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The effects of co-operation in pop music song writing

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ABSTRACT

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The project that was a part of this thesis has been titled YENIAS – anticlaustrophobe and was a solo project written, composed, arranged, mixed and mastered by the author. The concept around the project was to write about blindness that love brings to one's life, the decision making related to that and common relieving situations one might run into in such dispositions.

The core thought in the production itself was to combine organic elements with electronic music principles in the signal processing. The song writing itself was as personified and assimilative as possible, with using popular music song writing techniques in the toplining and lyric writing.

The main question in this thesis was about the comparison of working solo on music versus working in a traditional two to three-person group. The comparison was made with the experts' point of view, and common knowledge in song writing literature.

The results were positive according the data collected beforehand. The solo-written music had unique mannerisms in it, instead of having been a type-of compromising body of work. The music itself was experimental and assimilative at the same time. The question around collaborations positives and negatives was a subjective point of discussion, but the main effect was in making compromises with multiple points of views working on the art.

Key words: music production, songwriting, toplining, electronic music, collaboration

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

Arrangement	The art of placing instruments and bodies of music on a timeline for structuring reasons
Bridge	Traditionally a new part in a pop song, that is different from the verses and choruses, and placed before the last chorus
Chorus	The repeatable part of a pop structured song.
Lyrics	The words compiled into a pop song. Often poetic in nature
Instrumental	A recording without any lyrical vocals, although it might include some inarticulate vocals
Jam session	A semi-improvised musical performance performed by a band or musicians
Mixing	The process of taking recorded tracks and blending them together
Production	The process of developing, creating and refining recorded music for public presentation
Sampling	Recording audio from a pre-existing piece of media, and using it in a new context
Soundscape	A piece of music considered in terms of its component sounds
Top-line	The main melody followed by the listener in a song, usually sung by an artist or a vocalist
Verse	The part of a pop song that broadens the subject from the chorus. Usually happens twice or three times in a song, in between or before choruses

1 INTRODUCTION

The project that's a part of this thesis is titled YENIAS – anticlaustrophobe and it's a solo project written, composed, arranged, mixed and mastered by yours truly. The concept around the project is to write about blindness that love brings to one's life, the decision making related to that and common relieving situations one might run into in such dispositions. The project is new and almost fully under my own leadership, disregarding some recordings done with a third party.

The way of working alone was a rule that I made for myself to have a unique effect on how the project will sound. According to industry multi-talent Pekka Ruuska, making decisions on music alone enhances many attributes within the music (Ruuska 2020) and brings together something that sounds strictly like one's background in music and I wanted to utilise that since it's rarer to come by in music nowadays. The standards set will divert the sounds towards more compromises and co-operation has a certain sound to it as well, that is vaguer.

There are thirteen tracks, of which ten have vocal performances by me, and the structures shift from traditional to experimentational. The entirety of the project has an experimentative feeling to it and has an energy to it that requires attention in a way. Intense and contrasting soundscapes have a storytelling feeling to them with a toplining style that borrows mostly from popular music. The comparison is made with a four-track EP worked with a singer and artist called JULÉA.

I have been producing electronic music for about twelve years now and most of my expertise is in electronic music and more specifically, drum and bass. The know-how is hearable in the synthesizer tones and sound design but does not guide the project itself too much.

In this thesis, I'm mostly comparing the song writing experiences of working totally solo on a full album and co-operative pop songwriting, and reflecting on how the differences play a part in how the music sounds and how it affects the workers themselves. Comparison with the professional points of view are also in the core of this thesis' problems and search of solutions.

2   INTERVIEWS

Songwriting is inherently intuitional (Perricone J. 2000, 6). One cannot define a perfect song or a perfect approach on how to make a hit song. That is the reasoning behind asking a few established industry professionals on how pop song writing works or should work. The same questions for two different eras of songwriters would cover the most experience for the time being.

The first person I interviewed was Mikko Koivunen, who works with Finnish artists such as Rosi, Juha Tapio, WIL, Adi L Hasla and many more (Kaiku Entertainment n.d.). His experience is from the modern era of song writing and covers the new techniques and standards' effects on the work itself. As a professional, he's been active for around three years, of which one and a half have been full time.

One of the experts I interviewed was Pekka Ruuska, whose merits cover decades in the industry and his viewpoints are wider in the same area. He founded Kaiku Entertainment, under which Mikko Koivunen also works, and their percentage on the radio top-lists spots is exceptionally high compared to any other independent publisher. He also did well on his solo career in the 1990s, having written the smash hit ''Rafaelin Enkeli''. (Snellman 2013.)

In the end, the answers were very similar to each other. While Koivunen leaned towards practicalities, Ruuska brought in the experience with the knowledge collected throughout the years. The different views complimented each other well and brought in an expertise not present in many Finnish publications or song writing books. I've translated the interviews from Finnish to English.

I also interviewed Juho Kavasto, on electronic music production standards and principles. He has experience on mixing traditional band instruments with electronic elements and has over a decade of experience on producing electronic music, so I saw his views beneficial on fleshing out the digital nature of the album project.

3   TRADITIONS IN POP MUSIC SONG WRITING

It is imperative that traditions shape the way of working around culture and arts (Tylor, E. 1871, preface 5). History provides tools and techniques that surpass time and sometimes even efficiency. The popular genres have always affected the traditions heavily, since the popular consumption and popular music production fed each other definitively.

3.1. Brill Building and Aldon Music traditions

Significant players in the pop songwriting world have been the companies within the Brill Building, named after the Brill Brothers, who owned a clothing store at the site and leased the space for publishers, songwriters, composers and other agents in the industry. (Williams & Williams 2016, 68.)

Because of the heavy focusing of the industry within one space, there was a natural connection and a networking platform that lifted the music up by itself. The songs were pitched to all the companies within the building until they found a home, and most of the time they did. The community really solidified the roles of writers and composers as pop music workers and had their output valued since the record labels and artists could focus more on the business side of things. (Williams & Williams 2016, 70.)

The companies started to hire young and gifted songwriters to write hits for other, young people in their audience. The teams hinged together through working together and the way of working drastically enhanced the speed of the output of songs from earlier days. The teams continually learned the techniques within and so, became bigger players than the sum of their parts. The feedback system supported their development as well, since the companies that had interest in the songs would be in the same building and it was almost immediate. Having multiple artists in the house as well shaped the approach of writing to a more personalised way. For fifty years, the Brill Building and Aldon Music produced songs

dominated the charts, and such prominence is very difficult to find anywhere else on the timeline of popular music consumption. (Williams & Williams 2016, 70.)

3.2. Motown Records' traditions

The Detroit-based label Motown Records' releases had a tradition of having musicians jam together on different venues in the search for new ideas and inspiration. Jazz and blues musicians' backgrounds had a significant effect on how the biggest hits during the years of soul music and R&B music came to life. The recordings were done with many instrumentalists, who arranged and composed the songs in a way that had a lot of layering of similarly tonal instruments, such as having a full section of horns playing in different octaves to make the recordings sound 'bigger'. (Baker 2015, 2-4).

3.2.1 Order of working

The songwriting work was cut into separate parts: lyrical, melodical and rhythmical. The basis of a song could start anywhere, but the most common way was having a rhythmical and a melodical basis before any lyrics or vocal melodies were worked on. The aforementioned jam sessions were often recorded and sent onwards to lyricists and artists that could work on them in their own time and make them their own. Sometimes the tracks ended up without a lyricist and often the band members themselves ended up singing on it after feeling out whose voice felt the most fitting for the music. (Baker 2015, 3-5.)

3.2.2 Separating writers and musicians

Having separate writers and musicians came later as the popular music scene started to take shape. In contrast to earlier times, the writers had separated themselves from the musicians in having an ear to the popular approach of lyricism and had a gut feeling on what affected the listeners' reaction within the lyrics. (Baker 2015, 14.)

The focus was on a straightforward approach on the stories within the songs, with no hidden or double meanings within the text. That would accompany a simple, looped tonal background for the voices themselves to be the leading element within the songs. (Baker 2015, 10.)

> Oh yes, wait a minute, Mr. Postman
> Wait, Mr. Postman
> There must be some word today
> From my boyfriend who's so far away
> Please, Mr. Postman, look and see
> Is there a letter, a letter for me?
> I was standing here waiting, Mr. Postman
> So, so patiently
> For just a card, for just a letter
> Saying he's returning home to me
> (Please Mister Postman by The Marvelettes, 1961).

In such situations, the producers had a few musicians with the lyricists to get a core for the music down, simple chord progressions to write over and get a grasp on how the text could fit a certain type of melody in the arrangement. (Baker 2015, 10.)

3.2.3   Sources of inspiration

The genres of the musicians' pasts were a dominant part of what came out to be the hit songs of their time. Taking the rules of many different genres and fusing them to one created new combinations and soundscapes to use as tools to write new music. (Baker 2015, 16.)

Borrowing lines of melody was a commonly used technique to speed up the writing process. Having a line of melody in a new tonal environment had an average listener fooled since the chords in the background gave a different feeling to the music compared to the source of the melody. (Baker 2015, 11.)

Quite often the texts were based on some commonly assimilated situations linked to material possession and economical states, socio-political issues and relationship dynamics. The song Dancing in the Street, written by William Stevenson, Ivy Jo Hunter and Marvin Gaye represented that well:

> Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement used this song as a call to action for people to stand up and challenge racial discrimination. This song can be interpreted many ways. It opens with a call to everyone, everywhere. This is important because the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement wanted people from different races and different backgrounds to join the movement. The lyric "summer's here and the time is right" is important in the interpretation of the song because summer would have been the perfect time to take action because many of the young African-Americans were home from school and younger people were the audience that Motown was targeting. The young adults and teenagers were the face of many protests and riots. The Civil Rights Movement was also a musical movement and the lyric "All we need is music, sweet music; there'll be music everywhere" is a true statement (Baker 2015, 16).

The racial dynamics in the United States were a big driving factor in the predominantly black culture around the production of music around Motown Records. The early times were guided through an easy to approach style of production, having very easily assimilative topics around harmonically simple music. From there, the style shifted when their position within popular music was solidified through many hit singles in the radio and got more conscious of social and political issues. (Baker 2015, 14.)

3.3. Genre bending

Pop music has always been a blend of multiple popular genres mashed together or emphasised in the production and writing. The history shaped the genres within the pop world heavily as one thing rose above the other in popularity (Myers 2016).

The rise of rock shaped soul and R&B towards an edgier sound. A good example would be any early Beatles track that converted the music for a more Caucasian audience. The genre took what soul and R&B brought to the table and since it

was easier to approach to most radio owners, it became the time's biggest musical phenomenon. The genre shifted slowly towards a heavier sound during the decades and in the 90s, another genre started to rear its head. (Myers 2016.)

The digitalisation of recording equipment and the newly found electrical instruments brought new possibilities to people writing music and a more artificial generation of sounds and spaces came to be. The 1980s were the golden age of synthesizers, big reverbs and delays since people were bolder with their experimentation with their new gear. (Myers 2016.)

After the metal and synth pop boom in the 80s, rap and hip hop had been bubbling under the surface for a long time. The familiar soul and R&B sounds were used in the production and writing process, and the rise of samplers as tools in production became an essential shaper of the eras sound. Old recordings of evergreen hits were reused and shaped to fit a new soundscape and approach to music. (Myers 2016.)

After these eras, the genres started to even out in the popular music scene. The genres evolved slowly, but electronic elements had a bit of a downfall in the soundscapes of pop. Then came the internet and piracy, which shaped the musical world to never be the same again. The need for protection brought together streaming services, and through that the music scene lost most of the revenue that had been circulating for decades in record sales and exclusivity. (Myers 2016.)

Budget reasons played a part in the way of fully electronic music becoming a defining sound of the 2010s. The cheap production and fast output became logical when there was a fraction of the budget within the scene. People could write hits from their homes, on their home computers and without expensive studios or equipment. The shift from traditional physical records and recordings had a significant effect on the future sounds of pop. (Feinstein & Ramsay 2012.)

Latin pop had always been a big factor within latino communities, but the latin pop scene had been very strictly marketed to and listened to by the Spanish speaking communities around the world. Their traditional popular music shifted

fast from the physical recordings to an electronic approach and the sheer volume of Spanish speaking people consuming their own culture had a big hit on how the western world listened to music. The biggest hit during internet times happens to be sung in Spanish: the songwriters and producers of Despacito by Luis Fonsi have used modern techniques and combined them with traditional songwriting techniques, rhythms and melodies present in older latin pop. (Exposito et al. 2018.)

The recent influx of easy-to-produce trap music influences pop in the modern day. The genre is most present in the popular sound in the now and the biggest tracks are usually hip hop-influenced with catchy melody lines and hooks. (Lynch 2018.)

4   MODERN APPROACH TO POP SONG WRITING

The modern way of working with popular music has taken the traditions of the past and has made it more efficient in time (Ruuska P. 2020). Nowadays the production rarely includes session musicians, arrangers or composers separately, and it has shifted to a smaller group of experts in their own, but broader areas. Quite often, the producer also works as a manager for the whole session or group, contacting the record labels or publishers for the release or collaboration with an artist on the song.

4.1. Toplining

Having a topliner within a session has been formed into a standard. As an ear for melody is such an abstract matter, it is hard to come by or learn by intention. The way topliners work is usually in close contact with the lyricist and the harmonies of the song, trying to find something that really sticks and has a distinct balance of memorability and recognizability. (Randle 2019.)

Most of the time, toplining is working with a ready-made and produced track and composing a melody on top of that with a set of pre-written lyrics. Going back and forth with ideas is in the core of working on a track and intuition carries a lot of the weight with pop music vocal melodies. (Randle 2019.)

It is possible that a session starts with the group starting from scratch and quite often the producer and topliner might just start feeling out a melody on top of a harmony with a simple approach, like with a piano and just humming. (Randle 2019.)

Usually the topliner sings the songs as well, since it is natural that the ear best suited for finding the intuitive melodies has the best interpretation of the said melody. That is the reason for most topliners having training in singing or in many cases, are the artists themselves. By doing the latter, a distinct way of composing will be present in the artist's sound. (Randle 2019.)

Writing multiple top-lines for parts is very common, since coming up with many ideas provides more flexibility with the modern tempo of music writing. Picking and choosing the best parts can be a powerful tool in progressing with a song fast and it never hurts to have a little freedom of choice. (Koivunen 2020.)

The rhythm plays an equal part on how the melody sticks. Having a speech-like rhythm on a top-line will make the listener focus more on the text, when a rhythm-weighed top-line is more focused on the melody. (Ruuska 2020.)

4.2. Lyricism

Lyricism is a point of never-ending discussion on how it affects the experience. Experts have quite contrasting opinions on how the lyrics and stories affect the experience of the listener and that exact fact makes the art of lyricism so ambiguous. There are techniques to use that have proven themselves, but as their success leans heavily on context, there are no right or wrong answers with lyricism. (Ruuska 2020.)

The lyricists' work in practice has a close connection to toplining and usually they are the one and the same person within the session, especially if it's a two-person session. Coming up with catchy lyrics for a catchy top-line is something that A&R professionals search for continually as a skill and the lyrics usually have two approaches with that. (Pattison 2009.)

A captivating story goes a long way in attentive listening, and a catchy rhyme scheme has the listener entertained more easily. Slogan-like sentences within a text has people attach themselves to the music effectively and writing about common themes affects heavily how people assimilate to the art. (Pattison 2009.)

Choruses are the main point with popular music. Having an insightful chorus will make the listener think about the text more and attach themselves to it but making it too difficult to understand will create a distance between the listener and the text. (Ruuska 2020.)

The way of playing with emotions and logic has been a technique used commonly in writing. Descriptive mental images of situations have emotions built within them and most people understand them in a universal way. Having the text's emotional focus within the chorus usually has an impact on how big the emotional response is to the track itself. (Ruuska 2020.)

The chorus is commonly something that can last a lot of repetition within the story. The whole point is to be memorable but at the same time, something that could be understood from many points of view. When acknowledging that, the verses can be tools to bring in those points of view to broaden the experience of the song and bring it to a whole nother level. (Pattison 2009.)

Playing with viewpoints on not just going for the obvious or reciting what happened or will happen, one could use metaphors or parables to create feelings that people attach to said mental images. Clichés are always risky to use, but on the other hand, they are familiar to most people and easy to grasp to as emotional mental pictures. Using them in a new context in an understandable way can be very effective in creating emotional stories within songs. (Ruuska 2020.)

4.3. Production

Comparing to older times, the producer tracks as well when they used to guide the studio work as a decision maker. The role of a studio engineer or a sound engineer has almost ceased to exist, all the while producers cover the technical side almost completely. (Shepherd 2009.)

Nowadays the producer has a huge area of work to master: Composition, arrangement, tonal decisions with instrumentation, assisting in toplining and lyricism, recording, editing the tracks, mixing the demos and most of the time light mastering work is included in the production stage as well. (Shepherd 2009.)

The reasoning for it is the way a digital audio workstation works. One can create everything for a song within one software as a singular person, and since the

differences between different DAWs are big, mastering one takes a lot of time, effort and help. The technical side is vast and takes a lot of engineering to handle, and at the same time the producer is a director within the session and in charge of bringing together a so-called hit song. (Shepherd 2009.)

The production is a defining factor in how a track is experienced. If a producer gets a composition and is asked to produce it, it means that the producer has been asked to make the track work for the times and possibly, the future as well. (Shepherd 2009.)

Writing sessions tend to start from the producer: they find or make a loop on top of which the topliner and lyricist start building a part for the song. Most of the time, the chorus is something they try to come up with and build other parts of the song around it. All along the session, it's built into the tradition that the producer guides the session a bit, as the technical expert knows how to record and use the tools for production. (Weissman 2010.)

After a session, most of the time the producer moves on to solo work. The production itself starts after the song is structurally finished and the tonal choices for the song come in. Technical approaches to enhance a track's emotional impact and storyline are the biggest hurdles for the producer, and nowadays they might make some small harmonic changes to the song itself as well. (Weissman 2010.)

The producers try to build a recognisable sound for themselves, especially nowadays. As a creative part in the songwriting and giving the finishing touches to it, a producer wants to be recognisable in a similar way an artist does, even though it is a lot more subtle. The choices one makes in synth sounds, sound design or mixing has a big impact on how a listener hears or feels a song and the producer, handling eight different jobs in the modern day needs an ear for supporting choices and visions for the song itself. (Weissman 2010.)

Bringing the genres of the past to the modern electronic and digital world works wonders with listeners. Nostalgia is a 'drug' (Dembling 2011). that producers acknowledge when making decisions with production. A lot of modern music top hits borrow almost directly from older music in different ways.

Sampling classics from ten, twenty years ago is incredibly common as it brings the old memories of those who listened to the music to the fresh sounds that the new listeners enjoy. Short, but at least subconsciously recognisable samples bring the listener to their memories very fast, since musical experiences tie themselves to the times of said experiences. (Fintoni 2013.)

5   THE PROCESS OF SOLO-WRITING AN ALBUM

YENIAS - anticlaustrophobe is my solo project that follows a strict ruleset of not co-operating with anyone on songwriting, arrangement or production. The wholly subjective approach is to set a unique soundscape, have a singular source for songwriting choices and to create a sense of entirety for the project.

I used FL Studio, formerly known as Fruity Loops, to compose, arrange and produce the music. I used a Tokai Stratocaster copy for a more humane approach in the middle of the traditions within electronic music and used and recorded a bunch of samples for myself to use, such as stomps, metallic clinks and machine-like sounds to get a unique soundscape down.

PICTURE 1. A Tokai Stratocaster copy used in the production. (Gibba 2020)

A lot of the tonal choices in the soundscape revolved around traditional instruments as well. Native Instruments Kontakt libraries were very prominent in the

tracks for the wide variety of real-life instrument samples and the ability to play them through MIDI.

PICTURE 2. The interface of a sample library of a middle eastern string instrument Saz, used in the track Doubts (Gibba 2020)

The approach production-wise was a marriage of organic and familiar-to-ear elements flipped to a more electronic sound and tone, and the choices were supporting more electronic music production principles, even though the sample and tonal choices themselves were made thinking about an organic and recorded soundscape and quite a few of them were self-recordings in a studio environment.

The songs were written during the year 2019 and worked on until March 2020. The thirteen tracks have instrumentals in between songs with lyrics and the whole project is about 40 minutes in length. Final recordings are to be done in the future, with final mixing and mastering choices hanging in the air for the moment.

The overall theme of the project is a subjective experience on realising one's life being on its way to the wrong direction and making changes to it hurting people around them. Soundscapes travel across many shades of despair to accepting

freedom of choice and control of one's own life being more important than pleasing depression, other people's outsourced needs and short-term pleasurable choices.

5.1. Toplining

The melodical work on the vocals was mostly done on already composed bodies of music. The production and soundscapes I started from scratch, but a couple of pre-written lyric ideas had an impact on what I started to search for with the harmonies and melodies. I wrote down song themes and topics to write actual lyrics about and from there, started building soundscapes for the top-lining work.

Intuitive choices drove the toplining for the project for most of the time. A poppy melody was a main goal to counter the experimental harmony and production. Focusing the melodies on my higher register felt beneficial as well, since my voice tends to resonate better in the higher octave.

Most of the time, I wrote the lyrics before the toplining and tried to fit the storyline within the track afterwards, but on a few occasions, I came up with the most intuitive melody and wrote the lyrics on top of that. The results were more poppy in the latter case and felt happier than the lines composed after the lyrics. Focusing on the music seems to have that kind of an effect on me as a writer subjectively.

In the melodies, I wanted to embody the influences of dreamy and echo-y soundscapes from records I've loved in the past, with a lot of new techniques I like in black music like trap and R&B. Dramatic lines of melody were borrowed from band-based music genres like indie rock or even metal music, and the rhythmical lines were often from soul or similar genres. A few of the songs I intended to keep as simple as possible as it's a common tip for pop writing for creating hooky melodies.

There were a couple of cases, where I had made an instrumental track and felt like it was finished as it was, and afterwards became inspired to write full lyrics and melodies on top of the instrumental that I previously had decided to stick to.

The result was a melody that enhanced the text naturally, since the rhythm wasn't too catchy or strictly in grid.

The deduction in toplining work was that the production took a big role in how I approached the song melody-wise. The lines were very reliant on the mood and soundscapes of the composition in the background and the subconscious influences in a similar vein and sound did affect the way of working drastically. Composing an eerie body of music brought out a melody in a more indie rock-vibe and composing something more skeletal or simple brought in a more rhythmical melody line.

5.2. Lyricism

The texts are strictly tied to a momentous feeling of some sort. As one song covers a moment of despair in uncertainty, another has a relationship that is undeniably ending soon as the participants know the result as well but haven't discussed it yet. Some of them cover a larger picture with the moments, but some just describe the situation as an emotional experience.

I wrote 'I Need This So Bad' as the last track on top of an instrumental I originally felt was finished without any lyrics or singing. The experience of uncertainty in my life felt like such a direction-defining moment in my personal life that I decided to paint a vague mental image of hopelessness in that regard. Using metaphors and parables with catchy sayings were in the core of fleshing out the text. (Ruuska 2020.)

> It's the future glaring at me
> I've been sinking deeper, deeper
> It's now that I'm not perceiving
> No answers, nothing keeping
> My head straight
> Out of stupid trouble
> My headspace
> Is excessively cluttered
> My vision
> Is drawing down doubles
> Of doom paintings
> And all things muddled

The placement of the lines has a feeling of a racing mind enhanced as the sentences pause and continue in the following line, also flowing over different parts in the arrangement. The restless feeling of the moment has a contrast to the melody and composition as they sound calm and eerie, even though the moment itself was my mind playing tricks on me in a frantic pace.

'Doubts' has the situation of uncertainty painted in a different light. It started from a thought of a person being in a relationship for the reason of not to feel lonely, which in the end isn't even selfish even though it is for selfish reasons. Having doubts of one person being there for the other is a romantically common thing to aspire for, but rarely a person is legitimately present in a relationship for the other and the naïve thought was in the core.

> Inside my head
> There are doubts of your feel
> Of your dreams
> Of your needs
>
> I see you started gasping
> Slipping through the claws
> Not willing to save you from yourself
>
> Feeling myself gasping
> Slipping through the claws
> Not willing to save me from myself
> Because
>
> Inside my head
> There are doubts of your feel
> Of your dreams
> Of your needs

The song structure wasn't poppy per se, but the theme was common ground for many people. Having only two choruses in a track with the verses in between was an experiment for an opening track to have a mood setting effect. The way of not rhyming many lines was a deliberate choice to make the text feel like a monologue for one side of the situation. The straightforward approach was made for an easier experience to assimilate to since the structure was something different to your usual pop track.

An example of a track that I tried to tie into a more momentous feeling was 'Could Be'. Tying the text to a daily situation makes it a bit cosier and more familiar, and so is easier to relate to:

> Sitting in the living room
> Wondering, what could I be
> With or without this
> Not sure of the mood
> Shaving off the guilt
> Relieved without this
>
> Oh my, am I okay?
> Should be, since being done is alright
> No more shorting, or hiding
> Behind uncertainty x2
>
> I think this could be good
> Shedding off the things built
> Looks shared, no contact
> The pressure levelled
> and freed without this
>
> Oh my, am I okay?
> Should be, since being done is alright
> No more shorting, or hiding
> Behind uncertainty x2

The track is arranged in an electronic music standard, with the choruses being instrumental. The build-up is the lyrical chorus, meaning that the chorus could be interpreted as a post-chorus as well. It's a contrasting take at the end of the record, bringing a lighter mood before closing the loop of one's life in front of big questions.

5.3. Composition, arrangement and production

A lot of the production revolves around electronic music principles with human-played instruments. For example, a lot of the guitar tracks were processed with tools that are present in synthesizers and samplers (MusicTech.net, 2015). The effect brings the sound to a more cohesive place, all while keeping the familiar tone of the played instruments. (Kavasto 2020.)

The track 'Be Closer' has an acoustic guitar that was processed with an instance of MAutoPitch that is basically an autotune, made by the company MeldaProductions. Within the plugin, I shifted the formant factor down, which brought the attacks of the frequencies down a set amount. It softened the sound in an unnatural way which is present in the soundscape altogether. (MeldaProductions 2015)

PICTURE 3. The interface of MAutoPitch controlling the formant of the guitar (Gibba 2020)

In 'Anxious', I recorded coins clinking against each other, but by reversing the recordings, I got a surreal percussion carrying the glitchy groove. The use of granular samplers also added an element of an electronic soundscape to a recording of stick drumming. Utilising a resonator, I made the sticks play out a static chord and so, created tension in the build-ups.

'Phasing Out' has a bunch of real-life recordings of trash cans and mechanic sounds that make it sound like big stomping machine. The Brazilian-style drums in the drops are heavily influenced by Baile Funk, a genre famous in Brazilian favelas that has a certain polyrhythmic feeling to it, made with recordings of samba bands made sound low in quality. (Pentz & Lara 2008.)

The track 'Free' also utilised an electronic guitar recording in the core of the song. The main plucky chord is a guitar ran through an LFO that controls the cutoff frequency of a lowpass filter. The rhythm and tone of the guitar is very electronic and almost unrecognizable in the context. In verses the guitar plays without the filter and feels a bit more familiar but still hard to pinpoint as a guitar. 'Slightly' also uses this technique with a Cable Guys Half-Time on the guitar. The organic

drums in both are also processed to feel a bit more efficient in energy seen in electronic music production: pitch shifting a kick drum with a short decay has the kick more club-oriented in feeling and so, more electronic in vibe. (Kavasto 2020.)

I utilised many different forms of arrangement rules: there are a couple of pop tracks that have the traditional pop structure to them, a few EDM-structured tracks and a few abstract ones that follow more of an arch rather than a traditional song structure (Computer Music, 2019). In production, all the choices were made to support said style of a structure: If a song was more of an arch, the sounds themselves were more progressive. If the song was more poppy, the arrangement changed in every part to indicate change to the listener.

The choruses I tended to treat as the biggest and most important as the parts of the poppy songs (Ruuska 2020). The EDM-structured tracks I treated with the electronic music experience, bringing in more percussion to the drops and bringing the energy levels down in the build ups or verses. Especially in 'Could Be', the contrast of the energy levels in the production is present in a noticeable way. The guitars are again filtered through a low-pass filter and opened only in the build ups. In the drops, the percussion is on the highest point of energy and the whole track rides an intense wave of bass. (Kavasto 2020.)

The tracks have a lot of contrast in the usage of space and it makes the listening experience more eventful. The unrealistic spaces compared to the almost claustrophobic mix renders the arch of the soundscape interesting and keeps the attention of the listener that way. 'Doubts' starts the record in a big and unnatural space, and the next song 'Cataract' takes the direction to the complete opposite with the mix with only momentous spaces and none with the core elements of the drop.

In 'I Need This So Bad', there is an arch-like structure to it. The original version didn't have any vocals, so I re-arranged it so that a voice fit on top of it. The soundscape I went for originally was a huge wall of sound that would fall to minimalism in a dramatic way and the vocals really enhance the experience's contrast. The track is similar with the first one in the tracklist, 'Doubts', and has the feeling of recurrence common in life enhanced.

6 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SONGWRITING ALONE AND COLLABORATING

The differences in creating music solo and in collaboration were distinct, but in the end, I did feel the need of a third-party opinion on making bigger decisions on the tracks. Sometimes it was contrary to the feedback, and occasionally strengthened by the opposing opinion, as well as agreeing with the feedback and making suggested changes was a prominent way of working.

The main difference was the total freedom in decision-making. No one was present to tell me to change something in the music while working, and the said fact had my mannerisms highlighted. It was the point of the rule on the album though, and so, I met the set targets with the project.

I wouldn't have worked on a project this ambitious if I had anyone guiding my decisions on the way and the music became very personal very quickly through the bolder choices in all the areas in songwriting. The conceptual thought wouldn't probably have been a part of it either, since albums are rarer in these times of fast release of music and single-weighted marketing. The instrumental tracks possibly wouldn't have happened at all if I worked on the project with people who work on pop music as a profession.

The EP had a result of a different viewpoint completely. The way I approached the project was more of a handling process of multiple visions around a body of work, rather than a fully artistic venture. The sound was to be made more accessible and somewhat easier to approach than on the album and the compromises had the effect heightened. The roles naturally also affected the sound, and so the compositions were a combination of me and the other party grasping onto ideas and shaping them to fill one's needs and vision.

6.1. Toplining

The albums melody lines really represent my subconscious way of hearing and thinking about music and how I interpret it (Ruuska 2020). The songs are mostly melody and harmony-weighed instead of the lyrics being in the centre and that is partly because I worked solo.

Even though the common opinion on collaboration is that it makes the creation easier, I did find the composition to be easier when I was in total control. Subjectively, I did enjoy the music more than the collaborations in pop I've written in the past, but then again, the reasoning is heavily subjective as the music itself is personal to me, and not necessarily as easy to approach or understand by any third party.

The toplining work didn't depend on creating something as fast as possible either compared to working with a vocalist or a lyricist, and the work itself was more intuitive and in a rhythm that was comfortable for me. The fact of no one pressuring on a direction or a genre in the creation gave me full reign on just trying out melodies on top of sounds that weren't familiar in a style of a melody or composition (Koivunen, 2020). All in all, the experimentation brought in new factors and techniques the usage of which I only recognized afterwards.

Comparing the results in the melody lines with the EP written with a collaborator, the approach in the actual work was different and on top of that, the results sounded like they had compromises present in a safer and more familiar aesthetic. The intuitive experimentation mostly dwindled in fear of the decisions being too weird or distancing, and that is why the melodies sound a bit safer, more familiar and easier to sing. Multiple visions did come together in the process though, both sides did work the melody into a shape that both were satisfied with.

6.2. Lyricism

The lyrics are extremely subjective and bound to a place and an emotion of a fleeting moment in life. The way I felt was at the forefront, and when writing, I

didn't even consider how the text would sound to the listener. The results can be abstract in a certain way, but still recognizable as a humane experience of relationships and big decisions in life.

The way of not necessarily going for a chorus first was a point of freedom that had the lyrical decisions have less pressure on the catchiness and more on the storytelling and descriptiveness. Most projects I've worked with in pop song writing have almost with no exception, started with the chorus and most of the time it's the right call if one wants to make something effective and catchy text wise.

The way of writing down themes had me started on the texts, but in the end the results might not have been strictly under the original theme and started to take off in different directions compared to the first idea. The flexibility of not having a strict theme did wonders to how I could write text compared to collaborations with lyrics I've done in the past. The texts tended to stick to the original thought more strictly and going back on made decisions was rarer in cases where they were first thought out to be good.

On the other hand, the lyrical work on the EP was on JULÉA's responsibility. I mostly just worked on the grammar or singular word choices that I felt didn't work or were slightly off the tone that was the intention. The results were personal texts for the vocalist, with their vision more present in the output. It made the songs more personal for them and gave me space to focus on the production and composition. That way, the working process sped up significantly.

6.3. Composition, arrangement and production

I was braver than usual with the compositional choices on the album. When stuck with a song, I went for different tools in my personal reservoir of tricks when thinking about songwriting. In 'Hues', I used the traditions of jazz to switch up the formerly boring chord progression and with passing chords in between the carrying harmony, I got to a point that I was content with. It sounded fresher and more recognizable, compared to the earlier, simpler and forgettable composition. The

difference in collaboration was that I wouldn't have gone for those kinds of solutions in a collaborative situation, because it's a take-off from a more effective way of composing pop music and doesn't play by the common rules as much as a simple approach would. (Ruuska 2020.)

The compositional choices in the instrumental track 'No More' wouldn't have been a go for me in a co-operative environment, because it doesn't feel catchy as it is. The rhythms are easy to follow, even though a little broken, but the melody is weird and, in a way, off-putting since it doesn't follow the subconscious melody ear of the composer, and rather leans on repetitiveness and the bassline that borrows notes from jazz once again.

The whole thought of making tracks in an abstract structure or anything departing from pop standards wouldn't have been present in my personal decision making in co-operation. The underlying thought of keeping the work effective would have been in effect for the reason of respecting people's time. If people would have felt like the music isn't commercial enough, it could feel like it's too complicated for the effort put in and so, the safe route would have been in the core of arrangement. (Koivunen 2020.)

The productional choices were bolder as the theme of the whole comparison tends to be. The unclean approach in sample choices and soundscapes was a project-definitive factor and had a 'sound' built into it. The entirety benefitted from the subjective production palette and had made the listening experience more interesting.

Broken rhythms were in the core of production as it naturally became a subconscious decision in almost every track. The combination of tribal rhythms and western pop production formed a unique soundscape and had a big impact on the whole project. West African drums were at the forefront and those types of percussion aren't present in my co-operative projects around pop music.

I've used these techniques before in collaborative pop song writing projects, but not as boldly. Most times I've somehow had to hide them in the mixing stage, so that they don't call for the listeners attention since the collaborators have flinched

from the statements made in the production. Stand-out decisions mostly were revoked in doubt, rather than exploration or weighing on the sound itself. The EP had a lot of decisions pulled back on production statements, and so came out to be less explorative and safer in all aspects. The focus did shift on the texts and the songs themselves that way though, and highlights the assimilative aspects of the music more.

7 DISCUSSION

The questions around music may be scientifically unanswerable to some degree. Even though I had experts' opinions regarding the subject, and they had merits to base solid arguments against working solo, I did end up with a project that has garnered a lot of positive feedback from everyone who's heard tracks from it. The way of combining the elements has resulted in the hypothesis of covering a lot of different types of listeners quite well.

The modern way of working could stay for the time being though. All the work around music placed to one person's responsibilities can be an insane burden for a person that is not necessarily ready for it. The way art becomes personal for most of the musical minds is an asset and a hindrance in coming up with as objective views as possible on the art and so, changing a thing from a first draft can be insanely difficult or impossible from a first draft. Sharing the responsibility makes it a lot lighter for a person to change or work on since it's not only you that is responsible, it's the whole team around the body of work. Compromises lighten the feeling of responsibility even further, so it renders co-operation in popular music a tool to be reckoned with.

The traditions and tools in traditional lyricism did substantially help me to come up with the text. Some of the texts started from an idea by the experts of their time and from there, it was way easier to come up with something personal for myself from different situations and points of view. Co-operation speeds things up a lot, but sometimes the unique approach does end up working in a more interesting way. There is only one timeline in life and using it in a way that you see fit is essential, especially in creation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Email interview with Mikko Koivunen on 8.5.2020

1 (3)

Can you briefly introduce yourself, tell about your background in the music business and your history with music?

In short, I started my journey with music age 11. I'm an academy graduate and my main instrument was percussion. Got trained in music theory, prima vista, transcription, was a part of multiple pop and jazz bands and orchestras and had a little private tutoring as well.

After that I went to a musically weighted high school in Tampere. My military service was with music as well as I wore the army green in the army marching band. I'm graduating from TAMK with a bachelor's degree in media and arts and have been working with the publisher Kaiku Entertainment for a few years now.

What do you feel is the most important rule of pop song writing and why?

Again, in short, the most important rule is that there are no rules. A bit cheesy, I know, but still true. In other genres, there are clearer frames and rules compared to pop that tends to flow with the times. Genres affect the way pop is written but the popularity has the rules vaguer than within certain genres. It's good to follow the trends and stay on top of the current sounds in the pop scene but otherwise it's so cool to be able to do anything as long as you go for a poppy track or song.

I'm more of a tracker myself, but what comes to lyrics, a common good rule of thumb is to try to write it to the popular consumption. A text is probably easier to assimilate to if the themes cover a common ground compared to a very specific approach or viewpoint in a specific area. The text won't be the one element that makes a song alone, even in Finland, but its impact is a big player within the country.

What do you see as the standard in song writing sessions regarding the number of writers, and why do you feel it has been formed to be so?
Three people feels the best to me. I sometimes do work in a group of two, and rarely there's a fourth person commenting the track (an A&R person most of the time). I do not know why three people feels the best as the roles usually are split in the traditional topliner-producer-lyricist.

A fun thought experiment with shapes: in a square, the lines are connected to two dots, but one is excluded of contact always. Somehow, I see the same in the sessions when there's only two points to have contact with and converse about the work.

What positives/negatives you see in two to three person sessions, comparing that to writing alone?

Depends on your own skillset and the style of music you want to write. I feel that there are only positives in collaboration, since my work has never gotten worse when I've got an outside opinion in. The way we tend to lean towards comfort zones in writing has your tendencies with music enhanced and an outside opinion has things moving fresh and gets your viewpoint to become a tool, rather than a crutch or a stumbling block.

Quite often the greatest pieces are optimal collaboration since all the experiences with music come together in one place and bring out the best in different worlds and create a fulfilling piece of art in more ways than one. Of course, it's doable alone as well, but I feel that is a definite positive to have multiple approaches available.

Disagreements do bring conversation in though. There have been situations where I thought that a song was going in a wrong direction but still the amount of people hasn't been a negative point in the actual production.

What do you think is the future in session dynamics, regarding the amount or writers?

I think that it will remain close to the same three-person format, excluding having song writing camps that just pile people in groups and have the group sizes vary. People do tend to be flexible about it though and it might turn the song out better. The three-person dynamic just feels logical though, so I do not see any drastic changes in the future.

How do you think it will affect the music written in the future? How will the music sound because of the possible changes?

Well, as I said, I do not think the session dynamics will affect the sound too much, since it is mostly about what the people want to hear. The music itself will speak for itself in this case!

Appendix 2. Email interview with Pekka Ruuska on 8.5.2020

Can you briefly introduce yourself, tell about your background in the music business and your history with music?

I started as a gospel musician in the 70s within the church scene after my Christian confirmation camp. We had a band together for a long time and after a while we got to record a few albums with the band Livingstone! Very similar to any band activity, we played concerts in schools, festivals and bars quite a lot and in the 80s I felt like I would want to quit the band stuff.

I signed on to Universal Sonnet with the band Ritz that never really took off, and afterwards wrote the track called Rafaelin Enkeli in France in a hotelroom in the year 1989 and it became a huge hit. I lived as a popstar for about four years after that and did tours and recorded albums as a Universal Records artists. I used to work as a teacher before all this.

Got an offer from Warner Music to become a head of national production in the Finnish department and I took it. I decided to have a break with my artist career and decided to focus on the label work. The last seven years I worked as the head of A&R in the company and was responsible of the whole Warner Finland's artist roster.

I signed The Rasmus, Maija Vilkkumaa, Zen Café, Teräsbetoni, Juha Tapio, Johanna Kurkela, Samuli Putro and others, and in 2007 I left the company and decided to form my own music company Kaiku Entertainment that has now been running for 12 years!

As an artist I wrote eleven albums of solo material, and I've played hundreds and hundreds of gigs.

What do you see as the standard in song writing sessions regarding the number of writers, and why do you feel it has been formed to be so?

Co-write traditions have been around for ages, but not in Finland though. In the states, the Brill building they worked on music quite industrially for other artists, writing songs as they do nowadays. There were a lot of these groups of three as the standard is, but they used to pair up for work a lot more though! Names like Carole King and Gerry Goffin, Leiber & Stoller (these two rock guys) and so on were a thing decades ago already, but in Finland, the way of working became a thing just about fifteen years ago, right around the time of me forming Kaiku Entertainment. The group of three has been forming for a while now, and what come to the reasoning is that there is one technical worker/tracker/producer, a lyricist, and a person that focuses on melody.

I am used to a world with composers and lyricists and producers used to be the leader for the band, more than a person in charge of programming like the modern producer does. When looking back, the producer might have had to write stems or harmonies for a reed/brass section but nowadays it is rarer to oversee session musicians, and it is more about directing the other writers. Being the guy that works the technology on the side of working on the music is the standard now.

The terms 'top-lining' and 'tracking' used to be a different line of work, more on the lines of composers doing the arrangement and, well composing, while the lyricists focused on the lyrics and the band and the recording engineer is now the producer, basically. It just serves the new ways of working as well.

What positives/negatives you see in two to three person sessions, comparing that to writing alone?

Starting with the negatives, the boldness of choices tends to be lessened with the addition of people in the group that has a song writing session. People will not be

brave enough to make the same decisions they might be comfortable with when they work solo and the results might turn out lukewarm. Too many compromises, at its worst, turns out just generic.

On a positive note, when there is a working group and many backgrounds on a song, the songs themselves get done faster and in a more efficient way. When the dynamics work out and there is unique knowhow within the song, it usually becomes bigger than the sum of its parts!

What do you think is the future in session dynamics, regarding the amount or writers?

Impossible to say for sure. This type of group sessions probably will continue indefinitely. The techniques working in a group get a lot more attention by the day and the development only supports itself more and more.

Of course, there are songs that get written by singular people, but the collaboration is the dominative trend. The shares in rights will shift towards people working more on the tracks in the future compared to sharing them evenly as things mostly stand right now, but there will not be a singular one right way for the future.

How do you think it will affect the music written in the future? How will the music sound because of the possible changes?

Hard to say, I think pop will develop as it has to this day. The middle eastern rhythms present in pop a few years back has now faded and the new wave of trap music is having its way right now. Melodic rap and simple melodies are on the top right now, but there is no clear logic behind it really. No one can tell the future, even though there might be some small signs in the history of pop music.

Old classic techniques tend to hold to their own. Artists like Lewis Capaldi or Adele grasp to the source, or sauce of the core of pop music, and they establish

themselves without tying their sounds to the times as much as experimentalists do.

Appendix 3. Pekka Ruuska's course ''Sanoittamisen ABC'' on lyricism.

Appendix 4. Interview with Juho Kavasto on 15.5.2020

Can you briefly introduce yourself, tell about your background in the music business and your history with music?

I'm a music producer and DJ with a shady past of playing the drums in a few punk bands over the years. I have over a decade of experience in making electronic music, and I'm currently making drum & bass as Askel, which is my main project. I'm also producing and co-writing for an experimental pop act called Cyril Awakens. I graduated from TAMK as a music producer in 2019 and wrote my thesis about techniques for combining elements of electronic music with contemporary band instruments.

How would you compare electronic music production principles to so-called band music percussion-wise?

In electronic dance music, at least, the drum hits are often designed to be as hard-hitting as possible. This all stems from sample choice and careful (post-)processing with maximum impact in mind; obviously such control isn't possible to achieve with live drums.

What about harmonies, how a modern-day electronic music producer could go about vocal harmony production?

There are many ways to skip recording harmonies with a singer, e.g. using a vocoder or another harmonizer plugin (my favourite easy tool is the Soundtoys Little AlterBoy used in parallel). Of course, actual recorded harmonies will always sound more human, but that's not always the goal anyway.

How about the low end? What would be the defining differences in electronic music low frequency utilisation compared to recorded band music?

Similarly to drum production, oftentimes the big difference is dancefloor impact.

When it comes to basslines, you can't really get more effective (albeit boring) than a pure sine wave. Modern synths are capable of producing pretty much any other sound imaginable, too (although, again, actual recorded instruments would sound more natural, if that's the goal).

In band music you also often have to choose which one goes lower in the frequency spectrum, the kick drum or the bassline, but in electronic music it's customary to have them both in an equally prominent role. Sidechaining basses to kicks very heavily is pretty much standard procedure to achieve that nowadays.

What would be the positives and negatives in utilising electronic music techniques in pop music?

Many people like to talk about how electronic music sounds too "soulless" or "clinical" – and sure, hastily produced EDM sometimes might, but there are so many techniques to bring back that natural warmth to electronic elements. Besides, electronic music techniques open up a whole other world of textures and punch. However, I do understand that synth bleeps and bloops might be harder to approach if you're used to only hearing pianos and acoustic guitars in music. Another thing to note is the fact that electronic production techniques are constantly progressing and changing, so something written in 2020 might sound really dated a year or two from now.

Appendix 5. Thesis project album, Anticlaustrophobe by YENIAS

1 (1)

Appendix 6. Thesis project EP, Alone EP by YENIAS & JULÉA

1 (1)