

# The Importance of Playlists in the Life Cycle of a Song

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The Importance of Playlists in the Life Cycle of a Song

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The purpose of this thesis was to discuss the significance of playlists in the lifespan of a song. It aims to expand knowledge of what happens behind the scenes and how much effort is put into playlist construction. The matter is approached by gathering data from online articles and interviewing representatives of the music industry who are in some way in regular contact with playlists. Some of the several ways a song can be selected to a playlist are addressed in this thesis. The information is mostly time-bound as the industry is continually changing.

The selection of songs for playlists requires careful consideration. Playlists always serve a higher purpose that is not directly visible to the audience, and a regular person concentrating on enjoying music seldom gives it a thought. It was found that playlists today play a significant role in music marketing, and algorithm-based recommendations will become more prominent in music listening in the future. Radio has maintained its popularity in Finland and continues to play a significant role in artist development. New ways to promote music will presumably rise in the next few years and at some level, change the music industry.

The thesis includes a media segment consisting of four songs and a narration describing the goals and intentions behind each one.

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Key words: playlist, radio, Spotify, music business

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**GLOSSARY**

Playlist	List of songs that can be played in sequentially or in random order
Major label	Warner Music Finland, Sony Music Finland, Universal Music
YLE	Public service broadcasting company in Finland
A&R	Artist and repertoire

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Playlist as a concept is familiar to most people. In this golden age of streaming, it is a powerful tool for both listening and promoting music. There are various types of pre-assembled lists for different occasions on streaming platforms, and all commercial radios have precisely constructed lists of their own. One of the most common types are ranking lists. For example, Spotify ranks Finnish top 50 most listened songs right now. Playlists can play music in particular- or random order, but what is on the list is far from random. Music streaming has gone more and more towards algorithmic-based recommendations, and user's behaviour is closely monitored.

Playlists are viral, and for an artist to get a song on some of the most popular ones can be a game-changing factor. Same goes with radio playlists. Radio brings a different kind of visibility than streaming services and plays a significant role in the development of the artist's career. Usually, the most prominent artists blossom on top of the most followed lists with their big hits, but how can a new artist get there? This issue is a headache for many record labels, and they do everything in their power with promotion teams to get the new music to the most popular playlists.

It is essential to understand how playlists work to get the most of them and to avoid unnecessary frustration. This thesis tries to find out what happens behind the scenes, how these lists are constructed, and how they respond to changes. When you have a broader vision of what kind of tools you possess to get your music out there, the work becomes a bit easier.

The thesis approaches the questions by interviewing people working in the field who I consider having experience and perspective on these issues. The work reviews the history of playlists, followed by a focus on the work behind them and their significance.

## **2 INTERVIEWEES**

### **2.1 Jussi Mäntysaari**

Jussi Mäntysaari, Head of Music at Nelonen Media, has worked in the music industry for a long time in various positions. He has previously worked for Bauer Media, YleX and as Spotify's Finnish editor before his current status. (Hätinen 2018). I interviewed him via email with questions on how the radio playlists work. I think he is a perfect person to answer the questions of this thesis due to his diverse experience.

### **2.2 Pekka Ruuska**

Pekka Ruuska, CEO of Kaiku Entertainment, has a long and versatile history in the music industry. He has been a successful artist, record producer and now the founder and owner of a music company with some of Finland's best musicians and artists under his wings. (Blomqvist 2019). Pekka has seen the changes and developments in the music industry, and I believe it is essential to get an interview from him on the issues of this thesis. I interviewed him via phone.

### **2.3 Iivari Suosalo**

Iivari Suosalo is a musician, songwriter and a satellite A&R at Warner Music Finland. (Suosalo 2020). He has a fresh perspective on urban artist development and a good knowledge of the digital music era. I wanted to interview him to get more modish opinions on playlists and how labels could make the most of them. I interviewed him face to face.

### **2.4 Eetu Toivanen**

Eetu Toivanen is the digital manager of Kaiku Entertainment. (Toivanen 2020). He adds another important perspective to the interviews by working with artist promotion and social media on a record label. I interviewed him via email.

### 3 HISTORY OF PLAYLISTS

#### 3.1 Commercial radio

Commercial radio stations started operating in 1985 in Finland. There are currently about 100 commercial stations, 12 of which are national and the rest local or regional. Every week commercial radio reaches 3,7 million Finns. (RadioMedia n.d.)

Before commercializing radio, Finland had centralized radio operations for YLE, which was responsible for producing and broadcasting radio shows in Finland. This state-owned company had an exclusive right to use the equipment the state had built. Centralizing radio operations for the government was not at all uncommon as most countries in Europe did so. (RadioMedia n.d.)

Finland was the first Nordic country to commercialize radio. The council of state granted a licence to operate for a wide variety of new radio stations in 1985. (RadioMedia n.d.) According to Mikko Koivusipilä, every station had few listeners, and the decision making power of the music was with the host. In that way, every host could shape the show to their liking by playing music they enjoyed, and by playing the bands they wanted to help to get noticed. (Vapaus 2017.)

The first hit radio station Kiss FM started operating after ten years of commercial radio, followed by Radio NRJ with the same agenda. The era of hit radio shows and tight competition started to form. Music took a more significant role in commercial radio, and the new fresh radio stations with new exciting music forced YLE to make a change as it kept losing listeners. As the competition grew, radio stations started to take surveys on what kind of music their listeners wanted to hear. This medium ensured that the station played music the potential listeners wanted to hear and therefore stayed loyal to the station. (RadioMedia n.d.)

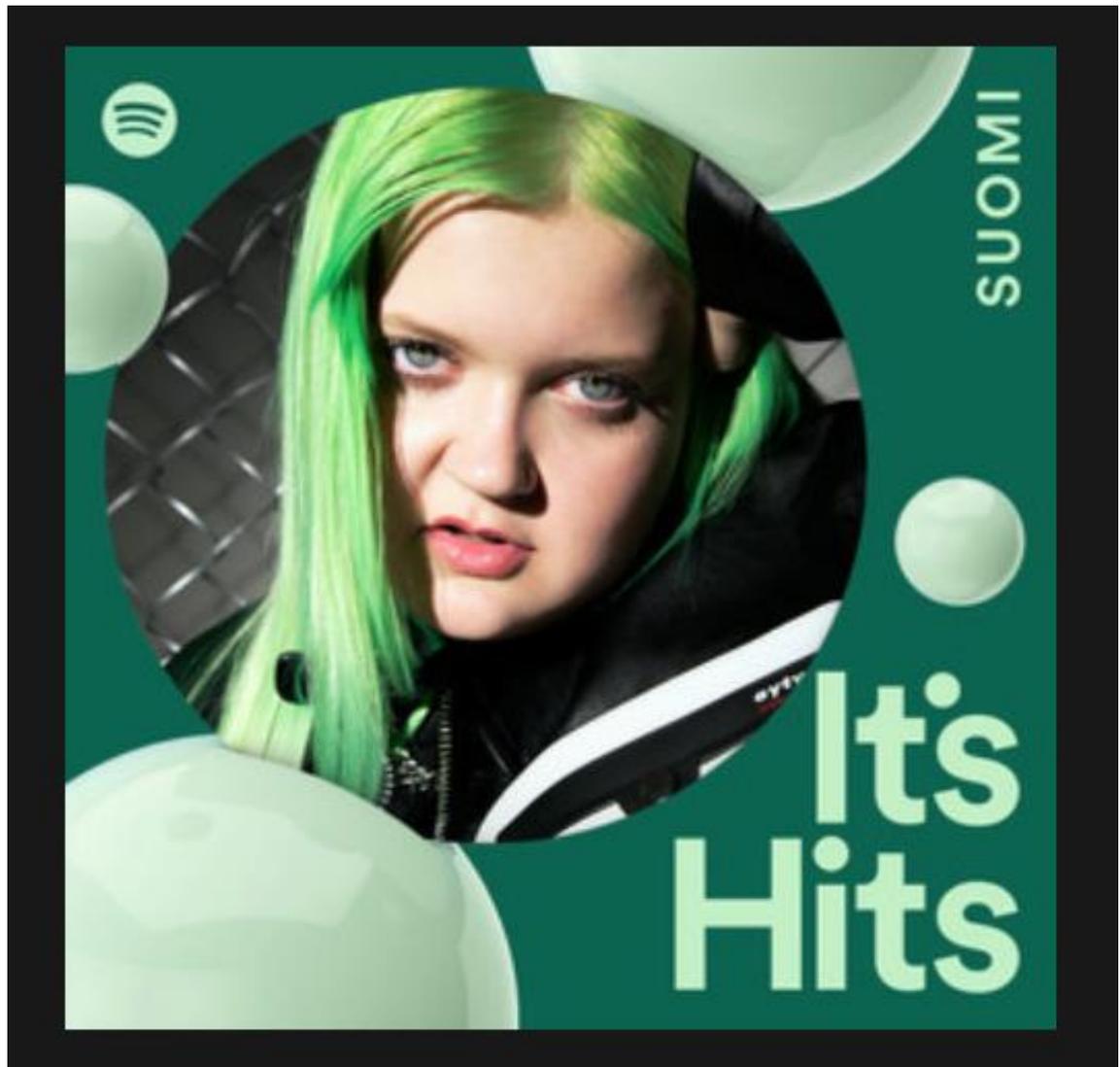
## 3.2 Spotify

The history of Spotify started in 2008 in Sweden when Daniel Ek and Martin Lorentzo launched the platform. They created a service which gave people access to a massive catalogue of music on demand for 10 euros per month. (Hyppänen 2017.) It was a game-changer.

The timing for launching Spotify was just right. The revenue of the Swedish music industry was noticeably declining in 2008, but the new streaming platform came to rescue. Spotify showed its operability right away by boosting the revenue of Swedish record companies by 30 percent. People fell in love with the new service, and it started to grow. Spotify broke one million subscribers in 2011 and ten million three years later. (Hyppänen 2017.)

A vast range gave people the privilege of exploring new unheard music by unknown artists without paying more than 10 euros per month. Spotify began recommending songs to its users based on the music they consumed. The more people listened, the more Spotify's recommendations improved. (Grannell 2018.) Algorithms started continually analyse people's taste of music and directing them to new songs of the same style (Hallamaa 2019).

Playlists made finding new music more accessible than ever. Spotify and Apple music doubled down on discoverability by adding playlists people could follow. (Grannell 2018.) These playlists are now the core of Spotify, and the biggest ones have tens of millions of followers (Hallamaa 2019). The name of the biggest playlist in Finland is "It's Hits Suomi".



PICTURE 1: Screen capture of the cover picture of It's Hits Suomi -playlist on Spotify (Photo: Koivunen 2020)

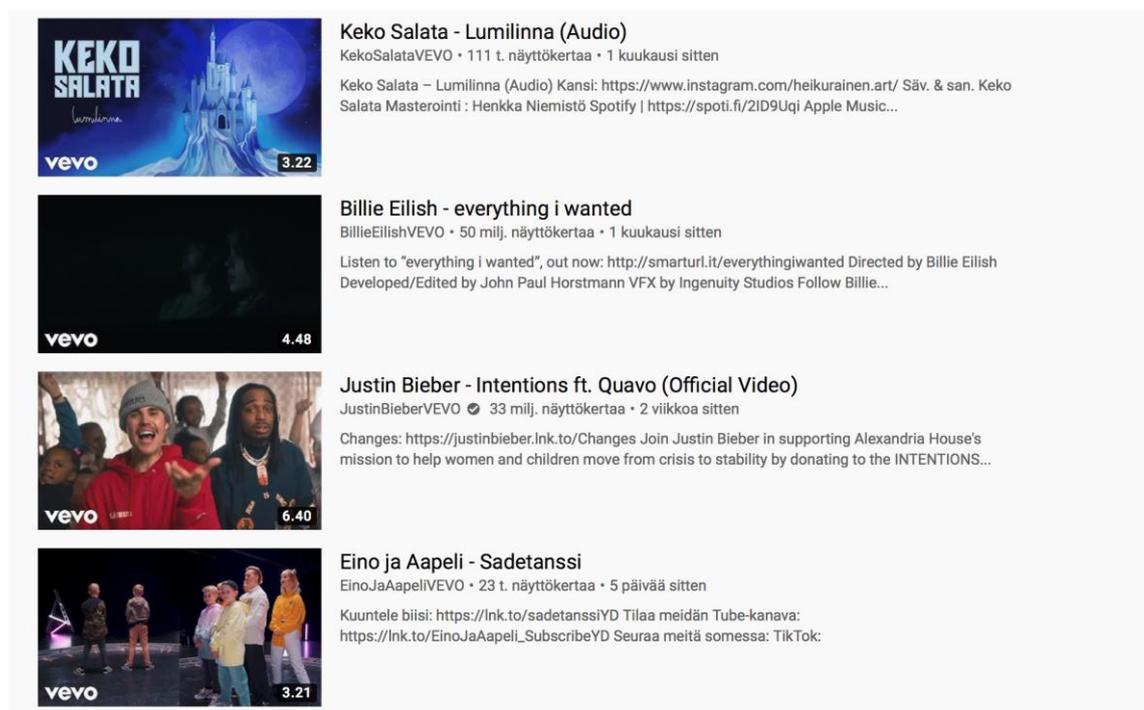
### 3.3 YouTube

Video-sharing platform YouTube was founded on February 14, 2005, by three early PayPal employees Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim. Since then, YouTube has become the king of online video, and it has more than 2 billion monthly users visiting their favourite music videos and more. (Leskin 2020.)

The starting year was a sensation for YouTube. The company had a rocket-like start, which got Google's attention. Google bought the company a year after its founding and started to shape YouTube to be the platform it is today. The site

went from being an amateur video sharing site to one of the most significant music streaming and the most prominent original video content platform. (Leskin 2020.)

A site that never really intended to be a music platform is now visited by one billion visitors each month for music, according to Google. Like Spotify, YouTube started to use algorithms that monitor user behaviour to recommend videos based on the previous ones they have watched. (Richards 2019.) What separates YouTube from other music platforms like Spotify is the visual content it offers to the listener. When MTV largely abandoned showing music videos in the mid-2000s, artists and directors found YouTube to be the new home for publishing music videos worldwide (Siqueira n.d.). In April 2009, YouTube teamed up with a company called Vivendi, and a new music video service called Vevo was born. The deal was a response to music companies' complaints about piracy. (Leskin 2020.) Nowadays it is more like a rule than an exception to see "Vevo" on the side of a music video on YouTube.



The screenshot displays a list of trending music videos on YouTube. Each entry includes a thumbnail with the Vevo logo and a duration timer, followed by the video title, the channel name, and the number of views. The first video is 'Keko Salata - Lumilinna (Audio)' with 111 thousand views. The second is 'Billie Eilish - everything i wanted' with 50 million views. The third is 'Justin Bieber - Intentions ft. Quavo (Official Video)' with 33 million views. The fourth is 'Eino ja Aapeli - Sadetanssi' with 23 thousand views.

Video Title	Channel	Views
Keko Salata - Lumilinna (Audio)	KekoSalataVEVO	111 t. näyttökertaa
Billie Eilish - everything i wanted	BillieEilishVEVO	50 milj. näyttökertaa
Justin Bieber - Intentions ft. Quavo (Official Video)	JustinBieberVEVO	33 milj. näyttökertaa
Eino ja Aapeli - Sadetanssi	EinoJaAapeliVEVO	23 t. näyttökertaa

PICTURE 2: Screen capture of YouTube's trending music list (Photo: Koivunen 2020)

## 4 HOW DOES A PLAYLIST WORK

### 4.1 Masterminds behind playlists

Spotify is the biggest music streaming platform in Finland. 11% of all music listening on an average day is from Spotify (Finnpanel 2020). Still, according to Teosto's and IFPI Finland's research on how Finnish people listen to music, around 40% listens to music by streaming it from Spotify. Globally, Spotify usage is only 36% of all streaming next to Apple Music, Amazon and a few other smaller platforms. In Finland, the same percentage is 85. (Teosto & IFPI Finland 2019.) Streaming has become a massive part of today's music consuming, especially among younger people (Music Finland 2016.)

There are several ways to consume music nowadays on Spotify. Depending on the situation, whether you want to focus on the music or just to get a pleasant mood on the background, you can choose from a great variety of different playlists. According to Teosto's and IFPI's research, 79% listens to music as background music, and 47% by focusing on it. On Spotify, there are lists for well-known hits, new music, all kinds of moods, different situations, genres, eras, and even for various types of dinners (Spotify n.d.). Playlists are a very efficient way to get the right kind of music playing without giving it too much thought. The most popular list is "It's Hits Suomi" under the Pop category with over 190 000 followers (Spotify n.d.).

Spotify is the new record store (Kafka 2017). It is the place for browsing music, and lists are like the shelves of the store. The higher your song is on these lists, the more visibility you are likely to get. Playlists are essential as they make instant user data collecting possible (DiFranza 2019). 2 000 000 streams is the limit for a gold record, 4 000 000 streams for platinum and so one (IFPI 2018). On an average day, the most streamed song in Finland gets around 60 000 streams. The stream count depends on the day, as on the weekends the count is usually higher compared to weekdays. (Spotify 2020.) The most streamed song in 2019 in Finland was "Ikuinen vappu" (IFPI 2019).

How does an artist get his/her single placed on a playlist, the efficient channel to get visibility on Spotify? There are two kinds of playlists, curated and algorithm-based. A human collects the curated ones, and in Finland, the editor is Samuli Väänänen. By using different data tools and his expertise, he considers which songs to place where. Spotify's artificial intelligence builds the algorithm-based ones by analysing the features of the music and the listening habits of the listeners and tries to combine these two as well as possible. (Flinkkilä 2020.) Record labels keep a close relationship with Spotify and arrange meetings to introduce what is coming and to pitch the songs they believe should be placed on playlists. Also, artists have a tool they can use to pitch a song to playlists in Spotify for artists -application. The tool comes handy, especially for independent artists who don't have a label doing the marketing and pitching for them. (Suosalo 2020.)

The stream count from playlists varies a lot depending on the song. The data of a song on a playlist affects the life cycle of the song on the list. (Flinkkilä 2020.) A song that is, for example, skipped a lot is more likely to be dropped lower or off the list entirely. A song from a well-known artist is more likely to be placed high on a popular playlist based on its previous success than a song from an unknown newcomer who does not yet indicate any success at all. (Suosalo 2020.)

## **4.2 Radio music research**

The way we listen to music has changed over time. It is clear to see that phones pay a significant role in music listening nowadays. Still, radio has maintained its popularity. Most of the radio listening happens in a car, but it is still popularly used at home as well. 55% of Finnish people listen to the radio at home, while the same percentage for Spotify is 39. (Teosto & IFPI Finland 2019.)

Commercial radio is over 65-million-euro media in Finland. In 2018, 65,7 million euros were spent on radio advertisement. It has remained its position as the number one music media over Spotify and other channels, despite the difficulties of different media in Finland. (RadioMedia n.d.) Roughly 70% of Finnish people listen to the radio every single day (Teosto & IFPI Finland 2019), and it reaches over 3,6 million people weekly (RadioMedia n.d.).

Commercial radio stations play what the audience wants to hear. The operating model is quite simple. Radio station asks, and the listeners answer. Stations create playlists according to the results of the inquiries they give to a selected group of people. The inquiries happen in so-called hall research. (Mäntysaari 2020.)

For instance, Nelonen Media uses hall research to determine the music they should play on their commercial channels. According to Jussi Mäntysaari, Head of Music at Nelonen Media, the process of such studies proceeds as follows. Each channel has a back-catalogue consisting of about 700 songs. The whole catalogue is being examined in the research, and 200 to 400 songs make it to the actual playlists. The collecting of the list is a challenging and essential job that usually takes a long time to be finalized. This part is where the music team's expertise plays a notable role. They go through several lists from Spotify, radio and other channels to bring every single possible candidate song to the table for consideration. (Mäntysaari 2020.)

People are selected to participate in hall research by their age and gender. Only people who fit the radio channel's target group are chosen. The first thing the chosen group has to do is to listen to the radio channel's descriptor list. The descriptor list is a relatively small list of carefully picked songs that represents the channel's sound. After listening to the list, they are asked to give points from 1 to 10 on whether they liked the list or not. This part is the first part of the research, and its function is to pick the most suitable members to the actual hall research. Those who like the descriptor list will be selected to the next step. (Mäntysaari, 2020.)

In the actual hall research, people listen to the whole back-catalogue of 700 songs, each song playing for about 10 seconds. They then answer multiple-choice questions of the clips they just heard. The first question is "Do you recognize the song?" and the answer is YES or NO. If the song is recognized, a few follow-up questions will follow. The listener chooses from these options; I love it, I like it, it's OK, I have liked it but now tired of it, I have never liked it. After the catalogue has been listened, the music team gathers the answers and compiles a list based on them. The songs are then categorized based on their age so that

two songs from the same era won't play one after the other. This way, the radio playlist will be a desirable mix and the songs in good order. (Mäntysaari 2020.)

### 4.3 The business

It's evident that record labels would love to take as much control in Spotify playlists as possible. After all, Spotify is the record store of today and getting to control what is on the spotlight sounds rather tempting. According to Iivari Suosalu, a Satellite A&R from Warner Music Finland, being signed to a major label gives a different starting point than an independent release or an indie label. Record labels meet with Spotify people frequently to pitch new music and most importantly, to introduce the bigger picture of the artist and his/her career. The meetings are a significant opportunity to showcase the continuity of the project, not just the next song. (Suosalu 2020.)

The more media partners a label can tie around an artist's career, the more positive effect it has as long as the actual content is quality. When labels pitch songs, the pitching should be fast and concise but also broadly address what is coming up in the future. That way, the partners know that the project will have continuity. Even though record labels get to play music live to Spotify people, they cannot make the final decision on how songs are added to playlists if added at all. They only get a chance to pitch songs with more depth. The last word always comes from Spotify. (Suosalu 2020.)

According to Eetu Toivanen, the digital manager of Kaiku Entertainment, the chances of influencing playlists are the same in theory, whether it is a major label or an artist who sends his/her song to Spotify through the Spotify for Artists app. The songs that get to be placed on a playlist are picked through a Spotify system, where labels and independent artists can upload the essential information about themselves and the song they are releasing. The official policy is that playlist adds are made only according to the information gathered from the system alongside the know-how of the editor. Each song is on the same line within the system. Whether a song is played live to Spotify people or sent electronically to the system is not essential for playlists. (Toivanen 2020.)

## 5 THE IMPACT ON A SONG

### 5.1 Exposure from a streaming service

To get added to a playlist with a considerable following can make an artist's career blossom. The exposure brought by playlists has the potential of being far more than just short-term. The understanding of how significant a role playlist ads play in today's music marketing is vital to get the most of them. The impact on an artist's career can be huge. (Rigo 2017.)

Statistics have shown that being included on an international Spotify playlist with a significant following can increase the stream count with 50%-100%. These peaks in plays occur when the song is on a playlist, but often after that, artists have seen a 20 per cent increase in their streams. (Kafka 2017.)

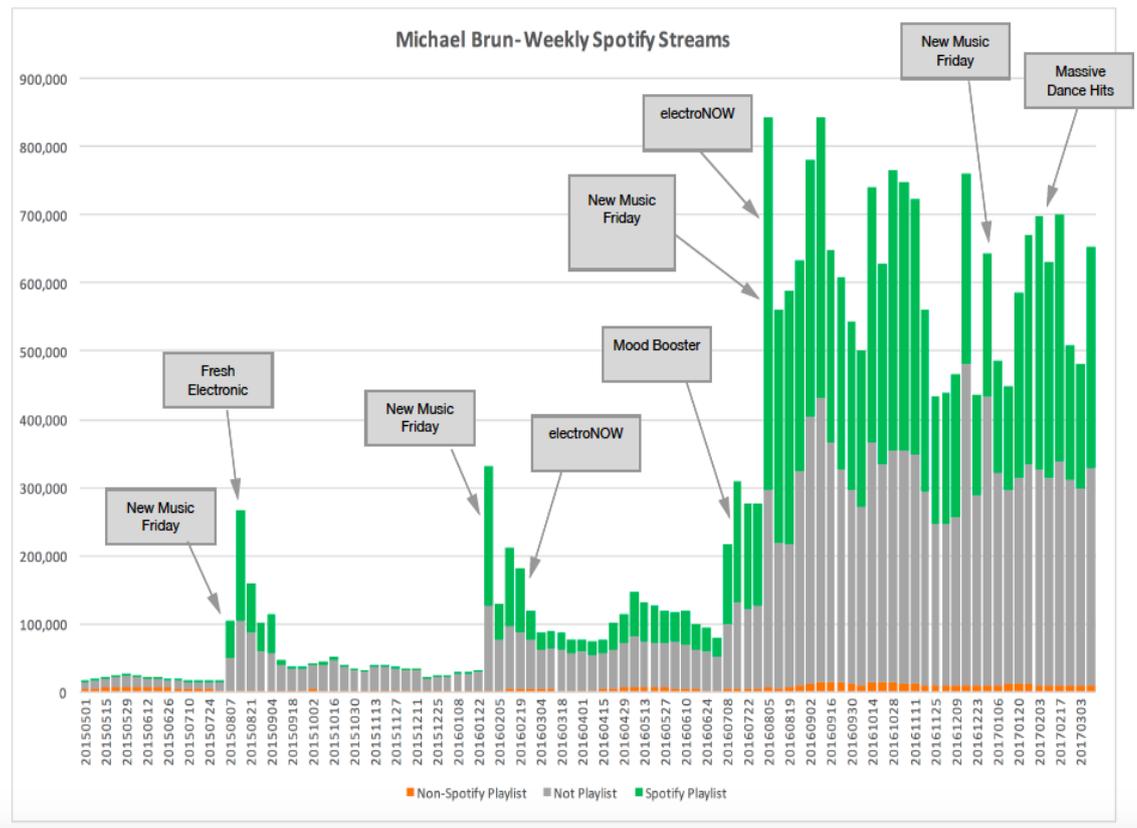


FIGURE 1: Changes in Michael Brun’s streaming numbers (Recode 2017)

Although the research results are from international markets, the importance of playlists in Finland is comparable. The biggest Spotify playlist in Finland, "It's Hits Suomi" has almost 200 000 followers, and it lists the biggest hits from Finnish artists alongside international ones. (Spotify n.d.) To be added on this list can be a very impactful thing for a song and the artist.

There are significant differences in the chances of success between international and Finnish songs. International songs have more time to start a long-lasting life in Spotify due to a large number of potential playlists. A song in a global market can go up in a specific country or genre, which will trigger the record label to take actions to target that direction even more. Even smaller playlists can get a song to gain unprecedented popularity and keep the stream count constant and high, resulting in later placement in more prominent playlists. In Finland, a significant number of streams come from the major playlists "It's Hits Suomi" and "#Vainsuomihitit" or from the "New Music Friday Suomi" playlist that focuses on the best new music. Without being on one of those lists, it is tough to break into the top50 list or even near it in Finland, but when the stream count is stable, streaming 2 000 000 is possible without getting to the Finnish top100 list. (Suosalo 2020.)

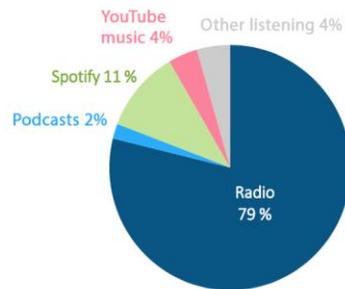
Major playlists keep the stream count higher than it would be without them. However, getting to a popular playlist doesn't certainly mean a gold single, and the strategic side is essential. The right timing of marketing can work like a lever and boost the impact the song has made on its own. (Suosalo 2020.) "There have been examples of songs that took a long time to get even close to the top50 list, but when they did, much more effort was put into marketing which helped to push the songs higher on the list. The people decide the rest" (Suosalo 2020).

## **5.2 Radio brings awareness**

Roughly 70% of Finnish people listen to the radio every single day (Teosto & IFPI Finland 2019), and it reaches over 3,6 million people weekly. Researches have shown that radio is the most significant music media in Finland, so the exposure it brings is presumably huge. (RadioMedia n.d.)

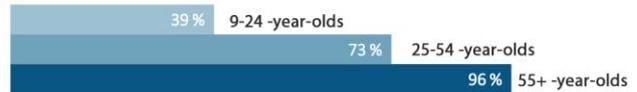
## Audio listening shares on an average day 2019

All 9+ -year-olds



Shares by age group

Radio



Spotify



YouTube music



Podcasts



Other listening



Reference: National radio research, year 2019

#Radiovuosi2020

FIGURE 2: Audio listening shares in Finland 2019 (Finnpanel 2020 modified)

Finnish bands like Satellite Stories, Sima and Sallan ja Miron matka maailman ympäri, to name a few, started their radio career before they even had a record contract. YleX, one of Finland's national public broadcasting company's stations considered these bands to be potential and played them on their show. YleX focuses on new music and targets the younger age group of 15-24 -year-olds, and record labels keep a close eye to their activity, sometimes resulting in signing new talent. A band called Sima is a living example of how a radio playlist add can lead to something as crucial as a record deal. Sony Music Finland spotted Sima from YleX which later resulted in signing the band. (Tawast 2015.)

Possible radio play is beneficial for the label too. If an artist gets air time right from the start or even before a record deal, it makes the label's job more straightforward. One of the most challenging things for a record label is to get the new unknown artist known, and possible radio play supports this goal. (Suosalo 2020.)

The importance of radio has changed over the years. According to Pekka Ruuska, the CEO of Kaiku Entertainment, radio used to be everything before Spotify. Still, slowly since 2007, the streaming service has taken a more significant role in the business almost becoming like the second radio. Before streaming services, radio used to be the only gatekeeper to broader success in the music

business. Ruuska has first-hand experience of the power of it before the streaming era. His own hit single *Rafaelin enkeli* blew up in the radio in 1990, and after four to five months he had a whole fall booked full of gigs. The radio play boosted record sales, not only for the single but for the entire album, and it sold platinum. (Ruuska 2020.)

Spotify can be considered as the second radio, but its influence is not necessarily the same. An artist can be massive on the radio but stream little in Spotify and vice versa. Spotify can get an artist to a certain level of popularity in Finland, and on that level, the artist can earn his/her living comfortably. Still, if the artist aims for greater success like JVG, Vesala, Cheek, Elastinen, Lauri Tähkä or Juha Tapio, to name a few, radio play is essential (Ruuska 2020). The audience base expands to new heights and the artist to so-called cross over artist. Spotify's users consist of narrow demography and therefore limits opportunities to a certain level. (Ruuska 2020.) The best scenario is to find a way to combine Spotify and radio. According to Ruuska, when you get commercial hit radio channels to play your music alongside Spotify, there are no limits to the success.

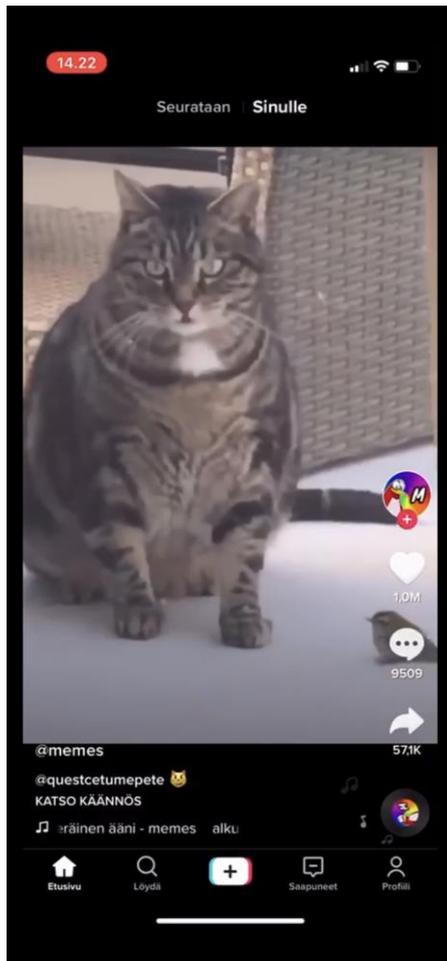
There is a central problem in getting a new unheard artist on the radio. According to Ruuska, all the radio channels that can make a song to become a hit are commercial stations. A commercial radio channel is just another platform for an advertiser, and it has one main goal, to grow its audience to be able to sell more time for ads. This kind of station needs to operate on terms that please the listener. It can be stated that when an average listener turns on the radio, he/she doesn't want to hear a song from an unknown new artist that he/she has never heard. A listener wants to listen to the best music from the most prominent artists. It is a high risk for a commercial radio channel to play something unheard, as the listener might turn the channel to a competing one. Because of the risk radios are very careful about what they play, and aim to get the biggest hits on the rotation that someone else has made a hit. (Ruuska 2020.)

YLE's channels are not commercial, so they could be the ones to raise the new talent and play their songs repeatedly to make hits. Unfortunately, there is a problem with this too. YLE's channels have a legal duty to treasure diversity and have to play music with such variety that the airtime one song gets is little compared

to commercial ones. A song needs to be played hundreds and thousands of times to become a hit on the radio so that as many people as possible have heard the song several times. Rotation plays a significant role in hit-making, and usually, the songs that get inside one are from the most prominent artist. Of course, there are outstanding songs from upcoming artists that fight their way to popularity and the rotation, but that is rare. (Ruuska 2020.)

### **5.3 Different route to playlists**

Playlists respond to things happening around them, and popularity outside Spotify affects the listings surprising ways. A song can go viral in various platforms nowadays, thanks to digitalisation, which usually affects positively to stream counts and playlists. The most recent application that has quickly risen to prominence in the music industry is called TikTok. TikTok lets users upload short 15-second videos and provides them with various filters, effects and a music database. The power of social media and platforms like TikTok is significant. When someone decides to post a 15-second video and use a song on it, it generates organic following for the song as well. (promoly n.d.) According to promoly's article on how TikTok is transforming the music industry, "an organic following means people will have unobtrusively stumbled onto your content. When an audience discovers things on their own, they're far likelier to be accepting of the material when compared to a sponsored post."



PICTURE 3: Screen capture of TikTok application feed (Photo: Jaakko Koivunen 2020)

One notable example of TikTok's power to generate a hit was Lil Nas X's song *Old Town Road* that rose from a TikTok #yeehaw-challenge to a Grammy-winning global hit that has over a billion streams in total. In Finland, there has not yet been a TikTok-powered number one hit, but the effect in the industry is visible. For example, a song called *Sekasin Sarasta* by Lucas, released in 2016, got a whole new start thanks to TikTok and its users. According to Tatu Äikäs in Jokelainen's (2020) TikTok article for Teosto, the song was an album track that did not get the attention of Spotify playlists. Still, it rose to popularity through TikTok in 2019 and has now 2.8 million streams. (Jokelainen 2020.)

Alongside new exciting apps that quickly get the popularity of the youth, a song can get significant attention, for example from TV- and radio commercials, as well as synchronisation deals like reality show intro music. Getting music into TV or movies helps to gain greater recognition and awareness. It's a stepping stone for

a newcomer and a great way to expand fan base for a known artist. Spotify editors keep track on what is happening around them, and it's not surprising to see a song get a playlist add because of suddenly boosted social media activity or a TV commercial that got the song stuck in people's heads. (Suosalo 2020.)

## 6 WORK SAMPLES

### 6.1 Ahti - Greta

This song is an example of a debut single on a major label. Ahti is a relatively new artist from Monsp Records / Warner Music Finland. He is known for his YouTube videos where he raps his lyrics on top of instrumentals of iconic rap songs. On YouTube, he has over 3 million views. (Warner Music 2020).

I'm a music producer and songwriter in Kaiku Entertainment. One day my publishing company asked if I would be interested in a session with a new young talented rap artist who has just signed a deal with Monsp / Warner. I answered yes, and we did the first session. Things went smoothly, and we continued with several more. Soon we had our first song ready which goes by the name "Pää ylhääl". It was released on YouTube the first of August 2019.

All parties, including the label, were pleased with what we did. It was time to start crafting the first official debut single for Ahti. For future sessions, Joonas Keronen, a songwriter from Hmc Publishing, was included in the team. We did several sessions with Ahti and Joonas, and we came up with several demos. At the same time, Ahti did sessions with other producers too, one being Daniel Okas. One day Ahti came to our session with a demo he did with Okas. He presented the song to Keronen and me, and we immediately heard the potential, but also what it needed. The song had a working name "Greta", inspired by Greta Thunberg. We started to modify the song to a more cohesive whole. We changed some lyrics and the hook melody and altered the production. The song got a structure we were happy with, and the label loved it. Ahti had several songs ready at that point, but "Greta" was picked to be the debut single.

"Greta" is Greta Thunberg inspired song, but not necessarily directly wrote to her. Anyone who has gone through feelings we can imagine Greta has can be related to the song. Friday, January 3rd 2020, was selected to be the release date for the song. It was an unbelievable coincidence that the day happened to be Greta Thunberg's birthday.

The song got excellent playlist adds on the release day. It was added to playlists like #vainsuomihitit, Uuden Suomalaisen Musiikin Lista, New Music Friday, Suomiräpin Järkäleet and Aitoa Suomiräppiä. #vainsuomihitit is the biggest one from these playlists, and the song was tenth on the list. On the first week, the song got 55 thousand streams on Spotify. The song was also added to YleX C radio playlist for a few weeks, which is not typical for a debut song of such a new artist.

TABLE 1. Spotify streams of Greta (Koivunen 2020)

10.01.2020	55k
17.01.2020	134k
24.01.2020	199k
31.01.2020	267k
07.02.2020	310k
14.02.2020	353k

## 6.2 Adi L Hasla - Turta

Adi L Hasla is a well-known Finnish artist with many achievements, including several gold- and platinum records. His song "Kevät" broke records as it was the most-streamed single in Finland for 41 days straight. His style is a broad blend of hip-hop and pop, where the two genres blend seamlessly. The listener can expect to hear club bangers as well as beautiful pop choruses from this artist. (Universal Music 2020.)

Adi and I did a session together somewhere in 2018. It was the first one for both of us making music together. We had no guidelines on what kind of song to make, so we started from scratch and went with the flow. Usually, most of my sessions begin by sipping coffee and chatting about life and politics, and so did this one. For me, talking about things helps the song writing process a lot, especially at the start.

Slowly I started making a beat as Adi began to write down text ideas and rhythmically mumble word-like stuff on top of the beat. Rhythm is a crucial factor in rap music, so it usually starts to form even before the lyrics (Hatni 2020). Soon as the process got further, the song began to get a direction towards a sung chorus. We tried a bunch of different melodies for the chorus for quite some time until we got what pleased us both. At this point, the concept of the song's story was ready, and the title was "Turta". I sang the chorus, and we recorded Adi's verses to get a decent demo of the song. Just before we were about to leave, we got an idea that perhaps Adi should sing the whole chorus himself. We recorded Adi's vocals, and we were satisfied with how it sounded. We left some doubling takes from my demo vocals to support the chorus and to make it slightly bigger.

Although we were happy with the song, it was forgotten for a while. About a year after the session, I got a phone call from Adi, and he said he had listened to the track and heard a significant potential in it. That was the day the finalizing process towards a release started. This song is an excellent example of how long it can sometimes take to a song to get released because of various reasons. The process is long and has multiple variables, and timing is one of them.

As a well-established artist, good playlist adds were expected. The song was released on January 10th 2020, and it got excellent playlist slots. It was placed 6th on the biggest playlist It's Hits Suomi, second on #vainsuomihitit, and second on Uuden Suomalaisen Musiikin Lista to name a few.

TABLE 2. Spotify streams of Turta (Koivunen 2020)

17.01.2020	175k
24.01.2020	314k
31.01.2020	450k
07.02.2020	548k
14.02.2020	626k
21.02.2020	670k

### 6.3 Tuure Boelius - Salaisuus

Tuure Boelius is a young pop artist who has released a relatively large amount of music. He became known on YouTube where he posted videos frequently before he started his artist career in 2017. He has released eight singles three of which has streamed gold. (Kaiku Entertainment 2020.)

When my publishing asked if I was able to attend a song writing camp with Jurek, Henna Sarriola and Tuure Boelius to make new music for Tuure, I didn't hesitate to answer yes. The camp was held in Tuure's summer cottage, and it lasted for three days. The objective was to make as many new songs as possible during the three days. The thought behind the song writing camp was not only to create music for Tuure, but to make something that would present a new musical direction. Boelius wanted to take a step towards more mature music.

During the three days on the song writing camp, we were able to make three songs and considerably good demos of them. We recorded vocals with Shure Sm7 on the spot without using any headphones. The music played through loudspeakers, and Tuure sang very close to the microphone while sitting on a sofa. We had a great deal of time to talk about life and share stories to inspire the song writing. Behind every song, there is a story from Tuure's experience.

After the camp, I made final adjustments to the songs before sending them to the label for listening. Soon, I heard that the record label liked each one a lot and that they wanted to release them all as singles. First one would be the song called "Salaisuus". I started to work on the final production for the single after the green light from the A&R team. After a few versions, Tido joined the project to bring his skills to the table. We decided to produce the song together to get the most of it. Soon, the sound was there, and the song was ready to be released. The vocal track on the final version is the one recorded in the cabin on the song writing camp. This song is an excellent example of how important it is to have the right feeling on the vocal track. It's not always replicable in the studio environment after the creation process where the emotions have been just right.

TABLE 3. Spotify streams of Salaisuus (Koivunen 2020)

07.02.2020	192k
14.02.2020	283k
21.02.2020	351k
29.02.2020	385k
06.03.2020	410k
13.03.2020	436k

#### 6.4 Tuure Boelius - 1

This song is another one from the song writing camp. It is firmly based on Tuure's own experiences, as are all the other songs born during the three days. The song has a deep story and a relatively dark sound to it. We wanted to make something danceable and captivating and share a relatable story.

The production process started already at the camp. The direction of the music was quite clear from the beginning, so the demo production was relatively easy to create during the song writing process. The demo we made sounded good already and gave a clear vision of the song. When it was time to make the final production, I made two to three different versions according to the feedback I got from the A&R team and Tuure. After the versions, it still felt like it lacked the power and feel of the original demo, and had slightly taken a wrong course. A prevalent stumbling block in music production is an overproduction of the song. When producing a song, it is common for an internal engineer to take control which can quickly lead to a reduction of feeling.

We passed the production to Jurek who finalized the production together with Ellinoora Tuuri. They did an excellent job keeping the original feeling and my production decisions and got the most of them. With this song, as well as "Salaisuus", the vocal track is the original from the song writing camp.

The song was released on March 27th 2020.

TABLE 4. Spotify streams of 1 (Koivunen 2020)

13.04.2020	301k
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## 7 CONCLUSION

Today, more music is released than ever before. It is straightforward for an independent artist to get his/her music to Spotify and even to promote the song in hope for a playlist add through the Spotify for Artists -app. A record deal isn't mandatory, but it can help with a lot of things in terms of marketing and connections and speed up the artist's progression process in that respect. We have seen several examples of the emergence of a hit song through various channels such as TikTok. Spotify playlists still play a significant role in making songs known and gaining popularity, but new routes to playlists are continually emerging. The shift in streaming towards a more automated entity will undoubtedly be seen in the next few years in some way. The algorithms are continually improving, and we can expect them to affect our music consumption even more in the future.

There are two kinds of playlists, curated and algorithm-based. An editor or a team, picks which songs to place with their expertise and different data tools. Artificial intelligence does the job for the algorithm-based playlists. Record labels get a chance to represent new upcoming music to the Spotify team, which might somehow affect the playlist adds for their favour. Still, each song is on the same line within the system, whether a song is played live to Spotify people or sent electronically to the system. After all, a good song tends to win and find its way to the top of playlists. Listeners are the judges.

Radio has maintained its popularity at an unprecedented rate, according to research, even during the current streaming era. Finns listen to the radio every day, and it reaches most of them. The role of radio in the development of an artist's career remains significant. While streaming alone can bring considerable success, the role of radio in reaching the next level is essential. The music that plays on the radio is mainly up to the listeners. Radio music managers play a crucial role in song selection, but hall studies largely determine what music plays on commercial stations.

So much new music is released today that it is hard for people to find and hear everything. Therefore, I believe that the importance of playlists in raising the popularity of songs will only grow. Radio and Spotify playlists reduce the amount of music most people listen to, making it easier to form an opinion on which song they like. A lot of good music will be overshadowed if they are not listed on one of the popular lists or played on the radio or some other way raised to popularity.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Work samples

#### **Ahti – Greta**

<https://open.spotify.com/track/4gPJoe8sYn-BPDsHkWM0f3C?si=ioV2RZCsR1KcQP73Hv7ldw>

#### **Adi L Hasla – Turta**

<https://open.spotify.com/track/4HgrobZRG3jcV5Bto1dCAu?si=N5IRgPbsRIKMJuPYM1pDbA>

#### **Tuure Boelius – Salaisuus**

[https://open.spotify.com/track/1vXLcFaph-kEGUvt8KXiiYX?si=V\\_CHisTIRa2QAuD2qyEkdq](https://open.spotify.com/track/1vXLcFaph-kEGUvt8KXiiYX?si=V_CHisTIRa2QAuD2qyEkdq)

#### **Tuure Boelius – 1**

<https://open.spotify.com/track/1ZVypI4Sx3kVg0cGyMIUhQ?si=4Mf-zeGeR-JatC7xr4gl9mg>