gospelartisten **Nina Åström**, som 2001 utkom med julalbumet *Merry Christmas Jesus*. Tretton år senare ger hon ut sitt nästa julalbum, *Joulun kuningas* (Aikamedia). På något sätt känns det vanvettigt att hon ska sjunga vanliga finska julsånger, till och med fina finska julsånger, i menlösa arrangemang. Det smakar alltför mycket kanelbulle, kakao, sirap och lussekatter. Den udd som Åström en gång i tiden hade lyser med sin frånvaro när **Markus Vainiomäki** står som producent.

*Jul med Nationaloperan* (utgiven på Ondine) väcker blandade känslor. Julsånger i operaarrangemang kan vara sköna en stund, men är det inte konstigt att en av de första skivorna (den första?) som utkommer med den nya chefsdirigenten **Michael Güttler** är en julskiva med en massa finska julsånger i pompösa utföranden?

## Körskivor glädjer

I stället har jag i år glatt mig över några körskivor, till exempel Jyväskyläbaserade **Cantinovums** *Joutuos Jouhuyö* (Alba) med **Rita Varonen** som dirigent och kammarkören **Kaamos** skiva *Pyhä yö* (Helig natt) med **Dani Juris** som dirigent. På bägge skivorna ryms finfina framföranden av såväl bekanta som mindre bekanta julsånger.

Sopranen **Johanna Lehesvuoris** julskiva var också intressant. Lehesvuori är utexaminerad från Karleby och numera studerande vid Kungliga musikhögskolan i Stockholm. Hon har en skön stämma, redan långt utvecklad och lovande, även om den ännu kan växa. Speciellt gläds jag över hennes goda svenska i stycken som **Gunnar Hahns** och **Bo Setterlinds** *Marias Vaggvisa* och *Marias väntan*. Tyvärr är skivan dock en aning amatörmässigt gjord. Inspelningen är inte den bästa och pianot (**Jenna Ristilä**) låter grötigt och brummande.

Årets gladaste överraskning och min största behållning blir de outtröttliga barnmusikentusiasterna **Robin Hunds & hans glada orkesters** julskiva *Sju dagar tills tomten kommer*, som bjuder på ideligen nya eller nygamla julsånger signerade **Tomas Järvinen** och **Henrik Strang**. Musikaliskt är låtarna helt roliga med countrystuk om än en aning oskyldiga. Över texterna finns däremot något underfundigt och tilltalande, som i *Staffan hade dagisfläng*: Staffan vred sig i sin säng / vi tackom nu så gärna / vaken sedan klockan fem och så vidare ... Skivan hör till de bästa som jag hört av Robin Hund.