



Producing Pop Music to Asian Markets

A look into the markets and the song writing process of J-pop, K-pop and C-pop

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ABSTRACT

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The Asian music market has grown immensely in a relative short time. This thesis is aimed for those who are interested in entering the market as a songwriter or a producer. It opens the door to this mysterious music market and the songwriting process of Asian pop.

Based on industry publications, this thesis presents the recent history of Asian music market values and consuming culture, up until the newest reports available, with some implications on how the market might change in the near future.

It also brings valuable information from already established producers, through six industry interviews. These interviews are meant to provide a better perspective of what the industry truly is like and what it requires, instead of only relying on theoretical information. Finally, a deep analysis of the writer's own songwriting and producing process on four songs is presented.

Key words: songwriting, music production, j-pop, k-pop, c-pop, asian music markets

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ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

Digital Sales	The market revenue consisting of online streaming, video views and digital downloads
Physical Sales	The market revenue consisting of sold CDs, singles, concert videos, etc.
J-pop	Abbreviation of Japanese Popular Music.
K-pop	Abbreviation of South Korean Popular Music.
C-pop	Abbreviation of Chinese Popular Music. Can be divided to Mandarin and Cantonese separately.
Co-write	A form of making music, done with at least one person other than you.
Cut	A song that has gotten through to an artist and is to be released.
BPM	Beats per minute, in the context of tempo.
Top-line	Term used to talk about the melody line of the lead vocals.

1 INTRODUCTION

Japanese culture has always greatly influenced my music. Through the soundtracks in games and movies in my childhood, it has always been subconsciously affecting how I perceive melody and harmony. But it wasn't until 2016, that I finally was introduced to Japanese and South Korean pop music.

It blew my mind in all the ways it didn't follow the same structures as the western pop, which had somewhat become repetitive for me in many cases. The vocals were also something out of this world for me. Not understanding a single word of what they were saying, yet they were able to make me excited just with their voice, which for me represented a strong performance. It also felt fresh, to not have any connection to the context within the lyrics while listening, but to concentrate on the music all by its own.

With all this, it was clear for me that I wanted to do everything in my power to move forward as a music producer towards the Asian pop business. This thesis is aimed for those, who intend to do the same, or are just in general interested in the business and the songwriting process of Asian pop.

The world of Asian pop is constantly evolving, and it has seen tremendous growth during the 21st century. By looking at the market values of different countries, it is undeniable that the importance of Asia as a music business should not be neglected as a possibility by any producer or songwriter. Entering the market without any previous information might prove difficult, so I have gathered useful information about the markets into this thesis from multiple sources including industry publications, expert interviews, also adding some of my own experiences.

2 ASIAN MUSIC MARKET

Looking at the statistics of the global music industry market shares, it is obvious that in recent years the importance of Asia has grown in terms of music consumption. Based on the reports of Recording Industry Association of Japan (RIAJ), Japan has since 2002 – where the oldest RIAJ reports date back to – been in the top two global music industry markets, only rivalled by the US. (Recording Industry Association of Japan 2007.) To this day, Japan has steadily held its place as the second biggest music market in the global music industry, but the other big Asian markets – South Korea and China – have only become more significant in recent years.

The latest RIAJ report from 2018 shows that China and South Korea have improved their status in the global music markets by a great deal. In 2009, South Korea was ranked as the world's 24th biggest music market, out-shadowed by Finland on place 23. China on that same year was placed at 39, barely making it to the top 40. (Recording Industry Association of Japan 2011, 24.) When compared to the latest RIAJ report, the changes are phenomenal. South Korea has risen to be the 6th biggest music market in the world, going past even Canada on 7th place, which is the home of artists like Justin Bieber, The Weeknd, Drake and Nickelback. China has also made a remarkable upturn with their industry, as they have risen to the 10th place. And it has been widely discussed that it won't stop there. (Recording Industry Association of Japan 2018, 4.)

In the following paragraphs, I will present the Japanese, South Korean, and Chinese markets based on available industry publications. The main sources utilized have been Recording Industry Association of Japan's Yearbook publications, the International Federation of Phonographic Industries' reports and Spotify statistics. Through the chapters I aim to provide a view of the development and current state of each Asian market through presenting statistics, interesting characteristics and examples of them.

2.1 Japan

Japan has been the second biggest music market for as long as there's data available in the RIAJ Yearbooks. It is and has been a market where the majority of the music sales is still in physical sales. In 2017, the percentage was 72%, which is a huge difference compared to the 15% physical sales in the US. The digital sales and streaming are struggling to find their place even amongst the younger generation in Japan, with its part being only 21% of the Japanese music markets. The number is small compared to the 75% of the US. (Recording Industry Association of Japan 2018, 4.)

What is truly remarkable when going through the statistics as stated in the RIAJ Yearbooks, is that in 2005 Japan sold 63.3 million physical copies of singles. On the same year, only 5.0 million copies were sold in the US, and in the UK, which is the 3rd biggest music market in the world the amount of copies sold was 26.8 million which was the second largest overall quantity. So, in 2005 Japan sold 12.7 times more singles than the US and over two times more than the UK. (Recording Industry Association of Japan 2007, 24.)

The gap grew even bigger in 2009, although the actual quantity of the sales came down. In 2009, there were 43.6 million singles sold in Japan, while in the US there were only 1.2 million singles sold. The 2nd biggest sales of singles that year was in Germany, with 4.7 million singles sold. In 2009, Japan sold 36.3 times more singles than the US. (Recording Industry Association of Japan 2011, 24.)

Even though there are still multiple times more albums sold physically compared to single sales in the United States throughout those same years, these statistics prove the importance of single sales in Japan. Later in the RIAJ Yearbooks, the physical sales were grouped as one instead of dividing them to singles and albums, so after the report of 2010 the statistics are not as clear as they were in the previous years.

To my knowledge, Japan has always been a very domestic, closed market. It is interesting that market inside the country itself has achieved the rank of the 2nd biggest music market in the world. It is possible that the music export hasn't been

so crucial for them. In my experience, for foreign consumers, it is still quite a challenge to get hold of Japanese music and to follow the musical trends, since most of their biggest artists are not legally streamable on any platform (i.e. Spotify and YouTube) that are generally used in the western countries. As a producer I know I have come to know that the best way to find trending music and statistics about the newest releases in Japan, is to follow the Oricon chart. Oricon is a company that supplies statistics and information about the Japanese music industry (Oricon News n.d.). I would compare it to Billboard, which also has a Japan Hot 100 chart on their webpage but holds different data (Billboard 2019a).

Exporting music from Japan seems to be very specific. By analyzing the biggest streaming numbers of Japanese artists on Spotify, you can see that the numbers are quite different from what the album sales are. According to a Tokyo Review article by Warnock (2018) and statistics from Statista (2018), 14,3% of Japanese people use a subscription based or ad-supported streaming service, of which only 16,5% are Spotify users. With these facts in mind, it's safe to say that most of the streams for Japanese artists on Spotify must be coming from other countries.

Based on Spotify, some of the Japanese artists, like Radwimps and Kyary Pamyu Pamyu reach multi-millions in their streaming numbers. Radwimps represents the wave of indie and rock bands, which seem to be very well supported in the music export sense. Radwimps have reached up to 18 million Spotify streams for their top song, with the total stream count of the top 10 most listened songs settling somewhere under 100 million. (Spotify 2019a.) To my knowledge, their most listened songs, many of the indie and rock bands have songs that have been featured in an animated movie or as a TV-show intro. This might be one of the reasons why they are easier to export, since the Japanese animations are even more broadly exported.

Kyary Pamyu Pamyu represents the idol factor of Japanese exports. The term "idol" describes manufactured starlets and refer to singers, but it can also refer to younger celebrities in general. There are many different kinds of idols in Japan, from minor to major, from single to large groups. (Ashcraft & Ueda 2010.) Based on Spotify streaming numbers it is obvious that many of the idols are kept as

domestic products, but Kyary Pamyu Pamyu is clearly an exported one, comparing her international exposure to the likes of AKB48. AKB48 is an idol concept with almost 100 members, which has sold over 60 million albums (Oricon News 2019). Their Spotify page on the other hand, presents only a single called Sugar Rush featured in the Disney's *Wreck-it-Ralph* movie, with 3,4 million streams and a compilation album "Set List Greatest Songs 2006-2007", with streaming numbers from 175,000 streams and below. (Spotify 2019b.) In comparison, based on Oricon database (n.d.) Kyary Pamyu Pamyu has sold approximately 520,000 albums, but on Spotify has the top song with more than 10 million streams, with the total count of the top 10 most listened songs settling around 27 million (Spotify 2019c). The numbers get more even on YouTube, which according to Sanchez (2017) is a much more popular on-demand streaming service in Japan than Spotify is.

2.2 South Korea

Even though South Korea has been in the top 10 of the biggest music markets for almost the entirety of the 2010's, things were very different in the beginning of the 21s century. Based on RIAJ Yearbook publications from 2007 to 2017, between the years 2004 and 2009 South Korea was constantly ranked below top 20, sometimes even barely included in the top 30. (Recording Industry Association of Japan 2007–2017.) It is obvious, that they have done something right, receiving the title of the 6th biggest music market in the world by the year 2017. But what have they done right exactly?

Compared to Japan, South Korea has been prioritizing digital formats of audio consumption over the physical ones at a very early stage, with the digital sales passing the physical sales as early as year 2006 as mentioned in the International Federation of Phonographic Industries (IFPI) report of 2010. Based on the same report South Korea has also been improving their legal environment to better protect the music right holders. In 2007, South Korea had two major infringing peer-to-peer download services, Soribada and Bugs, which were sued against by record labels and the Korean Association of Phonographic Producers, and later they were relaunched as legitimate services. The IFPI reports throughout the early 2000's constantly brings up the harm done by music piracy all around the world.

South Korea took major acts to make piracy harder to reach and saw steady recovering from its set-backs throughout the next years. (International Federation of Phonographic Industries 2010, 26.)

South Korea has also been a lot more active on exporting their music than Japan for instance. This becomes clear when comparing some of the major artists of each country based on their streaming numbers on Spotify. AKB48, which was earlier presented as the best-selling girl group of Japan regarding the album sales has under 4 million total streams on Spotify (2019b), for all of the material they've released there. The number of streams is significantly lower than in the case of BLACKPINK, one of the most trending girl groups of South Korea at the moment. Their top song on Spotify, "Kiss and Make Up", a collaboration with the UK superstar Dua Lipa has reached over 200 million streams. Their top 10 most listened songs have reached approximately 1 billion streams on Spotify and with 15 million monthly listeners, they are ranked as the 144th most listened artist on Spotify in April 2019. (Spotify 2019d.) The stream numbers are exclusively foreign, so it is obvious that South Korean artists are highly valued on the western market also. Spotify hasn't even launched in South Korea yet and if they would, they would have to compete with established streaming services, such as MelOn and of course YouTube already available (Sanchez 2018).

To my knowledge, South Korean groups and artists are also heavily promoted to the Japanese market, with the help of specified Japanese releases. Many of the biggest groups at the moment such as BLACKPINK, TWICE, SHINee and Red Velvet, have both Korean and Japanese versions of their full releases, or even completely new releases dedicated only to the Japanese market.

2.3 China

With the statistics already laid down for Japan and South Korea, it is China that has made the biggest progress in the past ten years. Placed at 39th in the year 2009 (Recording Industry Association of Japan 2011, 24), they entered the top 10 of world's biggest music markets in 2017 (Recording Industry Association of Japan 2018, 4). With its enormous potential and population, Chinese record la-

bels faced only the challenge against piracy. Based on 2014 IFPI report, a landmark agreement struck in 2011 between three international record companies and a Chinese search engine and internet service named Baidu. With the help of that agreement, they were able to fight piracy on a different magnitude. Sunny Chang, the president of Universal Music Group International stated:

The Baidu deal was a trigger that led to other internet companies changing their approach and becoming licensed. We believe that in three to five years the market will be open, and China could be one of the top markets in the world. (International Federation of Phonographic Industries 2014, 36.)

China has been thought of as a sleeping giant of the music industry, and with the help of streaming, it has finally been easier to harness its potential. According to the 2014 IFPI report, there are 618 million internet users in China, of which 81% are connected to mobile. That equals up to over 500 million people on mobile, which is more than the population of the top two music countries, the US and Japan together. (International Federation of Phonographic Industries 2014, 36.)

China has shown extraordinary resolve to harness internet potential. In RIAJ Report of 2018, China had only 3% of its music sales in physical and an outstanding percentage of 90% in digital sales. In comparison, the same numbers for the US were 15% and 75% respectively. (Recording Industry Association of Japan 2018, 24.) It could be argued, that the possibility of music streaming was crucial for China to grow as a music market.

In my view, when it comes to Chinese music export, it is situated somewhere between Japan and South Korea. Many of the major songs are found on Spotify and YouTube, of which the latter might often present an unofficial release of it. This is a major improvement compared to the availability of Japanese music abroad, but still pales in comparison to South Korea as how much they are promoted abroad.

China and South Korea have also shared some artists and groups, with their neighboring countries. The South Korean supergroup EXO has some Chinese members amongst them, and they have released complete Chinese versions of some of their albums, which can be found on Spotify (Spotify 2019e).

One major difference between China and the other Asian pop music giants, is its relation to the censorship of music. On the Congressional-Executive Commission on China webpage, we can find listed out state agencies who are monitoring the publishing and broadcasting of all media, including pop music. This has led to removing music from online platforms, for example in 2015, they ordered 120 songs to be removed for violating their terms. (Yang 2017.)

One interesting finding made during the thesis process was that there is much more information available about Japan and South Korea than the Chinese market. Even though pop music has been in China from the 1950's already, its newest form which resembles more Japanese and South Korean pop, isn't that old yet. Due to this and the censorship, it is quite difficult to find information about the development.

3 INDUSTRY INTERVIEWS

To supplement the theoretical knowledge of the Asian market presented in the previous chapter I have conducted e-mail interviews to six industry professionals on their experiences in the Asian music market. As a producer at Sugar House Publishing, I had the privilege to interview my seniors Janne Hyöty (appendix 1), Christian Jansson (appendix 2), Johan “Nisse” Nybäck (appendix 3) and Victor Sångfors (appendix 4) from inside the publishing company and also a songwriter previously signed to Warner Chappell, Timo Oiva (appendix 5). Many of their achievements are highly valued in the field of Asian pop, and they could be considered as some of the most prestigious songwriters and producers towards the international markets from Finland.

Through presenting and concluding industry expert’s experiences I want to bring out practical knowledge and words of encouragement regarding the field of A pop writing. It is a big and slow business out there, and it really requires a lot of effort to make it in the industry. But as the interviewees tell you, if you are ready to make that effort, it is very possible to create a career towards Asia from Finland.

All the interviewees presented above were asked for a short description of themselves, highlights of their career, how long they’ve been in the industry and how long did it take to break through to the A-pop market. They were also asked the following questions to which the responses are presented in the subchapter 3.1:

1. What made you interested in Asian pop writing/producing?
2. Is there something you do differently when writing or producing A-pop compared to Western pop?
3. During your career, have you noticed any change in what kind of songs the Asian artists and publishers are looking for? For example, are there more Western influences/references than before?
4. Why do you think Western producers and writers are so highly valued in the Asian music market?

5. Is there any specific benefit in being a writer/producer from Finland? For example, are the Finnish music organizations actively supportive towards Asian music export? Is there something you wish there was more of?

I also had the chance to ask Christian Jansson (appendix 2), for some useful and practical publishing guidelines from the producer's point of view. His insights to these questions are presented in the subchapter 3.2. Also, some valuable information was presented by the CEO of Sugar House Publishing, Ann Slangar (appendix 6) to subchapters 3.2.3 and 3.2.6.

3.1 Songwriter and Producer Experiences

In the very beginning, where I asked the interviewees to introduce themselves and how long it took for the writers to break through to the Asian market, I saw a pattern evolving, which was also confirmed in Jansson's (2019) interview as said to him also by Janne Hyöty. On average it takes approximately three years to get the first cut, that the interviewees considered to be their breakthrough to the Asian market. Hyöty (2019) mentioned writing probably 100 demos before his first cut. He has been a mentor for many of us starting out as producers, which brings even a greater impact on the requirement of hard work if one aims to become a writer or a producer in the Asian market.

3.1.1 Interest towards Asian pop

For the first question, "What made you interested in Asian pop writing/producing?", the interviewees all had different reasons for how they started writing, but many of them had common reasons why they kept on growing more interested in this specific field of pop writing – it's complexity and wide array of different approaches you can take when making music. Some could even say that they cherish the freedom that writing pop to Asia brings to the producers and writers themselves.

Oiva (2019) pointed out in his answers, that the concept of "A-pop" is huge and cannot be simplified into one big genre:

But I wanna point out that it's a very problematic approach to think that a genre called A-pop exists. It sure as hell doesn't! We should always talk about the specific market and artist to be more accurate and have better results. So in Japan, it's J-Pop (both classic or modern) in Korea K-Pop, in China it's Mando-pop / C-pop. All of these genres and styles have differences that the writer should take in to account. I think you get my point...like if a Japanese writer would say Western pop and then tries to push the same song for Finnish / French / German market. That wouldn't probably end up as a cut cause the cultures and markets are slightly different. (Oiva 2019.)

In some cases, the genres can cross and a song written to the Korean market will eventually find its way to be released in China with Chinese lyrics, but for example, some very specific J-pop songs with their original J-pop structure and top-lining will probably only find a release in Japan and nowhere else.

3.1.2 Differences between writing Asian pop and Western pop

In the second question "Is there something you do differently when writing or producing A-pop compared to Western pop?", Sågfors (2019) and Jansson (2019) said that they are currently concentrating to the Asian market more than they are to the Western market. Hyöty (2019), Oiva (2019) and Nybäck (2019) told that they are writing for both. Many of the answers concentrated on song structures and top-lines, which the interviewees told can be very different from the Western ones. Oiva (2019) told in his interview, that compared to the common Western 4 bars + 4 bars, "AABA" structure and "and it's normally quite simple and monotonous" (Oiva 2019) top-lines, the ones in Asian pop could be very different. Similar concepts could be used in K-pop for bigger structures, but they might play a lot with the idea by changing keys from major to minor for instance.

Top-lining for J-pop in Oiva's (2019) words, can be even more varied. "But for Japanese market the melodies have much more longer arcs, the melody seems to build longer tensions and it displays the harmonies much more." (Oiva 2019). For C-pop, Oiva (2019) says that he's still learning, since the genre is still the newest of these three countries. He does emphasize on the importance of ballads, that are in great demand in China. He mentions that melodramatic musicals and Disney soundtracks might point a direction for what you want to aim for. In short, he says "big emotions" (Oiva 2019).

Another perspective on the top-lining is brought up by Hyöty (2019), as he mentions that the top-line should be constructed to fit Asian languages.

From the producer's perspective, Jansson (2019) elaborated on some very great points. When it comes to production in the Western music market, he feels like many times it is better to play safe, instead of thinking outside of the box and daring to do something different, what is often encouraged. "You still only have to check out the current charts at any given time to see that statements like that often times are quite heavily exaggerated." (Jansson 2019). He also mentions that the business differences between East and West make the approach different. In the West the artists usually have a bigger say in their image and music for better or worse, while in the East, record labels and A&R:s are the main factor to decide what their artists should release:

They actively encourage you, as a producer and writer to present them with your vision, in the form of the demos you do, for how their artists should sound for their next release etc. So whenever I start a new song aimed for an Asian artist – whether it being written for a specific lead from a sub-publisher or label, or starting from a completely blank canvas, I feel as if I, as a writer and producer, have some input and an opportunity to show the labels what I think they should do next. (Jansson 2019.)

Other things that Jansson (2019) points out, are the practical aspects of the songs. Many groups and artists feature dance choreographies in their music videos and live performances. These might affect the song structure, as the writers and producers are sometimes expected to create deliberate parts to the song to meet the needs of the performance. He also mentions the differences between K-pop and J-pop. In some boy bands, you have to take account all the different members in the group. In J-pop for instance, the group might include multiple dancers or performers alongside the singers, and for them you have to emphasize on the "dance part" to make it work for the artist. (Jansson 2019.) To my knowledge, in K-pop on the other hand, a rap part is very often required for those bands that includes a member who is mainly a rapper. It is also very considerate, if you take account some of the other traits of the band, for example if the group has 9 great singers in it, it would be preferred to make a lot of harmonies and

adlibs with the vocals and make sure that there's room for all the members to have their moment to shine in the performance of the song.

As an additional question pointed to Christian Jansson, I wanted to learn from his own experience about a song that got released in China in November 2018, "I Need a Doctor" by NINE PERCENT, which he produced. In the chapter 2.3 regarding China, I briefly mentioned the monitoring of media, such as lyrics. Out of curiosity, I wanted to see what the lyrics were about for this particular song. To my surprise, they are quite political, about the climate situation and pollution in China, mentioning "greenhouse effect", "even breathing is difficult", "how can I be outside the door", all this finally leading to the hook "I need a doctor".

The song was written in collaboration with a South Korean writer duo and was initially aimed to the Korean market in November 2017 but found its way to the debut album "To The Nines" by NINE PERCENT. Once it got cut, Jansson (2019) says that the lyrics were translated or remade from the Korean ones, but unfortunately he wasn't informed about the context of the Korean lyrics to clarify if the theme of the song was the same in both languages, or if the lyrics were tailored for the Chinese market later on. (Jansson 2019.)

3.1.3 Changes in the Asian pop towards Western pop

For the third question "During your career, have you noticed any change in what kind of songs the Asian artists and publishers are looking for? For example, are there more Western influences/references than before?", I wanted to find out if the producers themselves feel like the industry has changed in regards what kind of songs are wanted by the publishers and labels in Asia. As a genuine fan of the variety of different styles in Asian pop music, I was concerned if the Asian pop has seen change toward a more homogenous field in music. But according to the answers I got, my concerns were found unnecessary.

Hyöty (2019) has been in the business for the longest and said that in J-pop he feels like the demand for certain kinds of songs has stayed very similar throughout the years regarding top-lines and melodies. He and Sångfors (2019) both say

that of course Asia follows global trends as any other country would but emphasize the way that Japan has sustained its own domestic style.

Nybäck (2019) and Jansson (2019) also bring up interesting points of view, where they say that:

The western influence is evident, but I feel that there's usually a lag regarding the A-pop market picking up the trends from the west, which is positive thing for a western writer/producer competing on the Asian market. (Nybäck 2019.)

Even though a lot of Western writers have helped shaping the modern J-Pop for the past 25 years or so, it's always been the foreign writers adapting to the J-Pop, rather than the other way around. Most of, I dare to say all current Top 40 songs on any given Western music chart would never work out in Japan. Their trends, and their references are almost exclusively domestic. (Jansson 2019.)

Hyöty (2019), Oiva (2019) and Jansson (2019) agreed on the fact, that in Korea, the influence might even work the other way around. They point out that now that K-pop has become a global phenomenon through such acts as BTS and BLACK-PINK, they have made their way to influence the Western pop scene also. Without question, Western influences are found in K-pop, but instead of being following the trends without questions, K-pop is should be considered as a trendsetter rather than a trend-follower.

Jansson (2019) points out that when looking at the Billboard charts for all of these countries, Japan, South Korea and China are in some manners far more domestic than many of the Western countries. "So, while trends certainly can play a part as a reference when looking for new songs for example, a K-Pop song still very much has to be a K-Pop song to get cut and be successful." (Jansson 2019). Compared to Finland's top 20 (International Federation of Phonographic Industries 2019), where the album and single lists consists of multiple international releases, in South Korea there could be none even in the top 100 (Billboard 2019b).

3.1.4 Western producers' market value

One of the main points the interviewees made regarding the fourth question “Why do you think Western producers and writers are so highly valued in the Asian music market?”, was the quality of the western producers. Western and especially Nordic producers are highly valued for their input to the Asian pop scene. Jansson (2019) points out that the modern K-pop scene was created from scratch in a fairly short amount of time, so it was probably natural to ask the expertise from already established pop scenes around the world, such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Sweden. As Sångfors (2019) and Hyöty (2019) point out, it is also very logical to ask western producers if they aim to infuse western influences into the songs in the making. Nybäck (2019) says that the fact that western producers are brought up in a different culture, they might bring something new to the table with less effort. This is also enforced with Hyöty's (2019) idea, that mixing western and Asian writers and ideas might be the perfect mix, with the perfect end result.

Oiva (2019) says that there might have been a gap between the producers from the west and Asia, where the western producers had been technically ahead, but it has narrowed down tremendously in the past 5-10 years. He also believes that the supply and demand of writers and producers will change in the near future, because of all the talented writers and producers in Asia. Oiva (2019) points out, that this will tighten the competition even further.

Jansson (2019) points out also some cultural and personality aspects that we share as Nordic people with the Asian culture:

Furthermore, I also believe that the fact we seem to share a lot of common traits with many Asian people, especially maybe us Nordic people, certainly helps. We work hard and are focus-minded, let the work do the talking rather than unnecessary small-talking. A yes means a yes to us both, a promise is a promise, and a deadline is a deadline. Lots of mutual trust. (Jansson 2019.)

3.1.5 Benefits of being a Finnish producer/songwriter

The 5th question “Is there any specific benefit in being a writer/producer from Finland? For example, are the Finnish music organizations actively supportive towards Asian music export? Is there something you wish there was more of?” was aimed to find out, what kind of support Finland gives to those who aim to the Asian market, and is it enough? And as a clear medium of these answers, Music Finland is kept in very high regard and is supportive for the producers and writers. Music Finland organizes annual camps like A-pop Castle, which has been a great opportunity for some of the interviewees. Music Finland brings Asian writers and producers to Finland for the camp, and writers from Finland get a chance to work directly with the ones from Asia, with the Asian publishers on set, which can be very beneficial for both parties. (Hyöty 2019; Jansson 2019; Nybäck 2019; Sågfors 2019.)

The work that Music Finland has done to improve the exports to Asia, has been irreplaceable for some of the writers. Oiva (2019) thinks, that without the help from Music Finland, “he wouldn’t have his career at all” (Oiva 2019).

Jansson (2019) participated in a joint trade mission organized by Music Finland and Music Export Sweden in November 2018 to Seoul, South Korea. They had many meetings with many different music businesses. The trip gave a clear impression, that Music Finland are keen on building up a great relationship with the Asian businesses. He also mentions that the fact that since Finland is a small country, it is fairly easy to approach Music Finland and Teosto personally, compared to maybe some countries with a much larger music business, like the United States and the United Kingdom.

Sågfors (2019) and Oiva (2019) pointed out some things that could benefit from more attention. Sågfors (2019) says that in his experience, the recognition given to the producers and writers who have had success in Asia might get out shadowed by domestic and other achievements. Oiva (2019) had some development philosophy to share regarding what the Finnish music business should try to achieve next:

I was pleasantly surprised about the fact Music Finland had connected with Business Finland to see whether there's some support we music exporters could get. And the music business should hook up with some other cool companies to find some support for music export. (Oiva 2019.)

Oiva (2019) also had an interesting thought, that is rooted to the Finnish music roots of "iskelmä", also known as schlager. Since it traditionally has a distinctive melancholic feel to it melody- and harmony-wise, it could be easier for Finnish writers to use the same melancholic feel towards Asian songs. Ballads in minor key with a hint of schlager could be easier to approach for us than they are for British writers for example. He also emphasizes our location as a country, by mentioning that there are many great names in K-pop and J-pop writing in Sweden which is only a one-hour-flight away. It would be a great chance to get to work and meet with people, and "learn from the best", as Oiva (2019) says.

3.2 Practical guidelines

The additional questions presented to Christian Jansson (appendix 2) and Ann Slangar (appendix 5) were aimed to gather information from the publisher's perspective to provide practical guidelines for the songwriters and producers. They gave their perspective on some of the matters that would give the songwriters and producers a better foundation to start building their career towards Asian pop music, and to give a general idea how the business works on the publishing side.

3.2.1 Where to start?

In the first question, "What's the first thing a new producer/songwriter should concentrate on when trying to get to the Asian market?", Jansson (2019) made the most important fact simple and clear – listen to Asian pop. Like mentioned in the previous parts of the interviews, there's a lot of freedom and own perspective that can be brought to Asian pop, but like it was also mentioned that the markets are very domestic, it could be futile to "force" western influences to the Asian markets without a good reason. By listening to all the different kinds of music there are and being on track of all the groups and artists and their music, will give you a broad understanding of what works, what has been done and what you could do. (Jansson 2019.)

In addition to what Jansson said, even such basics as knowing what song titles are already made into a K-pop song for instance, could work while writing new material for some artists. In some cases, it could be even considered inconsiderate to offer a song for an artist who already has a song with the same title. Jansson (2019) says that you should give it time to understand the Asian music scene in a wider scale – it is good to be patient when trying to learn all the differences and new methods compared to the western pop scene.

3.2.2 Best methods to make cuts

In the second question I gave some options for Jansson to choose from, considering the cut rates of songs that are created using different methods. Songs can be made in many different occasions. Some of them are done home all by yourself, some at songwriting camps with talented co-writers. Some of them could be sent directly to a lead received from the publisher, others might stay in the back catalogue for years and years. Here's how Jansson (2019) rated all the options I gave him, with some of his insight added in the clauses:

1. Songs written directly for artists (assuming the artist is participating in the writing)
2. Songs written at co-write camps (as there's usually label representatives/A&R's/decision makers at camps too, giving briefs etc.)
3. Songs written as online co writes
4. Songs written directly to a lead
5. Songs from the catalogues

There is a pattern to be caught here: if it is possible, don't work alone on all of the occasions. Co-writes and camps should be considered as one of the biggest opportunities to participate in, so it would be good to try to find out all the different possibilities that there are available for you to participate in them, and to expand the roster of people that are also interested in writing pop to Asia near you.

3.2.3 Royalties

The third question “Are you aware if there’s any transaction of royalties from Asian streaming services (i.e. Melon and Kakao in South Korea or QQ Music and KuGou in China) to the publishers and songwriters?”, was about royalties, especially about streaming. The royalties can vary between different countries and contracts between publishers and labels. Jansson (2019) points out that there are some general guidelines they follow. Labels in China often pay a “mechanical royalty advance”, that is an initial estimate of the royalties for the first period after the release of the song. If the song exceeds the estimates by becoming a bigger hit, and the sales and streams are bigger than estimated, the publishers and the writers should theoretically be paid royalties according to standard rates after that. (Jansson 2019.) The implication that the added “theoretically” gives, is that this might not apply to all situations. Logically thinking, when it comes to new artists or groups, for their debut singles or albums, it might be very difficult to make correct estimates for the royalty advances.

Japan and Korea don’t pay mechanical royalty advances, according to Slangar (2019). In Japan, the labels pay the Japanese publishers – or sub-publishers as they are to us working from different countries – the mechanical royalties from physical and streamed content. Without a sub-publisher in Japan, the mechanical royalties could possibly never reach the songwriter. These also apply to Korea. To Slangar’s (2019) knowledge, China is still a changing market. With growing international co-writes for Finnish writers, it remains to be seen how well the performance royalties through societies will be collected. For now, there’s little information outside the mechanical royalty advances.

3.2.4 Networking

To “What are the best events to expand your contacts in, to get to know more topliners, producers, publishers and relevant people to proceed further on your career?” Jansson (2019) says that for those who are published, they should of course first start with the network that the publisher has built over many years. There are many great people to work with within the same publishing company,

but you could also find people from different publishing companies through your own publisher.

He also again emphasizes the value in songwriting camps, because they usually gather many talented people together, and you could also work with them in the future. For instance, in my own experience, I have written with people whom I've met in the Song Hotel camp organized by Music Finland and Top 20 Future Hit-makers course organized by Teosto.

For unsigned producers and writers, Jansson (2019) gives a simple yet demanding answer – “be active”. Going to events and reaching out to people online will make it more likely for you to go get to work with them. (Jansson 2019.) This is how I got interested in the business in the first place, as I participated in an event called Europe Asia Roundtable Sessions – or EARS for short – in 2016. There I met Timo Oiva, who introduced me to the whole Finnish A-pop scene and became my first co-write partner with whom I got my songs pitched to Asia for the first time. He was also the one who introduced me to Sugar House Publishing, which eventually led to signing a publishing contract. This all happened because I participated in the event and talked to people. So, to enforce Jansson's (2019) statements – be active and talk to people.

3.2.5 Steady income?

With the fifth question “How many singles/cuts a year would create a steady income when making music to the Asian market?”, I wanted to find out facts about the financial side of the Asian pop business as a producer. To no surprise, it's hard to find any cohesive information of this, because the financial aspects are always dependent on many factors, as Jansson (2019) points out:

It depends a lot on what sort of cuts we're talking about – album songs or A-side singles? What sort of artist? BTS or a tiny Malaysian YouTuber? Will the song/album top the Billboard charts worldwide and sell in amounts of millions, or will it only be available to a limited audience? Labels who pay will obviously have this in mind. (Jansson 2019.)

He says that there isn't any exact number or clear answer to this, as it seems to be all around the world in the music business. He points out some things that might give some perspective. Your share on the song of course matters, if it's done by just two writers or by multiple. If you have also produced it and the label ends up buying your production for the release, in Jansson's (2019) words this can be considered as "a big bonus, speaking in economic terms". He clears the economics a bit, with saying that a cut in Asia can be anything from a couple hundreds of euros to several thousand, all depending on the multiple factors of which some are mentioned above.

3.2.6 Publishing contract

The sixth question was "What are the main benefits of having a publisher when writing music to Asia, or is it even possible to do so without a publisher?". I've had many discussions about this subject with my friends who work as songwriters and they have deliberately remained unsigned. In a music market of the Finnish scale or even some cases to other European areas, it is very possible to advance without having a publishing contract. In many cases, a song-by-song deal is signed to make the song published even though the writer might not be under a contract. This also offers flexibility for many writers, but for Asian markets it might be more efficient to aim for a publishing contract.

I started to wonder, could it even be possible to work your way through to the Asian market without a publisher. Jansson (2019) answered to this with a simple, short "no". He suggests people to look for a publisher in this field of the business. It brings possibilities like being able to apply to some songwriting camps, that could be much more difficult without a publisher. (Jansson 2019.) It also immediately expands your network, which was also brought up in the previous answers. Such basic things as receiving leads and pitching songs could prove to be really difficult without being published.

Slangar (2019) pointed out something even more crucial. Most of the Asian countries won't work with producers or songwriters who are not published or a sub-published. With all the auxiliary benefits like the expanded network and possibility to apply to some songwriting camps, the most crucial part for the publishers and

sub-publishers is handling the contracts for every song and every country, taxation contracts and regulations, which can be very difficult for independent writers to handle on their own.

4 BREAKDOWN OF SONGS

In this chapter I will present four songs, which I have made to the Asian market between the years of 2018-2019. I go through each track separately, in chronological order to demonstrate what I have learned from each process and how my thinking has evolved. From each track I present the background, the detailed process of making it and discuss the central remarks made about the Asian music market during each process. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed description of the process of making a song to Asian market and to highlight the special characteristics it brings to the process.

For each song, I wanted to bring out a certain issue or mentality that I faced in the process of making the song. “Bungee” was the first song I’ve finished to the Korean market during my career, and I took a “stereotypic” K-pop approach when making it. With the song “UNFAIR”, I faced troubles with the language barrier, in the vocal editing and mixing phase. In “The Heart Will Find A Way”, I wanted to emphasize the need for compositional and orchestrational knowledge to have the greatest number of tools available while working on a traditional ballad, which also pointed out that there is still much to learn for me in using them all. Made My Day was a song with a long way finding a top-line for it due to preferences and schedules, so I ended up working on it with a friend who had never worked on Asian pop before.

4.1 Bungee

Bungee was the first track I finished after starting my internship at Sugar House Publishing (SHP) in February 2018. It was first aimed for a lead received from a South Korean publishing company, for a fairly new K-pop boy group. Even though it didn’t end up selected to the lead it was made for in the first place, it has received some great traction in South Korea and China and could be considered as my most interesting song thus far, since it has been on hold for a few times.

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, I have listened to some K-pop throughout the years, but it wasn’t until 2018 when I finally started to pay more

attention to it and analyze it. When I started working on this particular track, my understanding of the whole genre was still developing. That's why this track for me, was a "stereotype" of what I thought could work for a K-pop boy group: energetic, edgy, very rhythmic and sometimes even dramatic with the chord progressions, which took inspiration from the works of baroque era compositions.

The lead we received for this particular artist, introduced some reference songs, that were really edgy, and they were clearly hoping for a significant amount of rap in the songs too. Thus, I picked up a fairly fast tempo of 182 bpm, which falls right into the approximate 90 bpm area when played half tempo, as in popular rap music.

In one of the references I heard a guitar riff with heavy distortion, so I wanted that to be my starting point. I started to jam with the guitar, and after a while I found a fairly simple riff that I liked so I started to work around that. To get the rap elements cohesive throughout the track, I wanted something very traditional in the rap scene, which was the 808 bass line, which has been very widely used in the rap since the 90's. The 808 in addition to the distorted guitar riff already gave a solid foundation to build on.

Since this track was aimed for a huge group in the K-pop scene, the feeling had to support that too. I tried to emphasise on the energy by adding claps and big booms, constantly trying to image if the track could get me excited if I heard it live on a stadium with 30,000 other people.

As a drummer, the beat is the most important thing to me. It has to keep you moving and make you feel like you want to dance. For this, I searched for percussive elements, loops and samples that I would use to create my own loops from. I found a loop from Splice that really gave a good groove for the whole track. It had to be modified to fit the track, since the original tempo of the loop was 130. It also had too much reverb and was taking too much space in this tempo, so I used probably the most important tool of this whole song, Native Instruments Transient Master (picture 1).



PICTURE 1. Native Instruments Transient Master (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

The reason why this plugin became the most used plugin throughout this project, was because the tempo was so fast. In tempos around 182 bpm, there isn't much room for reverbs and the general feeling of space for the percussive elements. In order to get the transients clear and cut out the sustain of all percussive elements, this plugin did the job amazingly. All of that would just take space away from the vocals, which is the main thing needed to sell the song to an artist or a publisher.

The first verse is pretty straight forward, leaning towards the beat more than any melodic or harmonic elements. In the second one, I had the need to make a variation of some sort. As mentioned earlier, this was my stereotypic view of K-pop, and I had the common concept that second verse often varies from the first verse to keep it more interesting.

With this in mind, I added more melodic elements and some harmonic variation. The first big change in the first half of the second verse, is that I stripped down the 808 bass line, and used a higher tone from another bass drum sample to give it a totally different feeling. I also added a weird syncopated and out of tune melody with a bell instrument sampled in Omnisphere, which I also ended up using in the outro of the song.

For the second half of the second verse, I used the 808 again, bringing it back to a more familiar feeling, but instead of making it fully familiar, I visited the IV degree chord Bb, which almost gave it the same feeling as in blues, which fit perfectly the rock'n'roll vibe that was subliminally constant throughout the song.

I realized that the pre-chorus should be the part with more singing than rapping, so it was an easy choice to make it more harmonic, adding chords and melodies to it. This was again a product of my stereotypical K-pop thinking. The production in it almost resembles the basic EDM pre-chorus, with risers and sweep effects and rising snare rolls.

In the chorus I actually went back to the same vibe as the verses. I had a vocal melody of some sort in my mind, and it was a mixture of rap and singing so I thought that it would make perfect sense to keep it kind of stripped down, but really intense. A major difference to the verses, is that there's a wide stereo panned breathing sample, that makes you feel almost intimate. It is a trick that I've heard used often times in the productions of Pharrell for example. One other element that really made the difference in the chorus, was a sample taken from a reverb flooded background synth in the pre-chorus, and then taking a short clip of it and looping it through the whole chorus. It isn't loud at all, on the first listening you might not even pay attention to it, but when you mute it you can clearly hear that it alone creates the tonal atmosphere to the otherwise stripped-down chorus.

The middle 8 is usually the part where you want to take the listener to a different feeling. I went for something big and epic. I also wanted the transition from the middle 8 back to the chorus to be as dramatic as possible, so I tried to get elements from classical music to it. After playing around with some chord progressions, I found a progression that reminded me of Bach and his compositions. It introduces a lament bass figure, which is seen for example in this piece by Bach (picture 2).



PICTURE 2. Passacaglia ground bass in Bach's Crucifixus from the Mass in B minor, based on the first choral movement of his 1714 cantata *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen*, BWV 12 (Blatter 2007, 240)

The progression I ended up with (picture 3) has similarities, of course the key and time signature differ. The progression doesn't contain a pure lament bass figure, since it jumps from Bb to Ab between the first two chords, but after that it follows the structure.



PICTURE 3. Middle 8 chord progression for the song *Bungee* (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

After finishing the track, SHP sent it to South Korea for a possible online co-write to get a local songwriting group to write the top-line for it. After some while, I received a large vocal pack from a South Korean writer trio. There were 17 tracks in total, so first there was quite some editing to be done before starting to mix. I used Melodyne and Logic X's own Flex Pitch for the pitch correction and quantization. For all the vocals, I had a pretty strict mentality for not leaving much room for vibrato or any variation in the tune. Some natural vibe was left for the lead vocals occasionally, but the background vocals were really strictly tuned. Later I

wish I'd done everything with Melodyne, instead for just the lead vocals, since it is a much better tool for vocal editing and I'm sure I could have done a better job by using it. But since the Flex Pitch is integrated in Logic itself, it was a faster tool to use back then.

When it was time to mix, I made busses for Lead Vocals, Doubles, Low Stems, High Stems and Ad Libs. It made the workflow easier to handle them in groups, and also easier to use the same processing for the groups in the bus, which also lets you use less plugins on individual tracks. After this, I created a VCA track for the busses, so I could have a "Vocal Master" fader for the final adjustments before the mastering.

Lead vocals went through first Logic's own channel EQ (picture 4). I used a low cut at 250Hz, since the vocals were very high pitched on the lead track. This made the vocal track more cohesive and less boomy. After the EQ I added a bit of distortion with Logic's own Overdrive plugin. When opening the tone knob all the way to 20kHz, this plugin gives a great boost to the higher frequencies, making the sound a bit airier. After the distortion, I used a compressor and the OTT plugin to really make the lead vocals tight. These also made some irritating frequencies pop out, especially on the sibilances. So, I took two Waves C1 dynamic EQ's to take care of those, one at around 6kHz and the other around 11kHz, to cut out frequencies that made the vocal track sound annoying at certain points of the song. At the end of the lead vocal chain, I used an API-2500 stereo compressor. It has a preset called 'Backing Vox', which really squashes the dynamic range and makes it cohesive throughout the song. I figured that this would make it sound a lot better especially in the rap parts, since every syllable would be essentially on the same level.



PICTURE 4. Logic's own channel EQ for the Lead Vocals (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

For send automation and effects, I used a small reverb on the singing parts of the chorus, while the rap parts I kept completely dry. This again for the same reason as for the percussive elements – in such a fast tempo, reverb would only confuse the listener and take concentration away from the transients which create the flow. For the pre-chorus I created an own huge reverb, with a decay time of 4.19 seconds. In this part there isn't a constant beat or rhythm on the background and the vocals also ease down a little bit, so there's actually quite a lot of room for such a reverb, but it is still fairly low in the mix since there's also a lot of vocal harmonies that need space. I also automated a vintage 1/4th note delay to emphasize the endings of the sentences and to fill out the space between the phrases.

For the doubles, I wanted them to sound thin, so they wouldn't take too much space in the mix. I cut everything below 255Hz and also used the Overdrive plugin to give some distortion but left the tone button at 980Hz to make them sound dark. To make them super wide, I used iZotope's Ozone Imager as a widener (picture 5). Setting all the parameters to full makes it really weird and uneasy to listen to on its own, but they really make the vocals sound very wide when used on the doubles.



PICTURE 5. iZotope's Ozone Imager (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

For the stems, I actually didn't use anything else than panning and editing. In the end all vocals went to a stereo bus that had an iZotope Ozone mastering chain and once again, an API-2500 stereo compressor for the final squash.

I mixed the lead vocals the loudest and stems lower and sent the final mix back to South Korea. They answered really quickly, asking "why are the vocals mixed so badly?". They were wondering where the ad libs were and why the harmonies were almost inaudible. I then realized, that producing a song for a K-pop group is a completely different from a western solo artist. Since the group doesn't have a dedicated lead singer, all of the vocal tracks are supposed to be treated with the same level of respect. I then did another vocal mix, rising all the background vocals and ad libs to an even level with the lead vocals. These changes were what made the difference for the South Korean publisher.

The song didn't make it to the pitch it was initially made for, but it has since been on hold once in South Korea and once in China. It was then retrieved to the catalogue, where it remains still.

4.2 UNFAIR

This track started from a lead for a big boy group in South Korea. This was in April 2018, when I already had a bit of a better understanding for K-pop in general. The lead was asking for something with bad boy attitude and danger, so I went for references that I liked myself, which included songs like 'Monster' and 'Power' from a South Korean boy group 'EXO'.

I set the tempo to 97bpm, and then opened up a VST synth called Serum and searched for the dirtiest bass sounds I could find and ended up finding one that would lay down the foundation for the song. I layered it with a patch from Omnisphere, to give it a smooth low end. Both of these sounds were a bit too messy in the stereo image to begin with, so I ended up bringing them completely mono with Logic's Gain plugin.

In the intro I wanted the bass to fill up the whole space, so I sent the bass from Serum to a long 3.8 second reverb. There's also a rhythmic element, which is a foley sample from a pencil, from which I cut all the transients separately and made them play like a 16th note percussion or a hi-hat pattern. It is paired up with an Omnisphere patch with heavy distortion, to give this constant tonal rhythm that continues almost throughout the whole song. There's also a synth riser to create the atmosphere.

After the intro, the drums kick in for the verse. The beat resembles a rap beat, but since there's more synthetic elements and aggressive bass sounds, it doesn't resemble rap in itself that much. The drum beat consists of a very punchy kick drum, three layers of claps and snares for the snare and some spliced parts of loops from Splice. The 16th note pattern from the intro made with Omnisphere drops down an octave and continues to play throughout the verse. With the help of white noise and risers, the transition to the pre-chorus gets more energy.

In the pre-chorus, I came up with this weird "call and response" pattern with the production. The first half starts with big chords and harmony while the second one is more stripped down and mysterious. The first half has two different pads and a sampled choir to bring out the harmony, and the bass riff that has been

constant since the beginning of the song now changes to a sustained, distorted bass sound, with its high frequencies cut off. Also, the snare sounds change to the first part of the pre-chorus. They are dirtier, but also more reverberated, to make them blend in better to this part. The transition to the second part has a big, fast 1/32th note arpeggio, spread wide with reverb, delay and stereo spreader. I wanted this element to be big, since the transition didn't feel impactful enough with just traditional risers and sweeps.

For the second half of the pre-chorus, all the reverbs drop out, leaving the beat stripped down and very similar to the verse. One of the major differences compared to the verse is that the pre-chorus has a synth pad with a tremolo on it, to create more suspension. It vaguely reminds me of the synths on Justin Timberlake's 'My Love' song. The synth pad really creates a different kind of mood to the pre-chorus - it makes it more mysterious and also dramatic. To emphasize the tremolo effect on the synth, I also added a white noise 'hi-hat' to make the transients and rhythm punchier.

The pattern repeats after the second half of the pre-chorus, with minor changes. The bass does a pitch bend effect and the transition to the second half again is now lead by chromatic bass stabs, after which the second half is again fully stripped down to be similar with the verse. The pre-chorus ends with a break, so that the chorus can kick in with a big impact.

In the chorus, the drum section gets immensely larger, adding layers to the snare, marching drums from Battery 3 to bring in more groove and two hi-hat grooves to bring it a bit of a modern 'trap' vibe. In addition to the synth pads that were introduced in the pre-chorus, the chorus also has a piano and a synth lead to bring some extra push.

The chord progression in the chorus includes an A major as the fourth chord, which is borrowed from the Em-dorian scale. And to create the most tension, I borrowed B-major from the E harmonic minor scale to get the big 5th degree dominant chord to the transition from the chorus to the verse.

For the second verse I wanted a clear variation again. I felt that there could be more groove, maybe even rap in this part so I again went for the classic 808 bass samples to create it. I wanted a really playful and funny groove to it, and finally came up with this descending bass-line, which goes two octaves down, in the E-minor key, revolving around E, C and B. For this part I had to EQ the kick a bit differently, to make more room for the boomy bass from the 808, so I cut off everything below 65Hz. In addition, there's also an hi-hat loop that maintains the 16th note rhythm in this part, but other than that it is very similar to the first verse, although it sounds completely different. After a foley sound effected transition to the pre-chorus, the structure stays the same until the middle 8. I didn't feel the need to change anything in the pre-chorus since it was interesting enough as it was.

The middle 8 started with the synth melody in it. I started playing around with an Omnisphere patch and found this melody that sounded a bit familiar to me. Even until today I haven't been able to figure out why it sounds familiar to me, but I really liked it, so I went with it. Again, for the middle 8, the main goal was to bring the mood to something different. I dropped the beat for the first half to give the track some time to breathe, since the drums have been constantly there since the beginning of the track. The chord progression has similarities to the chorus, starting with Em, going to D major and through a Dsus4 nicely resolving to again the borrowed 4th from the Em-dorian scale, A major. The progression repeats 3 times, and on the fourth it changes smoothly back to the pre-chorus, which leads well back to the last chorus.

I wanted to make the last chorus double in length. The song was only 3:08 minutes long with one chorus at the end, so I felt like doubling the chorus at the end would create more continuity to the song. Since there's no post-chorus effect in the song at all that would create a feeling of continuity to the chorus, this was the best option I had. The structure of the last chorus doesn't differ from the others, except for the transition to the double chorus, there's a bass movement on the B-chord, where the bass moves from the root note B to the third D#. This creates a bit more tension for the transition, while not making the change too

drastic. The second half of the chorus follows the same structure as the first chorus, because I used the base of the second verse as the outro, so the first chorus leads perfectly to that.

Now that the song was finished, it was sent to South Korea, where it started its search for a top-line. Some months later, the vocal tracks finally were sent to me for mixing. In the pack there were all the tracks separately, but they also included a ready mixed vocal stack as a stereo file. In the email they sent, they advised to use the ready mixed stack, but I was first hesitant with this, so I imported the separate tracks to start mixing.

After importing the tracks, I felt a strong need to emphasize some of the words or syllables, since to me it made rhythmical sense to me that the syllables that were at the end of the phrases, would be emphasized with wide backing vocals, while the ones at the beginning of the phrases would be thinner with less vocals. It didn't take me long to realize, that I have neither the training nor the authority to do this, simply because I do not know the language. Imagine if you didn't know any English and were asked to mix and edit the vocals. There's a word, for example 'philosophical', where you feel the rhythmical emphasis on the syllables 'sophic'. It might be a nice production trick, but it could also go terribly wrong, if you don't have the knowledge of the language you're working with. Korean, Japanese and Chinese are logographic languages, and some words written with a single character could include multiple syllables. If you break those syllables in, it could be possible to change the meaning. In most cases these are subjective to the context but should still be kept in mind when working with an unknown language, that mistakes can be done even in the editing phase.

So, to play safe with the language barrier, I went with the ready mixed vocal stack and didn't step out of line by changing the emphasis of the lyrics with the backing vocals, that I couldn't understand.

The song didn't make it to the initial lead since it was finished multiple months after the deadline was expired. It was put to the catalogue, where it remains still.

4.3 The Heart Will Find A Way

This is a very traditional ballad, with modern elements in the production. It started before the very first day of my internship at Sugar House Publishing. I was setting up my equipment to the studio, while talking with Janne Hyöty, my mentor and boss. He mentioned some ongoing leads that were open at Sugar House at that moment. One of them was a traditional Japanese ballad. I had listened to a lot of Japanese movie and game soundtracks recently, from composers like Nobuo Uematsu (Final Fantasy game series) and Joe Hisaishi (Ghibli Studio animations), so I felt fairly confident with the Japanese melody and harmony. In the midst of testing out my new studio room, I started playing the piano and came up with the main melody and chords. After that I let it sit for a while, but later dug the idea up again. I worked a bit more on it for the next week and then invited Hyöty to give his opinion on how the song is working out so far. He came up with excellent ideas how to continue the song, so we started to work on the song together. The first demo was done in my DAW, but we did the final decisions after we changed the project to Hyöty's DAW, which luckily in this case were Logic Pro X.

Ballads are fundamentally very different from the producer's perspective. Usually it feels more relevant to concentrate on sounds and the production of elements and instruments when working on pop or rap for instance, when in ballads it feels more convenient to concentrate on phrases, voicing and orchestration. Not to say that these facts should be neglected while working with pop, but since there's an option to make a simple phrase or a lick sound cool with a well-made synth sound flooded in reverb, in an orchestral ballad, you're very limited to do so unless you are very sure that such an absurd element really fits with all the other, traditional elements of the song.

That is the reason, why learning orchestration and composition for an orchestra is very useful in writing these types of songs. It enlarges the toolbox you can use within the margin of traditional instruments, when you know how you can add certain color with orchestrating the pattern or phrase differently.

The song is in D major. It starts with a short intro, which includes a crescendo and a diminuendo, that leads to the first verse. The crescendo starts with wind

chimes and a piano, doubled with a glockenspiel. Accompanied with a violin section, rising in with a crescendo playing tremolo, the transition grows bigger with the rest of the string section coming in with a staccato pattern going up with the D major scale. The violins work in two octaves, viola is playing divisi of the scale starting from D and F# to give it the harmony in the 3rd, while cello is playing the lower octave of the scale from D. To give the violins support and some air, it is accompanied by the flute, playing the same pattern, one octave higher. There's also an oboe, supporting the harmony from the 3rd, F# to bring more color and support for the harmony. To give some extra punch for the crescendo, there's a timpani crescendo rising from G and dropping to D at the beginning of the diminuendo. And finally, there's a concert bass drum to give the crescendo some accents for the beginning of the diminuendo.

The diminuendo part is a short 2-bar part, that slows down the crescendo and eases the way to the first verse. It includes a violin section playing a tremolo in two octaves, an octave higher than in the crescendo part. At the end of the part, the tremolo violin does a short melody line to bring the lead violin in for the verse more smoothly. There are also long sustained notes with cello and contrabass, playing D in octaves. To give them a bit more beef, it is also doubled by a French horn and a tuba, also in octaves. Piano and the glockenspiel are playing an arpeggiated pattern, following the scale as a Dsus2 chord. After this pattern, the verse starts.

The first part of the verse is very stripped down. It seemed like the best option after the intro, which calms down at the diminuendo. As a foundation for the verse, I used the piano riff that initially started the whole song, the pattern I was playing on the first day at the new studio. There's also a contrabass pizzicato keeping the rhythm underneath the piano. I also added solo violin, which playing a melody on the background. This for me created a classic ballad setting, with the vocals in front and a crying violin lead on the back.

The second part of the first verse continues the same, while adding some extra layers on top. One of them is a slightly arpeggiated violin pizzicato melody, which is doubled with a glockenspiel. The glockenspiel helps to give the melody some

clarity, since the violin pizzicatos created with an violin ensemble VST can sometimes be a bit messy. The piano chords are doubled with a viola section, which is also helped by a cello, occasionally playing different sustained notes from the chords. In the first version that I made, I didn't add any drums to it, but for the final version Hyöty added a dark, reverberated kick and snare to the background to give the second part of the verse a bit more boost, which also eased the change to the pre-chorus.

The pre-chorus is a very uplifting part. The chord progression changes to Em - A/C# - D - D/C - G/B - Gm6/Bb - Gmaj7/A - A7/9. As a huge rhythmic foundation, I used some cinematic drum samples to give the pre-chorus the epic feeling it needs.

The piano is playing a strong, 1/4th note pattern to give a steady rhythm for the pre-chorus. It also introduces some tiny melodic elements with the topmost note of the chord, varying from time to time to make the progression a bit more interesting even on its own. The string section is playing a 1/16th note pattern accenting the first of every second 1/16th note. The contrabass following the bass notes on the piano, which is featuring a lament bass pattern going down from C to A chromatically. This is the same pattern I used in the song "Bungee", but this time the pattern was Hyöty's creation. The cello is following different notes of the chords. It goes G - A - F# - F# - G - Bb - D and in the last bar of the pre-chorus it makes a short pattern going down to C# and through D to E just before the chorus starts. The viola staccato is following the chord pattern playing the root note and the 3rd of a chord for some chords and the 3rd and the 5th for others. It also follows the highlighted parts of the melody-line that's happening in the piano.

The violins are playing long sustained notes instead of staccato, but its pattern is very similar to the one of the violas. For some chords, the voicing changes a tiny bit. For this decision, I have to say that it could have been done better, since the violas and the violins are now playing around the same register, which is more favorable for the violin than the viola. It would be better to use a different, lower voicing for the viola, or make the pattern be played by the 2nd violin section to orchestrate it better. The pre-chorus transitions to the chorus with wind chimes, a cymbal crescendo and a fill with an acoustic drum kit from Logic Pro X.

In the chorus (picture 6), piano plays through the chord progression with long sustained notes, differentiating from it only when there's a chord change within the bar. The voicing is also very basic, trying to keep the movements between the chords as minimal as possible. The bass is also trying to keep minimal movements, so it varies in voicing if it's playing the root note, the 3rd or the 5th, sometimes even a 7th or a 9th.



PICTURE 6. Chorus chord progression for the song The Heart Will Find A Way (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

The string ensemble is following the same voicing, excluding the bass. This decision seems a bit lazy now to think of it, since the voicing is really clustered, which means that from this octave it would be best played by violas with a divisi of 3. That could have been done better, by voicing something an octave down to the cello, so the violas would now only have to split in two groups, each playing one note. Although this pattern is created by using VSTs and sample libraries with an unlimited amount of viola players, it is better to think of these choices as they were real players in your studio. This makes all of the orchestration choices sound more realistic, even from the smallest details. For example, one of them would be to consider, how long it takes a string instrument player to change from legato to pizzicato. They cannot immediately switch, because it requires a different grip for the bow. If you keep all the small details in mind, the end product will result sounding more realistic. And in the dream scenario, when the song gets cut and will be performed live with actual players, you can take credit and pride for the job you did orchestrating and arranging the piece.



PICTURE 7. Chorus violin melody for the song *The Heart Will Find A Way* (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

The violins (picture 7) are playing a sustained two voiced melody-line, which is probably the most important instrumental part of the chorus. When put on mute, it feels like there's nothing in the chorus, except for a dull piano playing the chords like in any normal pop ballad. And that's exactly why the violin melody-line was created. Of course, there would be also vocals in the chorus, but even the instrumental of the chorus has to convey some emotions, so that the one writing the top-line and lyrics will get a better image of how the song pans out emotionally.

Janne Hyöty recorded a bass track and two acoustic guitar tracks to the chorus. The guitars are strumming the chords with a free, laidback feel. The rhythmic patterns vary between the tracks, which creates a wide stereo field to the chorus. The wide airy acoustic guitars are a common thing to do when trying to create a wide feeling to a part of a song, since the gentle transients of the acoustic guitars are not too bright to take all the attention to the sides, but still gives the listener a wider image. The bass was recorded straight through the interface. Since Hyöty is an established guitar player and very familiar with music theory, it didn't take long for him to figure out an interesting bass-line, which follows the bass notes of the piano, but moves within them. Since it is the primary source of bass in the chorus, the sub frequencies of it had to be boosted to create a solid low end for it to fill out the whole bass area. To boost the sub, I used a plugin from Brainworx called `bx_subfilter` (picture 8). With this plugin I was able to find a lot of low end. In a sense, it saved me from having to add a virtual synth with a basic sine wave to add an extra octave below the initial one.



PICTURE 8. Brainworx plugin – bx_subfilter (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

The drum section is a pretty standard one. I used the Drum Kit Designer from Logic Pro X, since its interface is easy and fast to use. I didn't consider them to be good enough for the final version, so I didn't pay too much attention on the sounds and as expected, the samples were replaced in the final version with Hyöty's sample libraries. I had originally used a ride cymbal for the chorus, but it was replaced with a hi-hat.

Hyöty also added some virtual synthesizers to the chorus. There's a soft synth pad playing the same chords as the piano. He also added an arpeggiated synth, which really grabs your attention in the chorus. Like I mentioned in the beginning of this song's breakdown section, adding synthesis to a traditional ballad can be tricky, but in this case, I think it went really well. The pattern could be played with traditional instruments like the woodwinds, like a flute or an oboe for example. But knowing that the pattern is quite fast and leaves no room to breathe, it would sound very different when made humane for the woodwinds to play. When played with a synthesizer, it is normal for it to sound inhumane, which also means that it can play the pattern like a machine. In this particular setting, it fits really well since the drums sound very humane and the violins are also a very organic sounding instrument.

The chorus ends with a cymbal crescendo and is followed by the piano pattern from the verse as an interlude before the second verse starts. In the interlude, the bass guitar from the chorus plays a tiny lick underneath the piano pattern and

then continues to play in the 2nd verse. The violin from the verse is also brought back for the interlude. To keep the rhythm intact, Hyöty added some heavily delayed claps. It is also supported by a filtered, ready-made loop from one of his sample packs, playing 1/8 notes on the snare with rods, which also continues to the 2nd verse without the filter on. The chimes lead the way to the 2nd chorus again, with the help of a drum fill.

The 2nd verse is only half of the length compared to the 1st verse, which made it an easy choice to have more elements in it since the very beginning, because there isn't that much time to let it grow bigger. The biggest differences compared to the 1st verse are the drums and the bass. The drums are really prominent compared to the second half of the 1st verse, where they were really filtered down and behind the other instruments.

The bass was first recorded as long sustained notes, but after the drum beat started to develop further, Hyöty and I realized that the long-sustained notes doesn't fit the groove anymore. Instead of recording them again, we just trimmed the ends of the notes to match the rhythm of the kick and snare drum better. This decision was made just for convenience. Sometimes the instruments aren't available at the moment, the recording would take time and the end result doesn't actually differ that much that it would actually be worth it. While working on songs with deadlines, it is crucial to make everything as convenient and quick as possible, but of course not compromising the end result.

The 2nd pre-chorus is also slightly more massive than the 1st one. For the 2nd pre-chorus, we also recorded the bass guitar, to give it a more cohesive low end. Also, the delayed claps and the 1/8 note snare loop from the 2nd verse were added to the 2nd pre-chorus, since dropping them out felt like something essential was missing, when listening the parts back and forth. On the second last bar of the pre-chorus, the kick drum comes in playing straight 1/4ths to ease the way in for the big drum fill that gets us right back at the 2nd chorus, which is exactly the same as the 1st chorus was.

After the 2nd chorus, we are led to the middle 8. As it has become more of a rule than an exception, the middle 8 is a part where we try to take the listener to a different feeling than the rest of the song. One impactful way to do it, is to transpose it to a different key, which is what we did here. It changes from D major to F major or more precisely to its relative minor, which is Dm (picture 9).



PICTURE 9. Middle 8 chord progression for the song The Heart Will Find A Way (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

Since the harmony in the song is overall quite rich, the transposition doesn't sound drastic at all. In some cases, if the song was played through with only three or four different chords, such key changes would be very notable and drastic even, but in this case, it feels like it is just a continuum to the diverse array of chords used in the song. For me the chord progression brought a determined, hopeful feeling to the song, which I wanted to emphasize even more with other instruments.

The brass instruments – the French horn and the tuba – that were briefly introduced in the intro of the song, are now brought back. The brass instruments can make a really majestic feel when placed correctly, and that majestic feel fit perfectly with the determination and hopefulness of the middle 8 (picture 10).

PICTURE 10. Middle 8 tuba and french horn notation for the song The Heart Will Find A Way (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

The French horn is playing a two voiced pattern, which follows the piano's voicing through the whole part. Tuba is merely doubling the left-hand bass notes of what the piano is playing, with sustained long notes.

For the drum section, I wanted to even further emphasize the determined and majestic feel (picture 11). For me, nothing screams more determined than a military marching drum section. I have myself played in a military marching band, so creating suitable snare drum patterns with VSTs was quite simple. It was also possible to record my own snare drum, but for the same reason as we didn't start re-recording the bass to correct tiny nuances in the delivery of that track, I found it a lot more convenient and faster to use VSTs to create the snare drum patterns.

PICTURE 11. Middle 8 marching band notation for the song The Heart Will Find A Way (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

The string section plays a staccato pattern which follows the snare drum pattern, excluding the flams and tremolos, but keeping the same accents. The violas and violins play the triads, with varying voicing, mainly keeping the movements as small as possible. The cello follows the left hand of the piano, on the same octave. For convenience, I used Native Instruments Session Strings Pro on Animator mode (picture 12) for the staccato patterns on this song. It is the most simple thing to do, since I can just copy the same midi information from the piano track to the strings and the Animator mode will create the articulation for it, and since the articulation I used is a fairly simple one, it was as one of the presets.

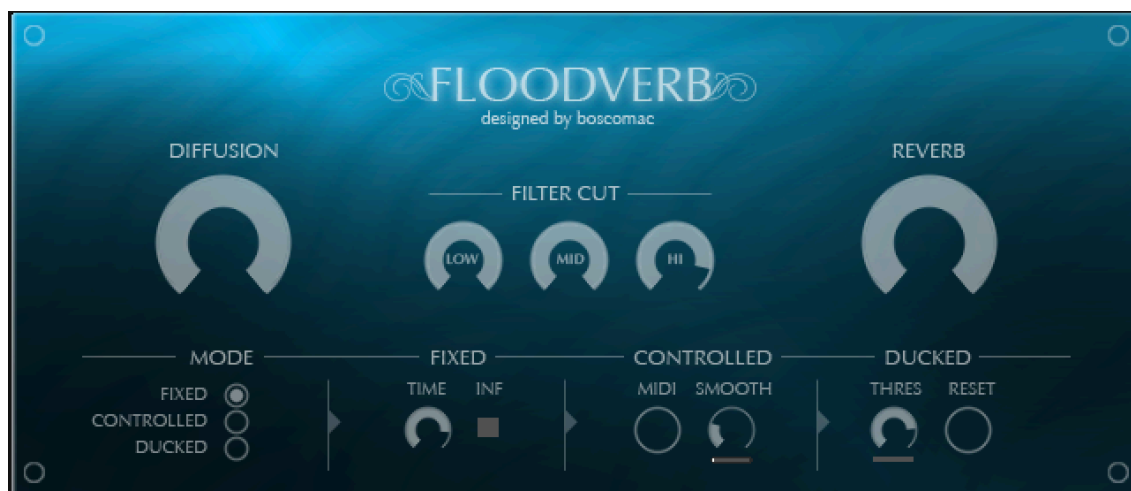


PICTURE 12. Native Instruments Session Strings Pro on Animator mode (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

There are also sustained violins playing the same chords from the same octave as the staccato strings, which again seems like a lazy orchestration choice although, it does glue the strings and the piano well together.

Janne Hyöty recorded a bass line and two acoustic guitar tracks for the middle 8 also. The acoustic guitars strum the chords with the same laid-back articulation

as the piano, changing the chord every bar. The guitars are so easy in this part, that I could actually flood them in reverb. For this, I used my favorite reverb from Boscomac, called Floodverb (picture 13). It can create nearly infinite reverberation, and it has a tone of its own. This tone also creates a great atmosphere to the middle 8.



PICTURE 13. Bosomac reverb – Floodverb (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

The bass guitar is a bit more energetic, playing mostly 1/8th notes through the whole part. To give it a bit more boost and a grittier sound, I used an overdrive plugin on it.

The last chorus starts with a stripped-down instrumentation. The piano plays the chorus chord progression an octave higher than it does on the previous choruses. The velocity of the piano is brought to 45 from the 76 that it is in the other choruses, so it is played more gently and more softly. I also made it sound more human, with moving the notes off beat by a tiny margin, so it doesn't sound as machine made as it could. There's also a small melody-line on top of the chords, to make the piano more interesting, since there isn't much else going on in this part.

From the string section, I used a violin section playing two voiced chords with tremolo articulation. It creates this beautiful, light feeling that fits perfectly for this

gentle part before the final crescendo to the last chorus. There's also a cello playing a pattern taken from the second verse but transposed an octave higher. Cello playing on the higher register has a very emotional sound, which fits very well for this part also.

Hyöty also recorded gently strummed guitar chords for this part, and I tried to mix them in with the Floodverb like I did in the middle 8. After testing it out, I found out that the tonal effect of the plugin itself was too distracting, so I faded the reverb out during the first bar of the gentle chorus. Later when we did the final changes in Hyöty's studio, he ended up adding a deep synth bass to this part. He also added the delayed clap from the second verse to it, and the synth arpeggio that is in the chorus, but this time a bit lower in volume and filtered down by cutting some of the higher frequencies.

The gentle chorus starts to build up to the final crescendo on the 5th bar, with the help of the chimes, a drum set crescendo with 1/8th notes on the snare and a tom and an arpeggiated pattern with the string and woodwind section. Here I found out an orchestration problem that I made. The oboe is playing the upper harmony for the flute in 3rds, but actually it would be much better the other way around (picture 14).

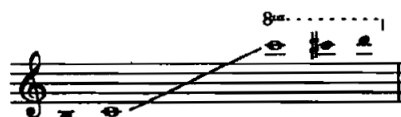
The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Violin, Viola, Flute, and Oboe. The music is in 4/4 time and has a key signature of one sharp (F#). The score is divided into two measures. In the first measure, all four instruments play an ascending eighth-note arpeggio. In the second measure, the Violin, Flute, and Oboe have whole rests, while the Viola plays a sustained chord.

PICTURE 14. Final chorus arpeggio pattern for the song The Heart Will Find A Way (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

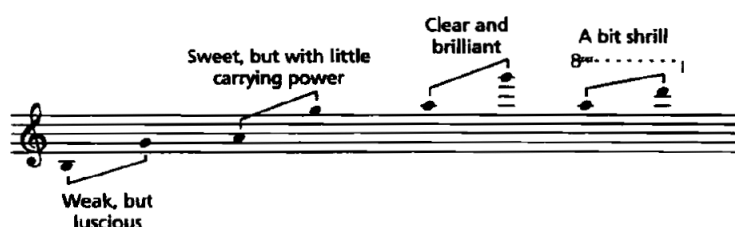
The flute has a higher range (picture 15) than the oboe, and in fact in this arpeggio, the oboe I used from the VST library isn't able to play the last, highest note. This is a clear mistake that I did not pay attention to when orchestrating this part.

Range and Registral Characteristics

EXAMPLE 7-1. Range



EXAMPLE 7-2. Registral Characteristics



PICTURE 15. Flute range and registral characteristics (Adler 2002, 181)

After the arpeggio, the chorus proceeds as it has for the other two, for just exceptions. The drums continue to a 3-bar fill after the crescendo and there's a melody with the solo violin on the background for the whole length of the fill. After this the drums revert back to what they were doing in the previous choruses and the solo violin fades away.

For the outro, I wanted to bring the listener back to a familiar theme, which is the one used in the verses on piano. This time, it is played more gently, and transposed an octave higher, which tends to sound beautiful and emotional played on the piano. The tempo also slows down from 103 to 63 on the last two chords. This makes the song end peacefully, in a way helping it to resolve.

After the very first draft of the demo was ready, me and Janne Hyöty started to play around with the top-line. Since he has much more experience in working on

top-lines for Asian markets, it was natural for me to sit back and learn from the experience.

At first, he didn't concentrate on making lyrics at all. He jumped right in to the verse, put the microphone on record and sang what came to his mind. This was done repeatedly, until he was pleased with all the different parts of the melody. He asked me occasionally what I thought of the top-line so far, but frankly, I couldn't answer much more than "it's great!" and "it sounds wonderful", since my knowledge of writing top-lines was still on very early stages. But as I already told, I had listened to J-pop, Japanese movie and game soundtracks and of course music in general, if the top-line would have been subpar, I believe I would have noticed it. This all taken to consider, I knew that he knew what he was doing, and by following and learning from him I knew that someday I'd also have the knowledge to do so.

When we got to the chorus, I wanted to try out a melody I had in mind. It was the first phrase in the chorus, and it actually stayed pretty much the same until the very end. Here I just want to point out, that either of us, Hyöty nor I are considered to be professional singers, but that should not prevent anyone to sketch out their ideas on top-lining when working on a song. In many cases, if you can deliver an idea, it will be easier to finish the song. This is a trait I will practice more in the future, since it should be never negligible how far one can or should take the project themselves. Sure, there are many occasions where you can work with a talented top-liner who will deliver what you need in a short amount of time, but sometimes the deadlines are so fast, that if you can create the track and the top-line, and in some cases maybe even lyrics, it is much easier to find a singer to record demo vocals of your ideas than it is to find a singer who can do all of the above, and still get a finished product before the lead closes. This can of course change if you connect with the right people, who trust in your work as a producer and will prioritize the tracks you sent them. But finding those people will of course take time, time that you could very well use to practice doing these things yourself also. Even if you don't end up doing top-lines for your own tracks until eternity, the skill still helps when working with people on song-writing camps or any co-write sessions.

The vocalist we got for this track was André Linman. It happened on quite a coincidence, but we asked him if he could write the lyrics and come to record the vocals with me. He agreed and we set up a session to the near future. On the day we had agreed on, he called me saying that he's having a block with the lyrics, which was fine since we could also work on them together. It was the first time for him to be working on a song that is intended to be published in Asia, so it was probably unclear of what he should actually concentrate on. It might be unclear that making lyrics for Asian songs is still important, even though they will be translated partly or fully, or even replaced completely. One way of thinking of it, is that it relays the amount of effort you have put into making the song. Other important factors are that in many cases, they might leave some parts in English, which is usually the title of the song. Some might release a full English version of the same song as an extra track on their album or EP. If you write lyrics that you haven't put much effort to, it would be a bad song on the western market, so why would it be much better on the Asian market?

André had made the lyrics to the first verse and sketched out the idea for the chorus. We started working on them together. He had a solid idea of the song title, so we just had to fill in the gaps. The middle 8's determination was reflected to the lyrics, when the singer also gets more determined about the way he's thinking in the future. The rest of the lyrics we made together, which was for me also the first time I wrote lyrics to a song aimed for the Asian market. Since it was a ballad and it was aimed for the Japanese market, we didn't have to stack as many vocal tracks as we would have if it was an electronic pop song for a Korean boy band. The vocals were easily recorded on the same day, thanks to the talented singer. The vocal edit was simple and quick, because the vocals are best to be kept very natural sounding. If they were too strictly corrected, the tuning could be heard in the most stripped-down parts of the song. The final mixing was done on Janne Hyöty's computer.

This song was pitched to the lead that it was originally made for, but did not get the cut on the first round. It was later retrieved back to the catalogue, where it remains still.

4.4 Made My Day

This song was aimed to a lead for a big South Korean boy group. They had another South Korean pop song as a reference, which for me was this dreamy, laid back, easy going track with some R'n'B elements in it. I liked the reference very much, so I tried to catch some of that feeling to my own track too. I named the project "Dream Pop", to keep in mind that I'm aiming for that dreamy atmosphere. The tempo of the song is 102bpm, and it is in Bb major and its relative minor Gm. The song was long without a top-line, since I couldn't find a suitable top-liner in time for the lead. Finally, many months later this song was still missing a top-line, so I asked a friend of mine, Simeon Puukari if he wanted to give it a try. He said yes, this becoming his first try on top-lining for a song aimed to Asia.

When I started making the track, I picked a patch from Omnisphere and started to play around with some chords. The reference song had a cool rhythm on the chords, so I ended up with a quite similar rhythm myself. It had this upbeat feel, where the chords were always rushing to start on the 1/8th note before the next bar, and when I ultimately put the chords through an over-exaggerated side chain compression, it really began to groove.

Picture 16 demonstrates the chord progression I used in the intro and the verse. It introduces long sustained chords on the tonic, Bb and then two stab like chords of Fsus4 or Bbsus2 whichever way it is interpreted. After that the Bb starts syncopated on the upbeat and then continuing similarly for another round, until the chord changes from the tonic to the subdominant - or the 4th in other terms - Eb. These three chords are the only chords used in the verses throughout, which creates a weird counter balance to the other songs I have analyzed in this thesis, that included a much richer harmony.



PICTURE 16. Intro and verse chord progression for the song Made My Day (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

For the production I wanted to layer the progression to many different sounds. The first one of the layers was the Omnisphere patch I started to test out the chords with. It has this mixture of bells and an e-piano, and as soon as I saw the piano sample be named "Dream Piano", I knew it would fit the thematic of the song I was aiming for. The next layer I used was a heavily delayed synth pluck, also from Omnisphere. The delay is really brought up with all the processing and compression in the bus that all these layers are grouped to.

The third layer was a bright bell synth, yet again from Omnisphere. I used tons of processing on this one to make it fit. The EQ is harsh, with a low-cut filter at 800Hz. I used reverb and delay to give it a bit more spacey feeling. It still had a very annoying top end, which I cut off with Logic Pro X's own Overdrive plugin, which has a tone knob that can help with such problems. After that I used again EQ and a dynamic EQ to get rid of annoying frequencies, and finally a compressor to bring out the delay and reverb more. This instrument required a lot of correcting, which brings me to think, was the original patch any good to begin with? But at the end, I was really pleased with the results.

The fourth and final layer, was a synth pad from Native Instruments Kontakt's sample library, called Retro Machines MKII. All of the other instruments had more attack than sustain, which made them fade away a bit too much to my taste. The chords are even 1,5 whole notes, or 1,5 bars long depending how you want to think of it, so a lot of the more transient oriented sounds are destined to fade away before reaching the next chord. Because of that, I wanted to use a more sustained instrument, which would glue the chords together. And that is why this layer was created.

All of these layers are grouped to a bus, that has some general processing for all these instruments combined. EQ is again making sure that the chords don't have lower frequencies in them to get confused with the bass-line. Compression is done in two parts, first with OTT, and after it with Logic Pro X's own Studio FET Compressor is taking care of the side chaining. The side chain on the synths is actually quite massive. The trigger I used for it was a short electronic hi-hat sample from one of my sample libraries, set on every 1/4th note. The sample length

affects the release time of the side chain compression, and I wanted the release to be quite fast so that is why I ended up using a short sample. The compressor is really squashed, and it ended up taking almost 30db off on every hi-hat sample. As I mentioned before, this gave the chords part of their groove. I know using compressors and samples for sidechaining electronic music like this isn't as convenient as using plugins like Nicky Romero Kickstart, but I was already accustomed to this method, so I ended up using it.

For some reason, what I had done so far reminded me of the 1980's so I tried to find more inspiration from the sounds of that era. I started to work on the bass, where I really emphasized this 80's kind of synth-wave trend that has been on and off in pop music for the recent years. It is a heavily side chained 1/16th note pattern, where it feels like the first note of each 1/4th note is missing because of the side chain. I used a heavily distorted and chorus infused bass sound from Native Instruments' FM8, which is the perfect synth for this kind of sound, since it has a lot of similarities to the FM synthesis used in the 80's. I used some filtering for the bass in the intro, to make the contrast in the verse bigger.

The intro also includes a melody made with some chopped up vocal samples and Melodyne, which I found to be the best tool for creating a vocal sample melody that is used in the intro, and partly in the verses. With the help of some noise sweeps and a drum fill, we enter the verse itself. The chord progression as told before, stays the same. The bass sound that I used in the intro, gets rid of the high cut filtering, which opens up the sound a little bit.

The kick drum and snare play a standard four on the floor beat, with a tiny detail on the first snare hit as it has an extra sample of another snare, heavily reverberated, but also cut completely off when the next kick drum hits. As a tiny detail for the kick drum, I used a hi-hat sample to create a tiny boost to the higher frequencies, so that it would cut through the mix better. I also used an OTT on the kick itself, which was the first time I've done this. The OTT usually exaggerates all frequencies to their limit, it can kill most of the bass of something like a kick drum. But in this case it worked, although I had to put a huge dip around 2,8kHz with a FabFilter Pro MB multi-band equalizer, to get rid of some attack that eventually was on the way of the lead vocals.

The snare is layered by three different samples. The main snare is more of a traditional one. I have this vintage drum samples library, that I thought could have the best samples to fit the already quite established 80's vibe that the track had. I ended up finding a snare sample that was sampled from the 1989's classic Roland R8 drum machine, which is very popular in the synth-wave scene these days. It was then slightly EQ'd, heavily compressed and finally I used a dynamic EQ to ease out some annoying frequencies around 5.8kHz. The second layer of the snare is a highly reverberated percussion sample, that sounds like a mixture of a cowbell and a woodblock. This was something that I just found while scrolling Splice and thought, that this would make the traditional snare sound a bit more interesting and modern when layered on. I also used an EQ to make its frequency spectrum quite narrow, and with a reverb it then sounded a bit more distant, which was exactly what I wanted. The final layer for the snare was a tambourine sample. I shortened the sample a lot, so that it would fit better with the tight drums that I had created already. It was then sent to reverb send, so it would blend in a bit more. I panned it to the right to balance out the high frequencies between the left and right with the tambourine and hi-hat.

The hi-hat is a tiny, more shaker sounding element in the song. It has a harsh EQ with a low cut from 3750Hz, and some de-esser kind of processing to make it a bit more subtle. It is playing straight 1/8th notes, with a short 1/16th note pattern repeating at the end of each bar. This I just felt that would bring the groove together a bit better, since the chords also take a head start on the upbeat. Finally, there's a hi-hat like pattern made with a white noise generator, called Magical 8bit Plugin. I love using white noise as a hi-hat, especially with this plugin. It's easy to create tiny variations in the color of each sample with this plugin, since the white noise has a pitch. The white noise played at C1 for instance is a lot darker than at C5, so you can create interesting patterns using this. It is playing 1/16th notes throughout the whole verse, so in a sense it is doubling the bass-line, giving it a bit more attack. The first verse is 16 bars in length, and after the first 8 bars the vocal sample from the intro re-enters. After that the song continues to the chorus.

One of the major things I really liked about the reference track I had for this song, was that the chorus was actually quite stripped down, and smaller than the verse.

I think it was a fresh approach, since usually the listener expects the verse or the pre-chorus to build up into an even bigger verse, so I wanted to try out this more minimalistic approach. The chord progression changes for the chorus (picture 17).



PICTURE 17. Chorus chord progression for the song Made My Day (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

The verses could be considered to be in Bb major since it revolves around Bb and Eb, but in the chorus it's easier to think of it transposing to its relative minor Gm, since the first chord is Gm. I spiced it up by using the borrowed 4th chord C major from the dorian scale again, as I did in the song Unfair. This I have later figured to be a very common progression for me to use, which I'm trying to use less in the future. It sounds great, but when it's too repeated it becomes dull. The chord rhythm is also a bit confusing when looking at it now, because there's no clear sign of the first beat of the bar except on every four bars, which can make it really hard to follow. Both the C major chord and the confusing rhythm created enough of a headache for Simeon Puukari, so he wanted to change them. He came up with a clearer chord progression, which was a lot easier to top-line on (picture 18).



PICTURE 18. Chorus chord progression change for the song Made My Day (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

First, I was a bit skeptic about the change, since my idea in the first place was to make it more interesting, but you always have to keep in mind that a good song is more important than making it interesting just for the sake of it. This change made it easier to approach as a listener and also as a top-liner, which is what matters more.

In the chorus, the chords are played by all the same layers as in the verse. The 1/16th note bass is replaced with a sustained, distorted and deep synth bass playing the bass notes as shown in the notation above. Since all the drums drop out for the chorus, I still wanted something to anchor the rhythm to make it easier to follow. I used the same idea from the verse with the 1/16th note white noise, but made it drift around in the stereo field with an auto-panner MondoMod from Waves (picture 19).



PICTURE 19. Waves – MondoMod (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

It is a good plugin to use when you quickly want some movement to your tracks. The range meter below the orb at the center lets you decide the degree of the panning, as how far it will travel on the stereo field before changing the direction. As you can see, I used only a value of 21, because I didn't want it to be too distracting, since it was still supposed to be an anchor effect instead of an attention grabber.

I also used plenty of impacts and long white noise down sweeps from Splice to make the transition from the verse smoother. The 1st chorus is only 8 bars long, which after we get to the 2nd verse with the help of some risers and a short drum fill.

The 2nd verse is exactly like the first, but in this I wanted to bring the vocal sample for the whole length of the 16 bars instead of just the second half. And after that we get to the chorus again, of which the first half is again the exact same as the first chorus. The 2nd chorus is now double in length and the second half of has differences to the first one. I brought in the 1/16th note filtered synth bass from the intro. It also has multiple parts of the drums copied from the verse, which include the white noise, hi-hats, tambourine and the cowbell like percussion.

I also wanted to create more tension to this part, to make it more uplifting to the next part which is going to be a middle 8 of a sort. The best solution for this was to create a chromatically rising synth, since it is very often used in EDM songs, and it has proven to me that it works. I created this with a Native Instruments synth called Massive (picture 20). The synth patch is modified from a ready-made patch carrying the name of "Laser Lead", which was originally downloaded as a part of a preset pack in the past years. It is a synth sound that uses one of the four available envelopes modulating the pitch of the oscillators to create a pitch bend like effect on every note, because of its delayed attack. I also used the pitch bend wheel modulation inside Logic Pro X to create the chromatic rise for the whole length of 8 bars. In a sense, it is pitch bending while it is pitch bending. It's playing 1/16th notes throughout the whole length of 8 bars, so it fits the rhythm of the white noise and the bass-line.



PICTURE 20. Native Instruments synth – Massive (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

I wanted the middle 8 to be really impactful, so I decided to have a tiny 1/8th note long break before it. On the last bar of the chorus, I made a mute automation for all the tracks to create a completely silent break that would make the beginning of the middle 8 more impactful. It did feel a bit too empty after that, so I added two 1/16th notes on the snare as a short fill before the middle 8.

The middle 8 has mostly the same elements from the verse, but the chord progression makes it feel more like the chorus (picture 21). It has the same drum beat with one additional snare squeezed in. The 1/16th note bass-line that was presented in the verse is also featured in the middle 8. One major difference is a new, heavily distorted bass layer playing the 1/16th note pattern. I used the same starting point for it as the less distorted one, since the FM8 synth's sounds patches were the best ones to fit this song. I used an iZotope Trash 2 plugin to make the sound really stick out from the mix.



PICTURE 21. Middle 8 Chord progression for the song Made My Day (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

I also wanted the chords to punch in a bit harder on the middle 8, so I created a new synth sound to add higher end to the mix. It is again a patch from Omnisphere, called “Supersaw Sensations 1”, of which I cut the low end away almost completely. The high frequencies were still a bit too annoying, so I soothed it out with a multi-band compressor, making a 7db dip around 7,2kHz, which had most of the frequencies that I wanted to get rid of. The middle 8 proceeds to the final, double chorus.

The final chorus has all the same elements as the previous choruses, with the addition of the full drum beat and the 1/16th note bass-line. After the middle 8 which resembled many of the same aspects as the chorus, it felt wrong to drop down the energy again, so I found this to be the best solution. The chord progression changes back to the chorus progression from the middle 8 progression, but all of the instruments are playing in both parts. As a tiny rhythmic detail, I added an open hi-hat sample on the back beat playing 1/8 notes. For the second half of the final chorus I wanted to emphasize it even more, so I added closed hi-hat samples on all the 1/16th notes, which gave the part the extra drive it needed.

Finally, the song fades out with a 4 bar outro, introducing a slightly strummed, dark pluck synth from Omnisphere. I accidentally left the old chorus progression as the fade out, but after I replaced it with the new one, I liked the old one still

better. The borrowed 4th chord from the dorian scale, the C major made the ending sound mysterious and exciting instead of actually resolving to Gm or Bb which would be logical for the song, to end in the tonic. That's why I decided to keep the old progression there in the final production.

The song went a long way trying to find a top-liner. It was first sent to South Korea, but they didn't find anyone suitable for it there, since the song is a bit different from what usually is sent there. After it came back from there, my publisher asked a top-liner from Sweden if they would be interested, but because of a busy schedule, they also had to refuse. I then took it to my own hands to find a top-line for this track, so I asked my friend Simeon Puukari to make it.

After showing Puukari the reference songs he felt fairly confident working on it. I also mentioned to him before he started that it is preferred to use a lot of variation instead of repetition in making the top-line, since from what I've heard and experienced it is considered a good thing for the top-line to have a lot of variation between parts and even within them. Puukari later presented his ideas, with the chorus chord change that I mentioned earlier. He had done the verses and the choruses, but the middle 8 was still a bit unclear. He gave it some time, and with a few bounces back and forth we had a fitting middle 8 top-line also.

The lyrics as he himself also said are "quite basic". We've had some discussion about lyrics already in this thesis, but in this song, I thought that the lyrics were good enough. The top-line has a lot of cool rhythmic elements in it, which I think could work really well in Korean language, so that already nullifies the importance of many segments of the lyrics in the verses. The chorus also has a lot of broad lyrics, like "bae" and other words that rhyme with it, and those could very well be kept in the Korean version since they ultimately rhyme also with the title of the song "Made My Day", which is the main phrase in the chorus.

The middle 8 is more of a repetitive part, with a single line of lyrics. It fits the part well since it's quite powerful, especially when using multiple vocal tracks. It also fit perfectly in between the phrases of the chorus, so we ended up using the middle 8 vocals partly in the final chorus also.

Just to point out, I've talked a lot about Korean language and how it could work in it, but there's still no certainty that this song will ultimately be translated to Korean. It could be any of the Asian languages, depending where it will get cut eventually. The lead was originally for a South Korean group, so I keep comparing it to the lead.

Since the songs have to sound as ready as possible when they are pitched, it is worth the effort to get a good vocalist to sing on the track. I asked a friend of mine, Juuso Pitkänen from the band Founding Neverland if he wanted to record the vocals for this song. He gladly agreed, which was great for me because I knew his sound already from previous recording sessions with his band, so I knew that it would fit this song perfectly. It was also effortless to work with him despite us being in different locations, since he has his own recording equipment at home.

During the week where we planned the recording to take place, he sent me some takes and versions and we found the right approach to record the vocals. He delivered me the lead vocal track with two doubles and another one sang an octave lower, which I knew would bring a lot of depth to the mix and would again be more suitable for a bigger boy group.

I did the vocal editing with Melodyne, which I also used to create the harmonies in some of the parts of the verse, and fully to the chorus and the middle 8. I found that creating the harmonies with Melodyne is a lot less time consuming than editing the recorded harmony. To put it simple, in this case I didn't have to quantize the vocal tracks twice, but only once instead, which can be sometimes very time consuming.

I mixed the lead vocals really bright for this song. There are many instruments that have a lot of clear transients in this song which I didn't want to take out either, so I just needed to make the vocal a tiny bit brighter than those instruments to cut through all of that. I used multiple compressors, from SSL-channel to API-2500. I also used quite a lot of distortion, which made the sound even more focused. I even used the iZotope mastering plugin Ozone 7 at the end of the chain to pull it

all together. Now looking at it I think I could have gotten similar results with a lesser number of plugins.

The doubles and the harmonies are going through a similar signal chain, but they are a bit toned down from the higher frequencies with an EQ. The processing is done in a shared bus to save a tiny bit of processing power compared to having the plugins on all the channels separately. The shared compressors also squeeze them all together really well. I love using the Waves API-2500 preset Backing Vox on the background vocal bus, since it makes them really cohesive with the least amount of effort (picture 22).



PICTURE 22. Waves – API-2500 (Photo: Karri Mikkonen 2019)

The doubles and the harmonies are constantly affected with reverb and delay, which I put in to the channel strip. These are before the compressors in the signal chain, so that the compressor squeezes them also.

As a final piece of the signal chain, I used an iZotope Imager, in which I put all of the parameters to the maximum to make them as wide as possible. They are extremely out of phase, but they sound great.

The octave lower vocals also go through a very similar signal chain. They are even more toned down on the higher frequencies than the doubles and the harmonies, since there isn't that much need for them because of the lower range of the vocals. I also used some overdrive on them to give an extra boost so they would be easily heard even on laptop speakers.

I used plenty of busses and automation for effects on the lead vocals. There are some constant reverbs and delays to create the space for the vocals, but there are also a few delays to emphasize the endings of phrases every time there's room for a dark tape delay effect.

In the last chorus I also bounced out the lead vocal to create some reversed vocals flooded in reverb to fill in some of the gaps between the phrases. This is an easy way of creating a constant, good atmosphere to the song.

For the last chorus when the vocals from the middle 8 continue on top of the chorus, I lowered their formant with Melodyne for them to sound a little different from the lead vocals. They are also spread as wide as possible in the same bus as the doubles and the harmonies, to make room for the lead vocals.

On top of the lead vocals in the last chorus, we recorded an ad lib part. Ad libs are a very big part of Asian pop songs especially in the ones aimed for a bigger group, since they make the vocal tracks sound livelier and at the same time, they give the group members something to sing on top of the main vocal lines. Sometimes they are also presented as a moment to show off the singers' abilities to sing, which is what we aimed to do here. Long high notes with a lot of variation, to create a showcase of skills.

The song was finished in the early 2019, and to my knowledge is part of the catalogue, waiting for a suitable lead to be pitched to.

5 DISCUSSION

The Asian music market has shown great growth and according to the articles and interviews I've read, they are going to keep on growing. South Korea is gaining more and more foothold internationally, while China keeps on growing domestically thanks to affordable and easy access methods of music streaming. How big will China grow, remains to be seen. Japan on the other hand, also brings up questions. As mentioned in this thesis, the majority of Japan's music is consumed as physical. It has been a rocky road for the digital services to succeed in Japan, but there's no certainty that it will stay unchanged in the next 10-20 years. It is always a question of consumers and promotion of the available services, which in the future might change the Japanese music business for better or worse.

There are some main points that are to be considered when starting to work your way up to the A-pop scene. The Asian pop scene can be approached with no previous knowledge of the different aspects of it, but you need to do your homework if you wish to succeed. You need to listen and stay on track what is happening in the Asian pop music scene itself. You also should reach out to people and expand your network around you. The Asian pop scene here in Finland isn't that big yet, so it is very easy to get in touch with the people involved and try to arrange meetings.

There are many things that could help a producer, even outside the normal production and songwriting skills. Personally, I don't think that learning the languages and cultural aspects of the countries you work to should be considered unnecessary. These all will develop into traits that improve your chances of getting to know new people in the field, could spark interest towards you, not to mention the usefulness of them in the songwriting process itself. Whether it is participating in writing lyrics and defining what kind of melodies could work better with syllable structures, or just joking around with your co-writers, it can prove its usefulness.

But the main thing the producer should learn above all else, is patience. Even outside the interviews I did for this thesis, I've heard that the Asian music business is a very slow business and requires time and effort that sometimes exceeds the time required in other parts of the world. I've heard of cases where people get a cut from a song that's been in the catalogue for 8 years. This of course happens everywhere around the world in the music business, but it proves the point that patience is needed.

To conclude, I can say that the Asian market will be an interesting field to work in as a songwriter and a producer for the upcoming years. The music itself can give limitless possibilities and when it's mixed with the constantly evolving form of the business itself, it will be interesting to follow how we – the Finnish songwriters and producers – evolve with it.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview Janne Hyöty

A short description of yourself, highlights of your career, how long you've been in the industry and how long did it take to break through to the A-pop market.

I'm Janne Hyöty, music producer, songwriter and publisher from Vaasa, Finland. I started writing my first songs "professionally" in the early 2000's. Up to date I've had over 30 no 1 releases in Japan which includes 7 singles with boybands such as Arashi, Sexy Zone, Kattun. When I started writing for Japan it took me 3 years of hard work and probably 100 demos before I got my first cut.

1. What made you interested in Asian pop writing/producing?

The fact that you can write "real" songs in a more old school way and throw in more unexpected elements than in western music made it very interesting. I think Asian music is more richer in many ways than western music.

2. Is there something you do differently when writing or producing A-pop compared to Western pop?

Same as 1. Also the songs are often a bit longer and has more parts. What is important is that you have to construct the top-line so it's suitable for Asian language.

3. During your career, have you noticed any change in what kind of songs the Asian artists and publishers are looking for? For example, are there more Western influences/references than before?

For classic J-pop its been pretty much the same what they are looking for (at least melody-wise) even if it also is going towards more western sounds, depending on the style. But like western music, the sounds are moving along with the trends.

for instance, K-pop is very up to date like western music, and even more futuristic.

4. Why do you think western producers and writers are so highly valued in the Asian music market?

The influence from western music make us popular. If you mix Western and Asian writers you get the perfect mix I think :)

5. Is there any specific benefit in being a writer/producer from Finland? For example, are the Finnish music organizations actively supportive towards Asian music export? Is there something you wish there was more of?

The Finnish organisation (Music finland) is highly supporting writers for the Asian market, like the A-pop castle songwriting camps. This has helped many writers to build a career in Asia. So that is very good!

Appendix 2. Interview Christian Jansson

Part 1

A short description of yourself, highlights of your career, how long you've been in the industry and how long did it take to break through to the A-pop market.

My name is Christian Jansson, an Åland-born songwriter and music producer, signed to Finnish publishing company Sugar House Publishing in Vaasa, Finland. After having studied music theory, music production and sound engineering at LAFO (Lappfjärds folkhögskola/Lapväärtin kansanopisto) in 2006-2009, I really grew to like and got into writing and producing pop music more seriously, and from that point on only really wanted to work with music in some capacity. Fast forward to early 2015, and an opportunity to work under the tutelage of my earlier teacher, as well as big mentor, the multi-platinum selling songwriter and music producer Janne Hyöty at Sugar House Publishing arose, and thanks to a mentorship grant, I could finally take my first, serious steps in the songwriting world, under his tutelage. Early on I also got signed as a writer and producer to Sugar House Publishing, and ever since, I've been working full-time with writing music for Japan, South Korea and other Asian markets, more or less exclusively. I vividly remember one of my earliest days at Sugar House Publishing, how my mentor Janne Hyöty told me that I need to be patient and work hard in order to stand a chance to be successful. He told me to "give it three years, minimum, to build up a network and a song portfolio, in order to succeed as a writer in Asia.". He emphasized that perseverance is key, that patience and hard work will be rewarded eventually. And it turned out he was absolutely right. Even though I still don't consider myself as fully having "broken through" in Asia quite yet, and even though I did have some small cuts prior, it took me more or less three years to land my first big cut in Asia with the Nine Percent single "I Need A Doctor", in mid-2018.

1. What made you interested in Asian pop writing/producing?

One of the benefits of working with such a decorated and knowledgeable mentor as Janne, though, was his ongoing guidance and ways to improve and turn my earliest songs into more Japanese sounding ones. I remember him introducing me to groups such as EXILE and SHINee, and in doing so he "lit a fire under my arse". I listened thoroughly and soon enough started picking up small things I realized I really loved in the Asian tonal languages. First and foremost - their unique melodic approach they ALWAYS seemed to adopt. Great, quirky melodies were, and still are the absolute foundation of their pop songs. I also fell in love with their more "allowing", sometimes more musical and complex approach to melodies, chords and compositions as a whole, compared to the music we were used to hearing in the Western part of the world. Having grown up loving progressive rock and metal music, I could hear lots of similarities when it came to compositions. While a lot of the modern pop music we heard on the radios felt very formatted (3 minutes, four chords, quickly reach the chorus etc.), Japanese and Korean music felt more liberal, more chords, more quirky twists, more jazz/prog influenced, yet without ever feeling unnatural or complex for the sake of it. It's simply a natural thing in their tonal language, and that's what I think was the thing I fell in love with. What's normal to them, is "thinking outside the box" for a lot of us, Western writers. And I think that's the main reason I once fell in love with it, and still love it!

2. Is there something you do differently when writing or producing A-pop compared to Western pop?

As 99% of what I do is Asian pop music, this one is a bit hard for me to answer, but I'll try to elaborate a bit on the different approaches I tend to adopt for the two. Firstly, with Western pop being so sensitive to quickly changing and evolving trends, I feel that successfully writing for such a market can be quite tricky, unless you've got really good connections, or have the opportunity to work directly with the artist. If not, it can be really tough to try and pinpoint what type of songs will work, what songs will be "the next big thing", and what the artist/label/record company will accept. As an increasing number of songs written and aimed for West-

ern artists nowadays are actually being written in close collaboration with the actual artist him- or herself, the artists themselves naturally have a large say in what kind of songs they like to do and work on. For better or for worse :)

In general I feel that when writing Western music, vocals and lyrics plays a big part, already at an early stage of the writing and creation. Image and personality - what the artist stands for is of increasing importance. Me, as a producer, have to make a production that fits and matches the image, feeling and the message the artist in question have and wants to convey. In terms of writing and production, more often than not, a large portion of "play it safe" applies, I feel. While you always hear people say "think outside of the box" and "dare to do something different" when it comes to writing and producing, you still only have to check out the current charts at any given time to see that statements like that oftentimes are quite heavily exaggerated. If I'd summarize my thoughts on writing Western music, It'd be something like: Vocals and lyrics extremely important, quite narrow-minded thinking in terms of what certain artists can and can't do, think "hits" all the time, and don't strive too far out from the current trends when it comes to production. Compare this to when writing and producing a track for Asia, where groups or artists in general have a much wider palette of styles, but less say in what songs they perform. Labels and A&R:s decide what their artists should release, and they actively encourage you, as a producer and writer to present them with your vision, in the form of the demos you do, for how their artists should sound for their next release etc. So whenever I start a new song aimed for an Asian artist - whether it being written for a specific lead from a sub-publisher or label, or starting from a completely blank canvas, I feel as if I, as a writer and producer, have some input and an opportunity to show the labels what I think they should do next. Experimentation thereby is much more encouraged than when writing for much of the Western music market. An important factor when writing for Asia too, is to think about the potential choreography and live performance, already at the writing stage. You have to be able to envisage the performance of your song, in a live setting, in your head. As groups tend to be big in numbers, it's also important to incorporate parts for all members to shine in the songs. For many K-Pop boy bands, rap parts are mandatory, while some Japanese bands might be made up of a lot of dancers/"performers" that needs their "dance part" in the songs, to make it work.

So you have to do your homework, knowing what the unique characteristics of certain groups are, and incorporate that into your writing and arranging. However, as long as you manage to fulfil these criteria's, there's rarely any limitations of what kind of songs or compositions you could, or should write. Groups and artists in Asia are rarely limited to a certain style or genre, but rather focuses on great songs, plain and simple. So in short I'd argue that writing for a Western artist is more about making a song that is tailor-made and perfectly suited to the artist in question, without deviating all too much from current trends, their specific style or sound, while writing for an Asian group or artist can be more experimental, more forward-thinking and less formatted.

3. During your career, have you noticed any change in what kind of songs the Asian artists and publishers are looking for? For example, are there more Western influences/references than before?

In short: Not really. But. There's a big difference between the K-Pop of South Korea and the J-Pop from Japan. K-Pop is today a global phenomenon, BTS breaks records and rule the Billboard charts. They are globally known, and as such both influences and draws influence from all over the world. They certainly are the biggest, but a lot of K-Pop bands are known worldwide today, and most of them work with songwriters and producers from all over the world. Hence, it's inevitable to hear some global trends in K-Pop, but it's still very much a trendsetter rather than a trend-follower, I think. Foreign writers working with K-Pop artists and groups are obviously encouraged to bring their influences to the table, but they will always need to adapt to the specific criteria's that define K-Pop. As South Korea is a well-developed and modern community, they obviously look at the international charts for reference, but still as an example, less than 10% of the music consumed and played in South Korea are defined as "International". Meaning 90% is Korean music. Strong domestic bias, to say the least. So while trends certainly can play a part as a reference when looking for new songs for example, a K-Pop song still very much has to be a K-Pop song to get cut and be successful. With J-Pop it's even simpler. J-Pop is almost exclusively consumed in Japan, and is very much rooted in their musical heritage and traditions. Even though a lot of Western writers have helped shaping the modern J-Pop for the past 25 years or so, it's always been the foreign writers adapting to the J-Pop, rather than the other

way around. Most of, I dare to say all current Top 40 songs on any given Western music chart would never work out in Japan. Their trends, and their references are almost exclusively domestic.

4. Why do you think western producers and writers are so highly valued in the Asian music market?

Quality, plain and simple, I believe. Quality in songwriting, in production, in mixing. Having heard first hand from people in the Asian music business, I know that Western producers and writers (Nordic ones especially!) are highly valued because of the quality of work, the songs sounds different, but great. This is not to say that there aren't skilled writers and producers in Asia, because that's not true, but as especially South Korea has had to build up what we today know as modern K-Pop from scratch in a relatively short time, I guess it was only natural to look to the more established music countries and areas of the world (Sweden, UK, USA etc.) for influences and music in order to build up their globally known music business that they today are. In Japan I think it's a bit different - I think they appreciate, or learned to appreciate the way that many Western writers misunderstand the classical J-Pop. They like the "wrongdoings" we do when we try to sound "J-Poppy". Even though we study, and try to pick up and learn, it still won't sound 100% natural to a Japanese, albeit still musical enough to make it work. And in a culture that rooted in tradition, that might just be the thing that makes it stick out and work! Who knows? Furthermore, I also believe that the fact we seem to share a lot of common traits with many Asian people, especially maybe us Nordic people, certainly helps. We work hard and are focus-minded, let the work do the talking rather than unnecessary small-talking. A yes means a yes to us both, a promise is a promise, and a deadline is a deadline. Lots of mutual trust.

5. Is there any specific benefit in being a writer/producer from Finland? For example, are the Finnish music organizations actively supportive towards Asian music export? Is there something you wish there was more of?

I don't know if there's any special benefit being from Finland, as I don't have anything to compare it to, but I do know that at least Music Finland definitely are very supportive of the Asian music export coming from Finland. They annually

arrange a songwriting camp called A-Pop Castle, with invited guests from Asia, which exclusively focuses on Asian pop music. Last November, as part of a joint trade mission together with Music Export Sweden, I also took part in a trip to Seoul that Music Finland had arranged. We had lots of discussions and visited several labels and important music businesses during our stay, and I always got the impression that it is an area of the world Music Finland are really keen to keep building relationships with and so on. However, I do know that there has been some business related problems with Teosto regarding the dealings with Asia in the past, but I do think most of it has been solved by now. But in general all good! The biggest benefit of being from a small country, with a small music industry, is that you relatively easily can form good relationships with organizations such as Music Finland, I'd say. As a writer and producer, I don't really have anything special I wish there was more of, as of now.

Additional question: You wrote the song "I Need A Doctor" for Chinese group Nine Percent. As the lyrics carries a somewhat political theme, did they make the topline fully in China, or was this a co-write you did before in English that got translated? Please elaborate on how this song came together!

Yeah, so this song is a collaboration between me and two South Korean writers, Yang Hyeon Mo and Back Woo Bin originally. It was finished as a demo for a big South Korean boy band, but ended up on Chinese supergroup Nine Percent's debut album "To The Nines" in November 2018. It started off as a track idea, an instrumental I sent to one of the South Korean sub-publishers Sugar House Publishing is working with, that put me in touch with Yang Hyeon Mo and Back Woo Bin, or 10years as they call themselves as a writing duo. They wrote the melody, Korean lyrics and did the vocal recording for the demo. This was around November 2017, a year prior to it being cut for Nine Percent, that is. Once it got cut by Nine Percent, they redid/translated (don't ask me, I've got no idea!) the Korean lyrics into Mandarin. As you told me, the final lyrics is apparently somewhat political, but I honestly don't know if that's only in the Chinese lyrics, or if the message is somewhat the same in the original Korean lyrics.

Part 2 - Additional questions on practical guidelines for songwriters and producers

1. What's the first thing a new producer/songwriter should concentrate on when trying to get to the Asian market?

Listen and learn. A LOT! Try to understand what it is that makes certain music work in certain regions and countries. You simply cannot - as a European/American writer for example - force the "western" music trends, arrangements, styles onto the J-Pop, K-Pop and C-Pop without good reason. Be open-minded and willing to adapt if you want to be successful. Blend your style with what already works in targeted area. Get familiar with the groups, bands and artists and their respective music and style, then put your own interpretation or twist on how you perceive them, and make music thereafter. Be patient, because it will take time to understand.

2. Looking at cut rates of songs, how would you rank these next options in order, that the top one leads to most cuts and bottom one to least

Songs written directly for artists (assuming the artist is participating in the writing)

Songs written at cowrite camps (as there's usually label representatives/A&R's/decision makers at camps too, giving briefs etc.)

Songs written as online co writes

Songs written directly to a lead

Songs from the catalogues

3. Are you aware if there's any transaction of royalties from Asian streaming services (i.e. Melon and Kakao in South Korea or QQ Music and KuGou in China) to the publishers and songwriters?

Speaking in general terms, labels tend to pay out a "mechanical royalty advance" to the songwriters and their publishers, where they do an initial estimate of the royalties for the first period after its release. If a song then goes on to be a huge success, and the royalties from streaming and other mechanicals are bigger than

the royalty advance, the publisher and writers should - theoretically - be paid royalties according to normal, current rate after that. Or the possibility is there for another advance, or a "buy-out", where the label/record company pays the publisher and writers a one-time amount for the rights to the song, either for a certain amount of years, or forever, hence meaning no more royalties from mechanical will be payed after. Performance royalties are of course separate from this, and should always be payed to the writers/publishers, not taking the mechanical royalty advance and such in account.

4. What are the best events to expand your contacts in, to get to know more topliners, producers, publishers and relevant people to proceed further on your career?

Assuming you're signed to a publisher who already has a network of contacts - then obviously, use and go through them. Ask for advice and help with networking. Going to writing camps is obviously a superb way of networking in a more concrete way, but getting into those also heavily relies on you being signed to a publisher, most likely. If you're not signed, I think you have to be very active yourself. Internet and social media is a great way to connect and network, as online co-writing have never been simple. Dare to ask people if they want to collaborate. If there's some sort of music fair/event - go there! Talk to people, a lot of the time in such events one thing usually leads to another. One guy knows another guy who knows this girl who's looking for songs etc.

Simply put - if you're signed to a publisher, ask them for help and utilize their existing network + attend writing camps. If you're not signed, you need to work on it and be active. Ask and talk to people, either in real life or on social media/internet.

5. How many singles/cuts a year would create a steady income when making music to the Asian market?

This is an impossible question to answer, as it depends on so many factors. Firstly, it depends on what's considered a "steady income", secondly - it depends a lot on what sort of cuts we're talking about - album songs or A-side singles?

What sort of artist? BTS or a tiny Malaysian YouTuber? Will the song/album top the Billboard charts worldwide and sell in amounts of millions, or will it only be available to a limited audience? Labels who pay will obviously have this in mind. Are you a producer, or "only" the songwriter"? How big is your share in the song? If you're a producer, and they happen to buy your production for the release, then that's a big bonus, speaking in economic terms.

A cut in Asia can - simply put - be anywhere from a couple of hundred euro's, to several thousands, all depending on a million factors, some of which mentioned above. Can't give you an exact answer or number here, sorry!

6. What are the main benefits of having a publisher when writing music to Asia, or is it even possible to do so without a publisher?

To answer the second part of the question first: No. I don't think it's reasonable to believe you'd ever succeed in getting songs released in Asia without having a publisher. So yeah, that's obviously the biggest benefit. Also, the existing network a publishing company usually have is something that can be of help when looking for/receiving leads, writing partners etc. A publisher usually also gets chances to send its writers and producers to different songwriting camps, that might not be open for unpublished writers. So yeah - look for a publisher, people! ;)

Appendix 3. Interview Johan Nybäck

A short description of yourself, highlights of your career, how long you've been in the industry and how long did it take to break through to the A-pop market.

My name is Johan "Nisse" Nybäck, music producer/songwriter, musician and teacher living in Jakobstad, Ostrobothnia, Finland. A lot of good gig memories from 20 years of playing live and as a serious songwriter for the past 6 years there's been some international cuts with artist as Kumi Koda, Mirei Toyama, Minmi, Ian Erix etc. It took about 3 years to get a first international cut.

1. What made you interested in Asian pop writing/producing?

It was just by coincidence that I started writing/producing A-pop. A local publisher focused on the A-pop market, called and asked if I would be interested to write and produce as a member of their team. I accepted their invitation and soon found myself hooked to the genres.

2. Is there something you do differently when writing or producing A-pop compared to Western pop?

The most common and evident difference between the genres are top-lines, so It's a different way of thinking regarding melody. But otherwise I don't actively think so much differently regarding genre when I produce. Some Japanese styles are very different to western production, but I rarely write for such styles.

3. During your career, have you noticed any change in what kind of songs the Asian artists and publishers are looking for? For example, are there more Western influences/references than before?

Not any surprising changes, there are trends as in any market. The western influence is evident, but I feel that there's usually a lag regarding the A-pop market picking up the trends from the west, which is positive thing for a western writer/producer competing on the Asian market.

4. Why do you think western producers and writers are so highly valued in the Asian music market?

Cause they bring something different to the table, just because they haven't been brought up in Asian culture. We can now see the evidence of the same phenomenon, but flipped. A-pop gaining ground in western music market, because it brings energy and creativity in a new way.

5. Is there any specific benefit in being a writer/producer from Finland? For example, are the Finnish music organizations actively supportive towards Asian music export? Is there something you wish there was more of?

Don't know If there's any specific benefit in being a Finnish writer. But I think Music Finland is doing a very good job supporting Finnish writers. For example the MF A-pop camps has been a very important networking venue, which for myself laid ground for my first A-pop releases. Also the financial support that MF can give writers attending camps and co-writes abroad is fantastic.

Appendix 4. Interview Victor Sågfors

A short description of yourself, highlights of your career, how long you've been in the industry and how long did it take to break through to the A-pop market.

My name is Victor Sågfors. I am a Music Producer, songwriter, guitarist living in Vaasa. Originally from Pedersöre. I have been focusing on writing for the Asian market since 2014. I have achieved gold, platinum and multi-platinum awards with my songs in Japan. It took me about 3 years before my first big achievement in Asia.

1. What made you interested in Asian pop writing/producing?

I was not interested in western and local pop music at that time. Somehow the Asian pop music caught my interest. Maybe because I came from a more experimental music-style-background. Like progressive rock music. I thought it somehow had some similarity to what I normally used to listen to and write. Janne Hyöty introduced me to the asian pop music.

2. Is there something you do differently when writing or producing A-pop compared to Western pop?

I don't make western pop (yet)

3. During your career, have you noticed any change in what kind of songs the Asian artists and publishers are looking for? For example, are there more Western influences/references than before?

Asian pop music has always been following the trend of western music. I think Korea and China is quicker to catch up on the western trend while Japan eagerly keeps their traditional style and getting influenced in a bit more smooth and hybrid way.

4. Why do you think western producers and writers are so highly valued in the Asian music market?

To get the western sound for the asian artists they need western writers maybe.

5. Is there any specific benefit in being a writer/producer from Finland? For example, are the Finnish music organizations actively supportive towards Asian music export? Is there something you wish there was more of?

There are some great support from organisations, giving grants, organizing camps and meetings. I am very happy for that. Still, I think that the songwriters working for the asian market does not get a lot of attention in Finland for their achievements.

Appendix 5. Interview Timo Oiva

A short description of yourself, highlights of your career, how long you've been in the industry and how long did it take to break through to the A-pop market.

Hi, my name is Timo Oiva, a 40-year-old songwriter from Helsinki, Finland. I graduated as a Bachelor of Music, focused on vocal performance in 2007. After graduation I have freelanced gigs as a backing vocals / lead singer / troubadour, had my own bands and art projects and have composed a lot of music for theatre and performance art. Started focusing on songwriting strongly around 2013, that is when I got my first cut on Finnish album. Hmm...breakthrough... I feel that I haven't got a serious breakthrough yet :) My first cut for A-pop market happened 2015 so basically it took 2-3 years. But it's hard to say how long it took cause I was building on my previous knowledge. But yeah in the industry from 2013 onwards and in A-pop market since 2015.

1. What made you interested in Asian pop writing/producing?

It was basically suggested to me. I had approached different publishers with my demos (just some generic western pop) and the feedback was kinda "keep on writing, not there yet" but then one song (a cowrite with Ville Alajuuma) was sent out to one majors international network. Didn't get any good results from Europe but then they got feedback from Japan that maybe this writer could try to write for Japanese market. So then the publisher suggested to me that do I wanna sign a house-writer deal for Asian market? And I was thinking "Not my goal but I would be fool to not take this change" So I said yeah. I had visited Japan with a youth choir when I was 20 years old, back in the summer of 2000. And heard some Jpop while I was there in the stores and radio. One particular artist felt cool, her name is Sugar Soul. Bought some CD's then and I listened to them quite a lot back in Finland. I've always thought that Asia and especially Japan is cool and it has felt interesting to me in so many levels. So in one sentence, I've been interested in the whole culture - language, religions, samurais, ninjas, robots - so I had some general knowledge to attach my writing skills to. But I wanna point out that it's a very problematic approach to think that a genre called A-pop exists. It

sure as hell doesn't :D! We should always talk about the specific market and artist to be more accurate and have better results. So in Japan, it's J-Pop (both classic or modern) in Korea K-Pop, in China it's Mando-pop / C-pop. All of these genres and styles have differences that the writer should take in to account. I think you get my point...like if a Japanese writer would say Western pop and then tries to push the same song for Finnish / French / German market. That wouldn't probably end up as a cut cause the cultures and markets are slightly different.

2. Is there something you do differently when writing or producing A-pop compared to Western pop?

For me it all comes down to the differences in melody and harmony as I am mainly a top-liner. Western pop has much more modular structure as in 4 bars + 4 bars etc and the top-line structure has more elements like "AABA" and it's normally quite simple and monotonous. That approach could work in a bigger structure for K-pop but in K-pop they might play a lot with major/minor vibes, so not so strict on the tonality. But for Japanese market the melodies have much more longer arcs, the melody seems to build longer tensions and it displays the harmonies much more. And the same with harmony in Jpop, it's a bit more complex etc. But for K-pop you might have this melody stuck on one note but in Jpop it might go thru all the characteristic notes of the chord as in 1st, 3rd, 7th etc. These things also varies between the different artists. But I think it's still a learning process for me, it's really hard to find that balance when things are simple enough to be catchy but not too childish. And for K-pop that things are swag and cool but not too dark. For China I feel that I don't have so much knowledge on the faster songs, but for ballads....go melodramatic, think musicals, think Disney. So big emotions. So there's tons of differences and the best results come from respect towards the existing hit culture within each market and then just listen and learn the market.

3. During your career, have you noticed any change in what kind of songs the Asian artists and publishers are looking for? For example, are there more Western influences/references than before?

I would say that the Japanese market has opened a bit towards the styles of the big Korean acts. So there's a classic J-pop and the modern style that has more K-pop elements. Previously K-pop was the closest towards the western market but nowadays I feel that K-pop is affecting the global styles. It's so huge at the moment so I'm predicting that in the future we will have couple of global styles and one of them is highly affected by today's K-pop. About China can't say a thing cause I'm just entering the market. So maybe there's some changes but I feel that it's all about the market knowledge. Be humble and learn the market. I know that hiphop is big in China at the moment. But ballads, ballads, ballads. Always need for ballads.

4. Why do you think western producers and writers are so highly valued in the Asian music market?

I think it's because of historical perspective. Maybe the western writers were technically ahead like 5-10 years ago but today I feel that the gap between the producers is getting smaller. One of the things I feel is that we have better english language skills and we are more familiar with the western pop. And when the labels in Asia are looking for something a bit more western / different they look for foreign writers. I believe that the supply and demand of writers and producers will change in 5-10 years. There's so much talented writers and producers in Asia, too, that the competition will get even tighter.

5. Is there any specific benefit in being a writer/producer from Finland? For example, are the Finnish music organizations actively supportive towards Asian music export? Is there something you wish there was more of?

Hmm... I think, this is basically just a guess, but we have an upper hand with our melody approach towards the ballad scene. That's one area that I'm focusing a bit now. I think our melancholic "iskelmä" has some similar vibes to these melancholic ballads that are in minor key. So it could be an area easier for us than say,

writers from UK. And there's a huge demand for this kinda of songs. Finnish people are respected in Japan, so that might help a bit. I think we understand that Japanese culture a bit more deep. Don't know if it helps writing but it might help to create more long-term relationships. And one thing that we might forget a bit. We are close to Sweden, one-hour-flight, so you can try to get to sessions with those big names in K-pop and J-Pop. There's many successful and talented writers in Stockholm so hook up with them. Learn from the best, I'd say. Finally about the support perspective. I think Music Finland is doing a wonderful work and I think that without Music Finland I wouldn't have my career at all. So more money to them aka more support to the field. Songwriters rarely get any funding / grants from associations, like the Finnish government Arts Council. I know only few. I think that it's getting better compared to 5-10 years ago. Is it because our songs could actually make some money, I don't know. I was pleasantly surprised about the fact Music Finland had connected with Business Finland to see whether there's some support we music exporters could get. And the music business should hook up with some other cool companies to find some support for music export.

Appendix 6. Interview Ann Slangar

Royalties

Nyt saa käsityksen että kaikki maksavat ennakkoa mutta näin ei ole. Japani ja Korea ei maksa ennakkoa mutta Kiina kyllä. Jos laitat siihen "Labels in China often pay..." niin menee oikein.

Japani maksaa streamingistä sekä mekanisoinnit että esitykset mutta ilman kustantajaa ei tekijä saa mekanisointiosuutta ainakaan. Kiinan osalta jää vielä nähtäväksi miten esitysosuuden käy.

Publishing contract

Useimmat Aasian maat eivät toimi ollenkaan ilman kustantajaa ja ali-kustantajaa ja näinhän on myös Amerikan kohdalla.

Kustantajat tuovat toki verkoston ja leirimahdollisuudet mutta erittäin suuri osa on sopimusten tekeminen jokaisen biisin kohdalla ja jokaisen maan kohdalla liittyvät omat verosopimukset ja säännökset.