



Working as a Songwriter and Topliner

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ABSTRACT

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There is a constant need for talented songwriters and topliners to create hits for the music industry. It is acknowledged that the gap between the skills of people who are just beginning their careers and the requirements for artists and repertoire (A&R) professionals is huge. Because A&R executives need to be carefully consider their decisions before betting a lot of money on a song so choosing a hit song is a game for A&R people. (Beall 2009, 22-23.) Regarding starter songwriters and topliners, narrowing the gap between their skills and A&R requirement need to be taken into account. Even though there are many music creators in the market, only some with hit songs on the charts are considered top-shelf songwriters, topliners or lyricists and make a comfortable living from that.

The objective of this thesis was to provide in-depth information for people who would be interested in writing top-line, lyricist and how to get their foot in the door as a songwriter and topliner, especially in pop music. The rules of the music industry, advice from the music supervisors, songwriters and topliners were also discussed. Three songs written by Uyen Dang were analysed to deliver an essential understanding of this topic.

As a result, comprehensive information was gathered about the music industry. This offers starter songwriters and topliners useful information about the songwriting process through analysis of three songs, the current state of songwriters in the music industry and how to get into the music industry by music supervisors' advice.

Key words: songwriter, topliner, hit, co-writing, royalty, split

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1 INTRODUCTION

Music plays an important part in my daily life since I was a kid. I was always interested in listening to the melody of songs even though I didn't understand the lyrics. Melody is the bridge to connect me with the songs and the world. Lyrics come after that once I have already liked the melody of the songs so I can dig deeper to the world of the lyrics.

The importance of the melodies has followed me till now when I decided to put my foot in the songwriter's world. I didn't know back then there are terms called: Songwriter and topliner until I started to study at Tampere University of Applied Sciences and did some co-writings. During the process of studying at Tamk and joining co-writing camps, the picture of becoming a songwriter/ topliner has been getting clearer for me and I have trusted myself more to participate in some other co-writings and camps after that.

The more I take a deeper look into the music industry, the less I know about it. As a songwriter and topliner, it is not easy to survive and make a living in this business without hard work, dedication and luck. It is not only about writing songs but also about communicating with other songwriters, producers, toplineers and understanding well the requirements of A&R, and artists.

This thesis will provide information about how to become a songwriter, topliner from the beginning, what is the current situation in the music industry, what is the obstacle to songwriters, toplineers and advice from music supervisors, A&R people, professional songwriters to starter songwriters, toplineers.

2 SONG WRITER AND TOPLINER

2.1 The role in writing and co-writing

There are various definitions of songwriter and topline due to the blurry fine line between the roles. Depending on the skillset and role requirements of each project, songwriters and topline will decide the main role they want to be in charge of. In many cases, the songwriter becomes a topline and a topline can play the role of a songwriter or both. (Gormley 2022.) Songwriters are also recording artists who write their own songs and producers occasionally work as a songwriter, topline or part of them (Berklee 2022).

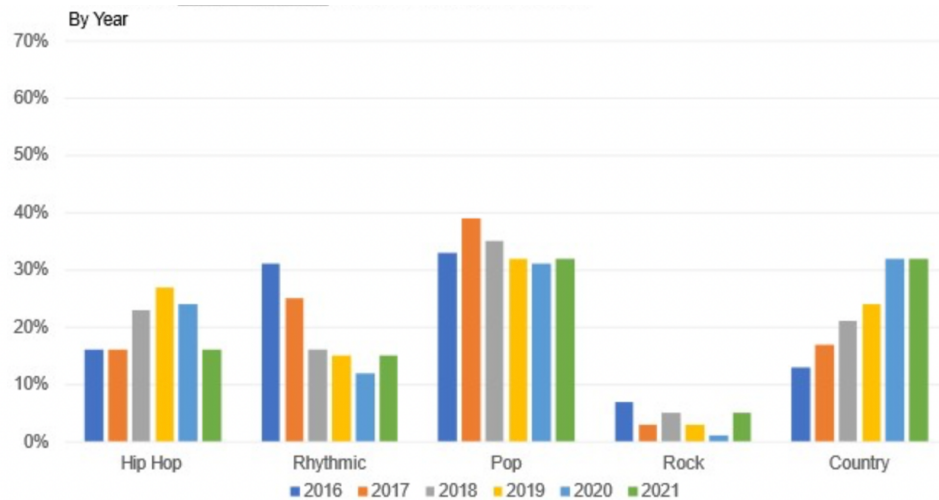
A songwriter is described as being involved in the whole process of creating a song together with a producer from scratch. While a topline creates the melodies, lyrics and harmonies based on the producer's instrumental track. (Daley 2022; Gormley 2022.) According to Berklee.edu, the collaboration between songwriter and producer especially in mainstream music such as pop, rap, EDM can already make the complete songs. However, in order to provide the catchy hooks and melody that A&R and listeners are looking for, the traditional way of song writing includes songwriter and producer needing a hand from topline. (Berklee 2022.)

2.2 Song testing

According to Eric Beall in the Billboard guide to Writing and Producing songs that sell, major record companies start to do research on a song during the record-making process to examine if a song is a single, based on the reaction of the selected group or the internet based-focus group. Some questions will be provided about whether listeners love, like or hate the song so the feelings of listeners towards the song are strongly paid attention to, due to the huge benefit when people like or love the song. The initial test is for labels to fix any errors before the song goes to the market. (Beall 2009, 47.)

Radio, where the song can reach a broader audience and potential listeners, also conducts insight research on a larger scale to minimize the risks and reach the target audience. Radio is an advertising tool and for so many years, it has been

a target place for songwriters, producers and topliners aiming to market songs. In order for the song to make it through radio research, a well-structured song is contemplated. (Beall 2009, 45-46, 54.) Besides, knowing a specific format of radio, whether listeners' interest is in first ten seconds of a song or the chorus and if the song is exciting enough to repeat in a week need to be considered (Beall 2009, 59). Those two charts below show the current trend of radio songs and genres in US:



Billboard Radio Songs Year End Chart Genres (Intergr8 research 2022)

1	Dua Lipa	Levitating	2020
2	24kGoldn Featuring iann dior	Mood	2020
3	The Weeknd & Ariana Grande	Save Your Tears	2020
4	The Weeknd	Blinding Lights	2019
5	Silk Sonic (Bruno Mars & Anderson .Paak)	Leave The Door Open	2021
6	Chris Brown & Young Thug	Go Crazy	2020
7	Doja Cat Featuring SZA	Kiss Me More	2021
8	Justin Bieber Featuring Daniel Caesar & Giveon	Peaches	2021
9	Ariana Grande	Positions	2020
10	Olivia Rodrigo	Good 4 U	2021

The 10 Biggest Radio Song of 2021 (Intergr8 research 2022)

3 THE WRITING PROCESS

3.1 Song writing process

Producing mainstream music, including pop, rap, EDM, traditionally involves the collaboration of songwriters and producers. A collaboration like this is updated into the modern song writing process in which toplineers are included along with songwriters and producers because of the high demands for catchy melodies in songs and the potential to create hit songs. (Berklee 2022.)

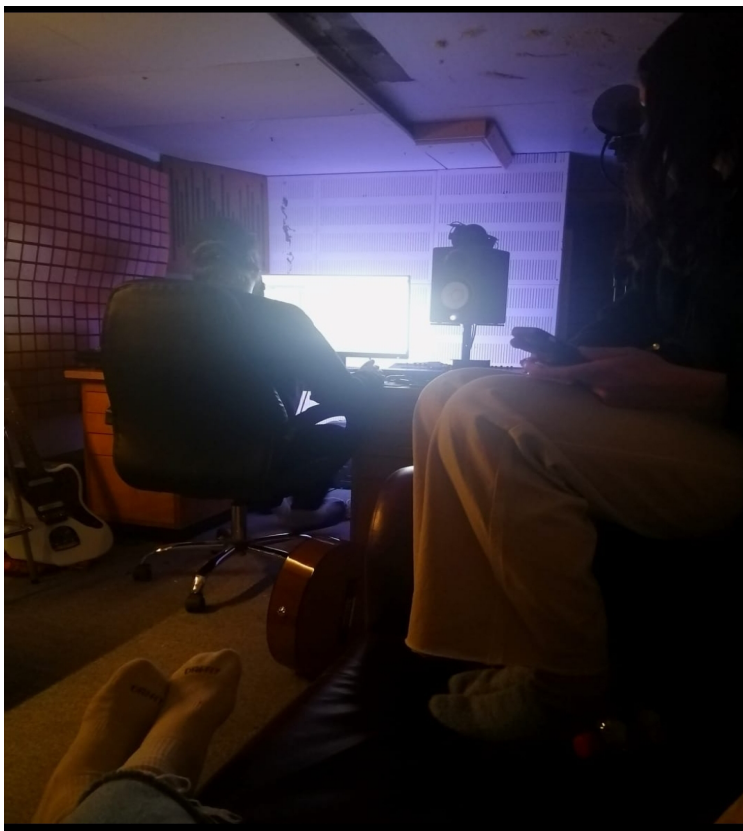
The song making process depends on songwriters, producer and toplineers agreeing on a common goal that works best for the specific session. Ryan Tedder, a singer, songwriter and record producer has mentioned in his course that when it comes to co-writing, 30 minutes of the session is the get-to-know time for songwriters, producers, toplineers and artists if he or she is there (Tedder, R, 2020). Hence, to make sure the outcome of the song is good at the end of the day, getting to know the people that you are cowriting with, the music taste of the artist, the requirement of A&R people are the key elements for smoothing out the creation process of the song and the long-term collaboration.

The cowriting session usually starts with some raw ideas and builds on that. There is no formula in the way the song is written. Every songwriter and toplineer has their own methods of describing their ideas to co-writers and producers. It also depends on the culture and characteristics of group's members. One of the effective ways to have a good result is to be open to new ideas and different perspectives from members during co-writing. Nashville songwriters association international once interviewed Ysa Fernandez, a songwriter, artist and producer how to develop as a songwriter, she answered: "The best way to grow as a songwriter is to have new experience to draw from, push yourself out of your comfort zone, constantly be learning, and actively listen to people" (NSAI, 2022, para. 7).

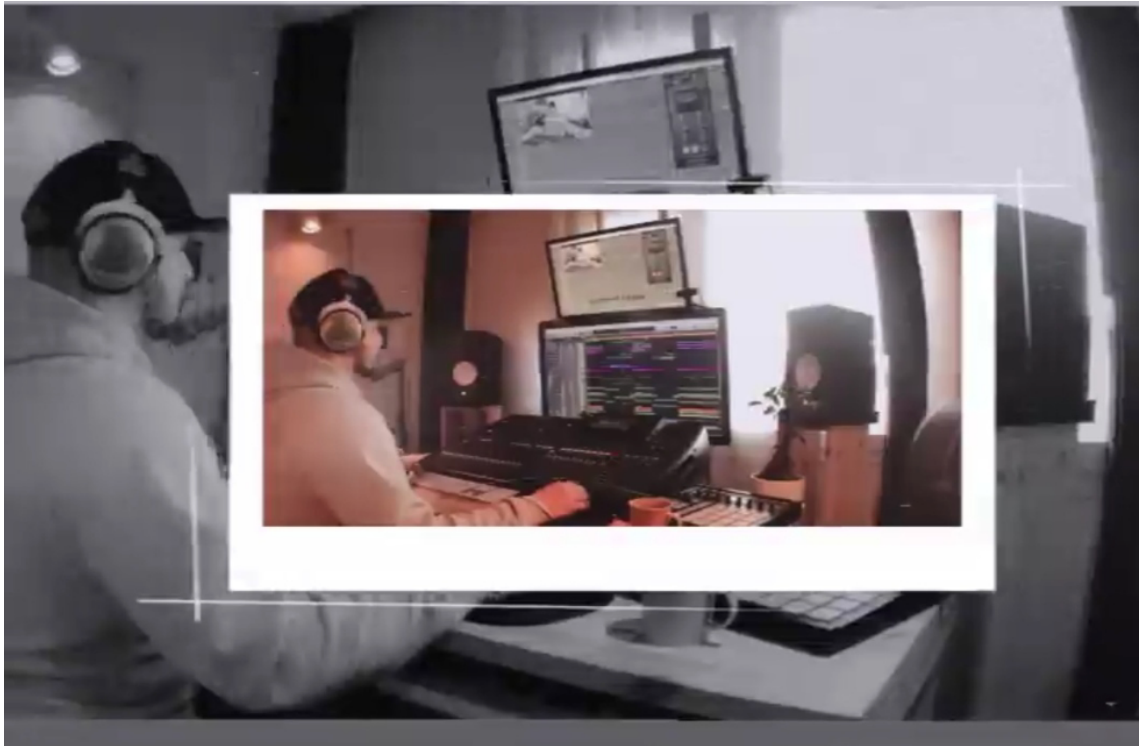
3.2 My song writing process

My writing process is quite simple. It starts by getting the melody on top of my head, picturing it, transcribing it into the whole song's melody, then writing lyrics, arranging, recording vocals and finally sending it to the producer. Sometimes, a song is inspired by some words or phrases from daily conversation, from the bass line or from the instrumental track. If the producer is interested in working on that idea after listening, we will have a collaboration session after that. This method is applied for my own project or small cowriting projects.

In larger scale co-writing projects, the process is slightly different. From my experience, co-writing teams receive the leads from A&R people or we organize a co-writing session by ourselves, set up the studio or online zoom session and do the work. The producer creates a beat on the spot or uses an existing beat in his/her library. Songwriters, toplineers begin mumbling melodies, words until the main melody is chosen. Alternatively, songwriter or toplineer can come up with a melody; topic or lyric ideas for the lead in the beginning and producer makes a beat based on those ideas.



PICTURE 1. Co-writing in Future hitmaker top 20 2022. (Photo: Uyen Dang 2022)



PICTURE 2. In a session for vocal production 2022. (Photo: Esko Soinne 2022)

If you are a songwriter or topliner working under a publisher, you are sent to camps to develop your skills and establish connections for bigger projects. According to Patric Sarin, creative director of HMC publisher as well as a writer said: HMC sends young potential songwriters to artist cowriting sessions to build up their CV and connect them with industry peers, but the key thing is they are willing to go to the camps. If they are not, the publisher is unable to help them. (Sarin 2022.)

In the song writing process, at least for me, there have been ups and downs. There are times when a song sounds really enjoyable and catchy to the ears and then other times, the song just doesn't fit your taste. But after a few hours or a couple days doing other things, when listening to it again, it sounds good when your ears are refreshed or few minor details were fixed. Ryan Tedder mentioned in his course that it is important to take short breaks during session to rebuild the energy e.g. by taking a short walk, coffee or coming back working on a song after a day or two (Tedder 2020).

It is about consistency, believing in what you are writing, having faith in the process, being open with team members. In addition, listening to A&R requirements and receiving feedback will improve performance when writing songs.

3.3 Hit songs

Any songwriter wants to own as many hit songs as possible, especially in mainstream music. It's not only about the revenue you will get from those songs but also about your own brand in the music industry. This will lead you to a more significant opportunity. However, in reality, only a small fraction of "hits" are created in a songwriter's pocket.

"The catalog of any successful songwriter or publisher is inevitably a mixture of about 5 percent genuine, grade-A "Hits", 45 percent "Good, not great" songs, and 50 percent "Misses.'" (Beall 2004, 17).

Defining a hit song is not easy. If it's a hit then it's a hit. Nevertheless, there are some questions to consider if the song has the potential to become a hit or not: Is a quiet audience getting excited when listening to the song? Among the songs in your catalogue, which one song would you choose to play for a person who could change your career? (Beall 2004, 18.)

One way to increase the "hit" rate in your catalogue is to write, review and improve skills as much as possible. It is not just about working on hit songs but improving good songs as well, due to the fact that publishers are considered to invest in good songs as well. (Beall 2004, 17.)

Creating hit songs needs luck. You will never know whether it's a hit or not until you release it. One common thing between a hit song and a good song is that it's predictable enough but also surprises the audience with the tension and the release (Beall 2009, 95). One of the things that determine hit songs is the relationship between the song and listener, the excitement and specific moments that bring emotions and feelings to the audience.

Those elements, along with the impression that listeners have about the song after extensively playing the song, will affect the probability of it becoming a hit song (Beall 2009, 73).

Amanda Williams, a songwriter who comes from a successful songwriter's family, shared her views with Nashville songwriters association international about the standard ingredients of a hit song are "simplicity, rhyme and repetition" (Williams 2022). It is especially true when you listen to top 5 to top 20 Billboard hot 100.

The Swedish capital has been a major player in pop music industry for a long time. According to Embassy of Sweden (2020), one-quarter of the number one hits in the pop chart of American Billboard were made by Swedes in 2014. Seabrook, who wrote the song machine, Inside the hit factory shared his opinions with Wharton show, that one of the reasons Swedish songwriting is different is because of its culture. In Sweden, there is no distinction between writing R&B and Pop music, they don't set limitation in writing music. However, In UK and America, creators tend not to write R&B due to cultural reasons. Besides, although Swedes are good at English but the way they use English is different from native speakers. So, language usage and song titles are not too attached to metaphor and wit. For example, "Hit me, baby one more time", Britney Spears hit title might sound weird to British and American songwriters because of the imagery it represents like domestic violence. (Seabrook 2016.)

Moreover, the writing system is important to Swedish songwriters. They have a large community of songwriters with specialized skills: topline songwriter, verse songwriter, chorus songwriter, bridge songwriter. The song parts will be chosen from the best parts of songwriter's part. Swedish professional songwriters also trust and invite young potential songwriters to collaborate and learn from them like Max Martin has done. (Seabrook 2016.)

"You have to sit next to the guy who's the master, and then you become the master, and then you pass along the secrets, and that's really how it works" (Seabrook 2016).

4 COWRITING



PICTURE 7. Future Hitmaker Co-writing session, 2022. (Photo: Esko Soinne, 2022)

As a songwriter, topliner, we spend most of the time doing co-writing, so communication skills are essential to create the quality songs and minimize misunderstandings.

Knowing basic cultural differences would be very helpful in cowriting in multicultural groups as well as in everyday life. Culture differences are often misunderstood as characteristic. But once we understand the root of cultural differences, these problems can be avoided. The book: *In Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* book by Hofstede demonstrate quite well about that matter.

Cultural dimension	Definition	Examples
Power distance	<i>Power distance</i> is the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.	Low: U.S. and Canada High: Japan and Singapore
Individualism and collectivism	<i>Individualism</i> describes cultures in which the ties between individuals are loose. <i>Collectivism</i> describes cultures in which people are integrated into strong, cohesive groups that protect individuals in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.	Individualistic: U.S., Australia, and Great Britain Collectivistic: Singapore, Hong Kong, and Mexico
Masculinity-femininity	<i>Masculinity</i> pertains to cultures in which social gender roles are clearly distinct. <i>Femininity</i> describes cultures in which social gender roles overlap.	Masculinity: Japan, Austria, and Italy Femininity: Sweden, Norway, and Netherlands
Uncertainty avoidance (UAI)	<i>Uncertainty avoidance</i> is the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations.	Low: Singapore, Jamaica, and Denmark High: Greece, Portugal, and Japan
Confucian dynamism	<i>Confucian dynamism</i> denotes the time orientation of a culture, defined as a continuum with long-term and short-term orientations as its two poles.	Long-term: China and Japan Short-term: U.S. and Canada

PICTURE 6. The model of cultural dimensions by Hofstede (Hofstede, 1991, p.28)

Due to the pandemic, co-writing projects have shifted mostly to the online co-writing. I have primarily done both co-write sessions and co-write camp online. Even though there are some obstacles during the process, I enjoy doing online co-write in general. For me and my producer, we can adjust our meeting time to accommodate our schedules. Because we live in different cities, so it saves time to travel for both of us by doing virtual cowrites. Besides, as a songwriter, I need time for myself to think about the topline melody and lyrics. Thus, when I need time, we have a break and I can work during that time then send the recording tracks to the producer once it's ready.

A minor point of online co-writing is that sometimes the producer might want the vocal sounds in a specific way, so it is easier to record at the same place with producer or vice versa. Besides, latency issues happen during the process of online co-writing so we need to be aware of that. All in all, my online co-write sessions have been smooth so far.

If you want to send your cowritten songs to publishers or to continue working on songs with other songwriters and producers, you need a catalogue. Having the songs easy to find in the catalogue is another aspect to consider. (Blad 2022.)

In the Music &Media conference, there was a topic called “how to get your song on their radar” with music supervisors. The most common thing they ask for from songwriters and producers is a list of songs including the song title, the tempo and the genres (Blad 2022). It’s even better if you have the title, writers, publishers, date written, studio, engineer, status (master, rough mix or work tape) (Beall 2004, 21). It would save them a lot of time, impress them and help them pay more attention to what materials you have sent them.

5 MUSIC, ROYALTY AND MONEY

In the future Top 20 Hitmaker Course, Minna Koivisto, A&R manager of Universal Music Finland and label manager of Johanna Kustannus, explains that when she initially signed her publishing deal in Finland, she didn't know what she was getting into, so after that experience, she really takes the time to get to know the people that she would be working with, seeing how it feels to work with them, and thinks carefully about what she actually wants instead of taking whatever is offered. She wants to find the right people to know what kind of music she likes and makes instead of seeing potential in her and trying to mould that into something that will make sense for them. (Koivisto 2022.)

Minna advises songwriters and producers to find a team that really understands your vision and gives you the best support to help you along the path. As a producer or songwriter, finding what music you really love and connect with, being proud of your musical background, figuring out what you want to do, finding the right people are the first step of building a strong foundation for your career. The best opportunity for song writer and producer is connecting with people, it is the people business. From the label perspective, the best thing that writers should do is to make music and release it. (Koivisto 2022.)

Besides committing to writing quality songs which is the ultimate goal of songwriters, how to make money out of it is a concern. Even though many songwriters that I have known including myself, put passion for writing and creating songs before anything else.

Songwriters can get money from mechanical royalties, performance royalties, synchronization licences, print music royalties and publishers' advances (Blume 2004, 171).

Depending on the country, songwriters' royalties might be different. As examples, the royalties between Finland and United States were examined in this thesis. In Finland, there is no producer royalty, the same applies to writers. There are few cases but it is very rare and it is not a standard in Finland at the moment. (Sarin 2022.) It's a high risk for record labels to pay everyone who walks in the studio

and the standard for session fees is challenging when paying for songwriters. The label pays the producer a track fee to make the producer points. There are some cases in Finland label has been paying producer 10000 euros extra just to bias royalty for the top producer and it is not common at all for producer to have royalty in Finland. (Lindroth 2022.)

In US, the situation is different. Songwriter royalties are the negotiation between producers and toplineers. Mathias Sorum, A&R, music manager for Sorum publishing company based in the US, shared his experience in US about the royalty collection that the contract still remains between the producer and the artist. The label gives points to the artist and the artist gives it to the producer. As an A&R, when he gets 10% from the label, he would share 5% for producer and 5 % for songwriter before they walk into the studio and they still get 4 or 5 points from the artists. (Sorum 2022.)

The current situation in the US as well as other countries is that you need great producer and great songwriter and creators if you want great product and they don't get paid until they are big names. Songwriters are decreasing because they are broke, they have great music but it is just too much out there. (Sorum 2022.)

To come to the agreement about the percentage split of a song, it is necessary to have a straightforward conversation with cowriters. For most of songwriters, it's a sensitive topic that is ignored for the comfortable atmosphere before and during the co-write sessions but it is all about negotiation. Beall has mentioned in his book 'Making music make money', that it is always good to do those splits before the song becomes famous to prevent any unnecessary matters related to split later. (Beall 2004, 14.)

Apart from that, one thing that scares me the most is what if I write a song that sounds similar to a released song that I don't know? That thinking sometimes affects my writing process especially when I come up with catchy melodies. When I brought this up at some conferences with people in music industry, I didn't receive yet the clear answer at least for me to understand how to avoid it until I read the book 'Making music make money' by Beall. He mentioned that this is the nightmare of almost all songwriters.

“In my experience, most copyright infringement cases in the songwriting business are entirely subliminal- a matter of a writer unknowingly reprising a song lodged somewhere in his or her subconscious.” (Beall 2004, 16).

In order to minimize the risk of copyright issues, it is important to understand your catalogue, try to remove the attachments to the songs that you have in your catalogue and examine any concerns regularly (Beall 2004, 16). Another tip provided by Jason Blume, who wrote the book named 6 steps to Songwriting Success, can also be applied to avoid plagiarism. The author recommends playing songs without lyrics for friends and relatives who have background about popular songs (Blume 2004, 125).

6 SONGS ANALYSIS

6.1 Lover

A year ago, I wrote this song after having a short trip at my friend's place. The song describes the missing feeling about the person who used to be very close to me.

The topline idea came to my mind randomly and I finished the whole topline melody, lyrics ideas, structure before sending it to my producer friend Onni. He liked the song ideas so he quickly made chord progressions for the song and sent it back to me. After selecting the most suitable chords and structure for the song, we set up a recording session in the studio, worked both on the instrumental tracks and some lines in the lyrics to make it sound solid. One of my other producer friends also produced the string parts in the song.

The set up for this song recording was quite basic: a laptop, Apollo interface, Neumann TLM 103 microphone, Pop filter, Microphone stand, Beyer dynamic DT 880 headphone, guitar, Genelec monitors, bass. It took us two days to finish the arrangement and recording and 1 to 2 more days to finish the mixing. I'm planning to pitch this song.

The verse is a conversation between me and myself, and the question is a reminder of all the good old days with someone who used to be the one.

"When did we have a conversation?"

The emotion of loneliness is dug into deeper in the pre-chorus in order to make the chorus stand out where the missing feeling is emphasized.

The pre-chorus is the answer for the first verse question, and I changed the pre-chorus lyrics a couple times because I wanted to build up the mood in the pre-chorus that shows the lonely feeling waiting for someone with the uncertainty of

hope. It is demonstrated through the phrase: “Now I’m here alone, staring at my phone”

In the first part of the chorus, the emotion is triggered by those simple questions but no answers. The chorus melody came up quickly but I had to change the lyrics and rhythm of the second sentence of the chorus because I wanted the lyrics to be related to the feelings of a large number of listeners. The last part of the chorus is where all the tensions and emotions are shown.

“Oh, I miss those days so bad bad bad bad, you know, so bad bad bad like a lover.”

In verse 2, the melody of the verse is the same as the first verse, with backing vocals to make the sound wider and bigger. Despite thinking that the feeling is fine, deep down I’m still “missing you”. The one thing I learnt from my senior when we did a co-write is that if we have the lead, we should stick with it. Although it is easier to expand a topic in different directions, it is important to choose one direction to ensure a solid outcome. (Kim, 2019.) So, in every song I have written, including this one, I keep that idea in mind.

The second pre-chorus differs from the first. The C-part is the gentle reminder about happy moments in the past and the current reality where we “never had a chance to figure out how far our road would go.”

The structure of the song is common pop song structure: Verse- Prechorus- Chorus-Verse- Prechorus- Chorus-C-part-Chorus-Chorus

Questions in the chorus are the reminiscences of those old good memories. The answer is already in the questions and the last line: “miss those days so bad bad bad like a lover “

The purpose of this song was to bring back the memories that listeners may have about the one who was close to them but ended up walking on separate paths.

The lead was created by myself and I am going to pitch this song. It was aimed for female artist such as JAX, Olivera: Finnish artist but who has just released her English album lately. The genre is popular music.

We had good feedback from other songwriters, toplineers about this song and I was chosen for the Future top 20 course thanks to this song which was one of the songs that I applied. I want to make it sound better because during that time, I hadn't trained my vocals much, and there were a couple of lines that I wanted to adjust to make it more related to people.

6.2 Memories

This song was written recently with Esko Soinne, the producer I've known after joining the top 20- future hitmaker course.

The idea of the song came when I was on a holiday trip back in my home country, Vietnam. I started mumbling the melody that randomly popped into my head and I like the word 'therapy' so I decided to write something that combined that melody and 'therapy', but then the story ended up in a different direction than what I had planned before.

Topline melody ideas and lyrics were recorded on my phone and sent to Esko. He liked that idea so we set up a Zoom meeting to work on this song.

He came up with the chords and synth while we had a zoom meeting. Bass and guitar tracks had to be recorded after the zoom meeting due to the latency issues. I started to record a proper vocal line with my Macbook, Scarlett interface and TLM 103 Microphone, Beyer dynamic Dt880. However, due to the unstable electricity in the hotel, the quality of the recording track was not good, so we decided to record it when I was back to Finland. It took a considerable amount of time to get a final version of vocal recording because I had covid during that time and lost my voice.

This song took us couple months to finish including rewriting some lyrics lines several times, recording vocals, instrumental tracks, receiving feedback from music supervisors, senior producers and toplineers from publishing companies,

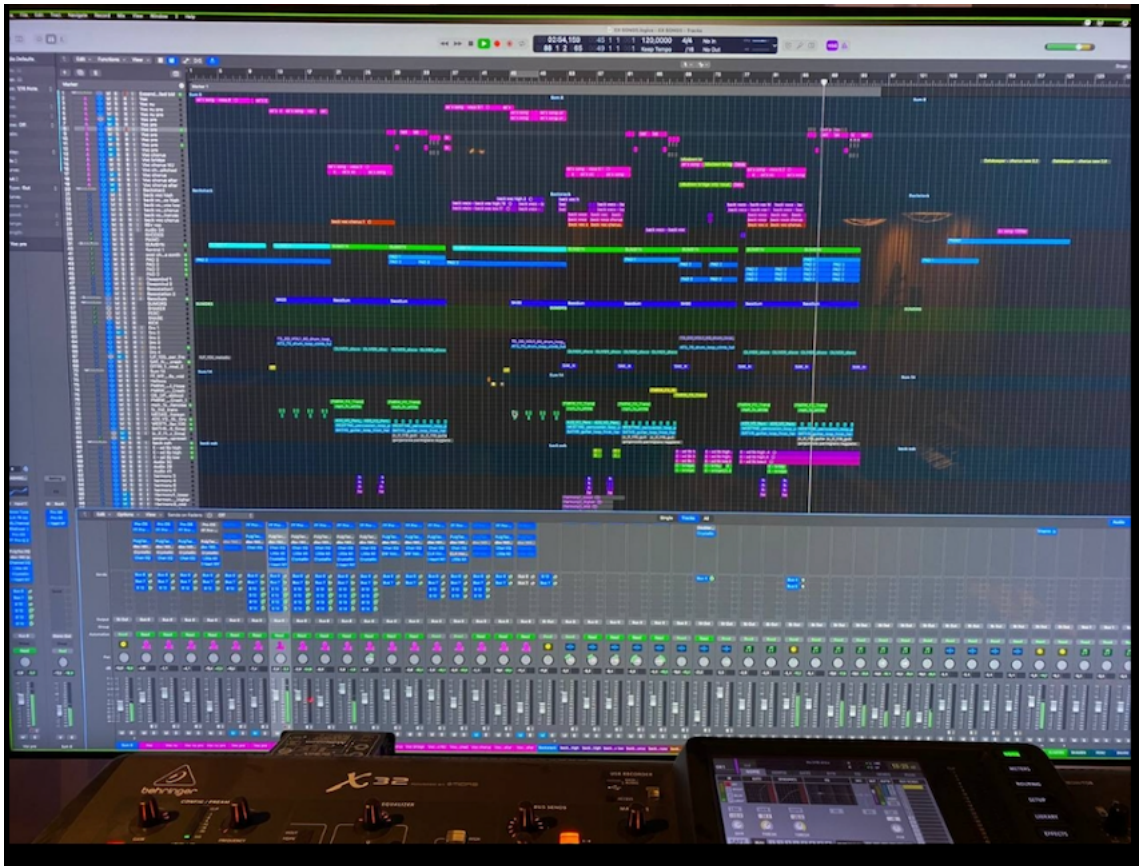
adjusting the recording, arrangement, composing, mixing and mastering it. This song was made completely remotely through zoom meetings.

The song describes the mixed feelings in a relationship regarding whether to continue or stop this happy, bittersweet moment. In the end, even though the love is there, but it can't save one from saying goodbye.

While I originally planned to write a song about therapy, I ended up writing a love song with the chaos feelings where the person wants to be loved but has decided to let it go and wishes all the best for the former partner.

I used Studio one to record, edit and mix vocals before sending them to the producer. We had 7 to 9 online meetings to mix the vocals and instrumental tracks. There were some vocal parts that didn't sound right, I re-recorded it and sent it back to him. He then did a proper mixing for vocals and the whole song. For the backing vocals which was one of the last parts of the song making process, I recorded different tracks with different melodies and we chose the best ones that fit the song's vibe.

The song making process was enjoyable for me because we worked effectively and we had previously collaborated, so we had a straightforward conversation about the song and respected each other's ideas to achieve a good outcome.



PICTURE 3. In a session of making Memories, October 2022. (Photo: Esko Soinne, 2022)

The first verse is about the urge to miss someone through the images that appear every day:

“I think I need to go to the therapist / Cos oh my god I miss you so much lately”

Throughout the prechorus, it is the statement of expressing the missing feeling through “days and nights, your smile, your eyes, shine brighter than the sunshine”. The main idea lies in the last line of the prechorus:

“Missing you but it’s time to say good bye, good bye, good bye”

I changed the second line of the chorus in the final version because I wanted to make it less personal and easy to sing along.

The chorus pushes the emotion to the next level by saying “live your best life/ so do I/ time goes by/ we’ll be okay”. Although we are not on the same road, we will always support and give each other our best wishes.

In verse 2, I keep the same melodies as the first verse in the first three sentences and changed the melody in the last line to make the different from the first verse:

“It’s time for me to move on and on/ find my own symphony”

This regret is mentioned one more time in the c-part to remind the listeners of a deeper level through the words” no more”.

The structure of the song is: Verse, prechorus, chorus, post- chorus, verse 2, prechorus, chorus, post-chorus, c-part, chorus, chorus, post-chorus

The lead of this indie pop song was created by me, the purpose of this song was to pitched.

While I was writing this song, we sent a demo to one of the HMC songwriters, topliners, Wilma Virintie. Her feedback was that the sound of the voice, the feeling and the emotion were good, but the chorus needed to be catchier. We had to decide if we wanted it to be a cute or cool song and the overall production needed to be improved.

Likewise, we got feedback from Elements music songwriter, producer: Simeon Puukari that the song works well as it was but if we wanted a bigger chorus, the chorus should stand out more since it was unclear when it was coming.

Another feedback we had from Suga publishing producer: Karri Mikkonen said the topline was a bit complicated and short production-wise due to the fact that we sent the demo version at the beginning of the song making. So we tried to work on those feedbacks to have a final version.

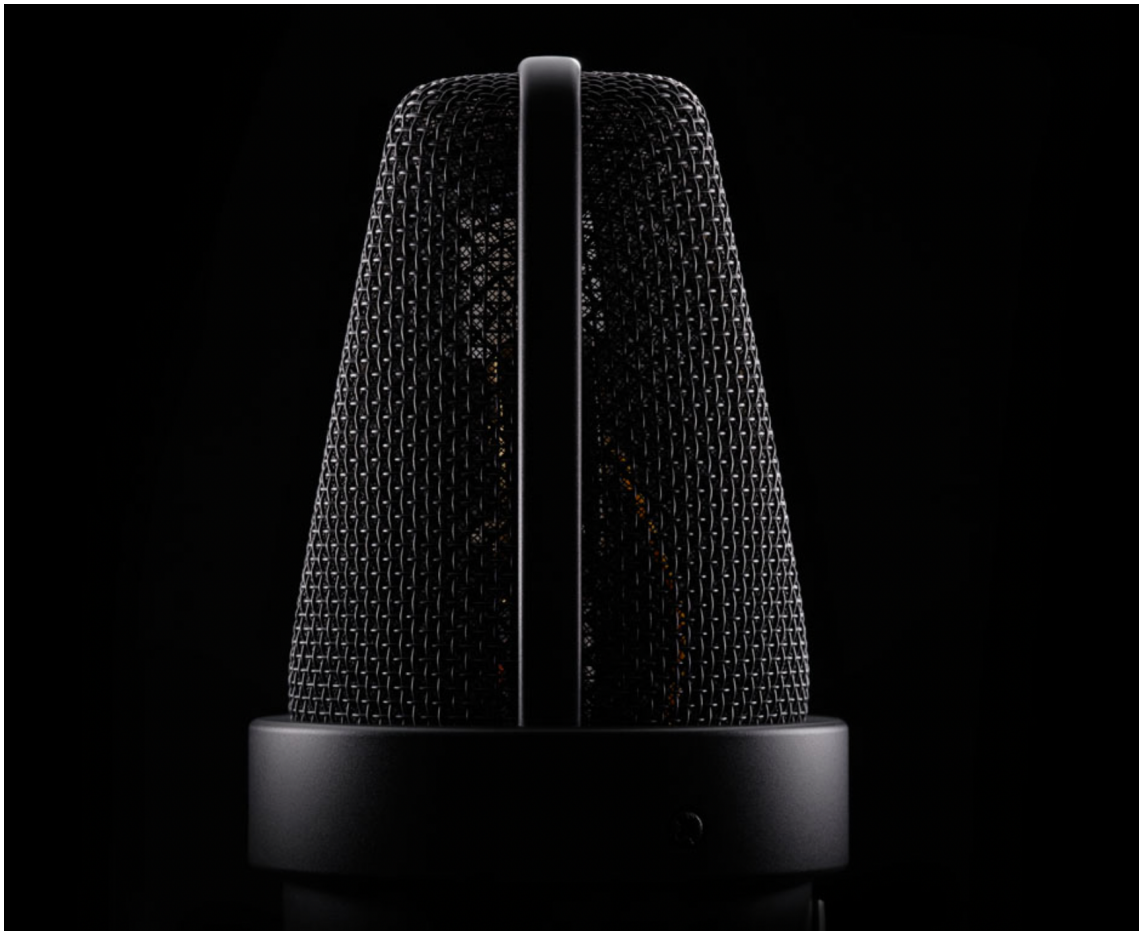
This is the song that I’m most uncertain about because even though it’s an indie pop song but the vibe and melody might not be the taste of common pop listeners. Therefore, the vibe of the song could be for Asia market.

This song was aimed at a female artist or girl group between 17 and 26 years old. The topline melody and lyrics part can also be adjusted depending on the number of members in a group. There is a post chorus instrumental solo so it might fit for a lead dancer in a group to do a dance solo.

6.3 Slow down

This song was written in the middle of the process of finishing Memories song. The idea was inspired while travelling by tram and meeting beautiful people. I thought I got used to the adult life where people care for themselves and even when we are depressed, stressed, hurt, vulnerable, we tend to hide our emotions and we don't share them. But somehow, on this miracle trip, there was a beautiful soul who recognized that and came to talk to me. That was a moment when I realized people still love and care for it each other. That was one of the most beautiful moments of my life and it brings me joy until now when I think about it. Esko is the producer for this song as well. We both enjoy funky music so we decided to add the funky vibe.

The same thing in those two previous projects, I used the similar set up with my Macbookpro, Scarlett interface, Neumann tlm 103 microphone, Beyer Dynamic Dt880.



PICTURE 4. Neumann TLM 103. (Photo: Neumann)

The key word I used to write this song was “beautiful”. The first verse describes the happy surprise feeling after meeting random people and having a conversation with them. The main idea is in the last line of the first verse: “People still love each other.”

“I thought it’s just a normal day/ But it turned out in a different way”

As a way to prepare for the main theme of the chorus “slow down” which is also the title of the song, the prechorus is written in such a way to represent that idea. It refers to the “life is a journey/ we are rolling/ so take it easy”

The ideas came through the questions:

What if we all kept our hearts as pure as when we innocently cared for each other? How beautiful the world would be and how many people would be saved by those pure hearts!

The main idea for the whole song is in the first line in the chorus: “slow down if you need it”. Slow down to enjoy the ride, enjoy the beauty of life and beautiful souls around you. Slow down to savour the special moment where we sometimes forget instead of worrying about the past or future.

In order to bring a breath of fresh air for this song, I used the rap part as the second verse. The past is the past, we can't change it, so it's best to live in this moment. Despite life's ups and downs, we will still be alright.

The structure of the song is modern popular music: verse, prechorus, chorus, half verse, rap, chorus, chorus.

To make it suitable for radio, we decided to make it short, 2 minutes 35 seconds.

According to Eric Beall in his book the ‘Billboard guide to writing and producing songs that sell’, people looking for a good time while tuning in to the radio, listen to up tempo songs three times more than ballads (Beall 2009, 26).

In order to create funky vibe and up-tempo feel, we combined a catchy bass line with modern pop vibe. The mysterious dark instrument melodic theme was played in the pre-chorus as to build up the feeling for the chorus where the happy, positive vibe is presented.

In the second verse, adlibs are added to bring more layers to the song.

I tried to keep the backing vocals and adlibs simple, not too many and too complicated to make it easier for the producer to work on it.

In the previous co-write project, we had a lot of good backing vocals and adlibs tracks. It took a lot of time to choose which one would work best for the song. Even when we added backing vocal tracks to a song, there were still too many that confused listeners and also music supervisors, A&R people. Thus, from that experience, we tried to make it as simple as possible but also strong enough to keep the spirit of the song.

The lead came from the song ideas itself. The style is funky pop, the artist we are aiming for is Anderson. Paak, Lizzo.

The feedback we got from this song during the process were to make it more edgy, attitude and controversy in the lyrics. 'Keep the verse and pre-chorus simple if you want hits and make it easier for normal people to follow. Make the production more up to date by adding for example gritty sounds'.

Another feedback from artist manager and festival director in Switzerland, Ananda Geissberger that he really liked this song and the vibe. It could be potentially performed on a big stage or a festival where people can dance and have a good time. For all of those three songs above, beside the specific feedback I have mentioned, others feedback was derived and put together from multiple sources, musicians, a mixing engineer, singers, songwriters and friends with music business knowledge and background.

Regarding to the split, we agreed to split equally among team members because we were all contribute to the songs.

7 DISCUSSION

Being a songwriter, topliner requires lots of work, dedication, consistency and luck. Depending on where you want to be in your career, honing skills will never be enough. The love for writing, creating melody should combine with the commitment to do it better every day and get it done, little by little and never give up.

There is always a pressure on songwriters, toplineers and also producers about how to keep their own musical colours while making songs with the goal of being on top of the charts by meeting the invisible requirements, especially in mainstream music. During the workshop in NSAI, Adrea Stolpe, the songwriter and instructor in song writing said that the concept is necessary but the way songwriter express it is the key element to make the song work (NSAI, 2020).

Amy Allen, a singer/songwriter who has co-written songs for Selena Gomez, Halsey, Harry Styles, shared in her Ascap interview for people who want to start a songwriting career that it is important to stay authentic while writing song, to keep your true colour and capitalize on that to find your voice. Also trying not to pay too much attention to radio trends because it is always changing. (ASCAP, 2020.)

Besides, having a mentorship would help a lot when you are a starter. As for me, I really appreciate everyone I have met that helped me on the music path, from teachers, friends at school to co-writing team members to music supervisors, A&R people. Mentorship plays an imperative role for the development of a songwriter, topliner especially people who want to build a career as a songwriter, topliner. Music industry is both a small and big balloon at the same time, you know what you want but you don't know how can you get there or who to meet and how to get into that industry. Finding the people you trust, love what you do, you love what they do, support you and respect one another are important.



PICTURE 6. Future hitmaker cowriting, 2022. (Photo: Esko Soinne, 2022)

In addition, it is necessary to seize every opportunity because we never know where our music will end up.

A lot of songwriters aim to pursue the career as a full-time job. The financial aspect is one of the main concerns beside the passion for music. As it was discussed in the previous chapter, the royalty for songwriters is different in different countries and it is a small amount or even zero for starters. The only way to get royalties is to sharpen the skills, doing as many co-writes as possible until you reach a certain level where you work with well-known artists. Another possible way is doing side jobs as many songwriters are doing at the moment. Patric Sarin who is a writer mentioned in his interview that he is doing a side job as a publisher in HMC to nurture his hobby as a songwriter because the revenue of being a songwriter is not enough for him to take care of his family (Sarin, 2022).

Apart from that, putting yourself in the right environment and finding your core people will help you improve your expertise. As a songwriter/topliner, the most important thing is to enjoy the process and keep the passion for music.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview Patric Sarin

Patric is a creative director at HMC publishing and a songwriter

Hi Patric, What advice would you give to songwriters and toplineers about how to get their songs cut?

This has been a very big discussion and I'd say the youngster, they come into this industry you know, they want it to happen a Tik Tok way you know tomorrow. That's just impossible! Because I mean we have a lot of, we have almost like 70 writers, you know you just have to work, you are as good as your last hit. If you don't have a hit, we really need to work on you to get into the right room. And when you are in the right room, you are really need to prove yourself everytime. So there is no shortcut there, the shortcut for us is kind of try to open door but I mean you need to work, no one care about your career as much as you do and if you are not willing to do the work, I mean it sounds old school but you really have to kick ass and really have to work really really hard. That's how it is, that's how it is in any businesses. So I mean finding your right writers, I mean we signed young writer and some manage really well and some just notice this is not for me then they just kinda disappear, I mean they are not working for us, we don't have a working relationship, I can't force anyone to write anything but I can't work with them if they don't send me any songs or they don't attend any camps. Its impossible, I mean then you don't have product because you have a product when you have a song, after that you can negotiate.

We have the discussion in our brand partnership, the guy at Warner when we are discussing a song, when we have our writers and producers, they write the song for an artist, and then let's say Samsung want to use the artist's face and the song for commercial. The thing we've been dealing is that the artist gets 50000 euros for being an artist and the writers get 2000 euros for the song. Or if you do a movie, it's like the budget of the movie is 2 million, we budgeted 10000 euros for the whole soundtrack. Even the artist is just getting a song and you are just going there and singing it, 50000 compare to 2000, that's not a balance so now that is what we've been working with. You know, getting 30000 for the artist

accepting that and sharing 20000 maybe for the producers and writers or 10000 even. They depend on your skills, its different things if they write their song by themselves so then they get the whole cake. The writer situation has been that well any money is fine, thank you very much, I appreciate it and now it's actually started to change, you can feel that.

We are publisher obviously we want the best for our writers but the royalty things isn't in the publishing thing but we have to make it one. We gonna have a management module for this so we negotiate it, negotiate the standards for our writers as the same as we do production management. I deal all of them, production prices for our producers under our deal and then we take a like small percentage of it but usually we get more than them and that's because they are the nice guys then the A&R will still be liking them and hating me but that's good, that's how it should work then they keep doing the music and obviously they don't have to deal with it because no writers want to deal percentages.

What is the difficulty of songwriter/ topline to get the deal?

The difficulty is that a lot of people wanting a deal. I mean you have to have talent. It's all about that, but you don't do anything with talent if you are not willing to work really hard. That's something that's the youngster really don't want to hear but it's the same with every writer. That's what I've been saying, even though you're really skilled and talented, its gonna take years just for yourself to find the drafts and to work with the pros. It's like you playing ice hockey, you are being thrown in the NHL, like everything is very fast and you need to be skilled so you kinda need to find yourself even though you are really talented and the self-confidence to be able to express yourself in the same way you do when you write with yourself, now you write with like big star writers, finding all that, that's very challenging and you need to be nice with people in camps and humble.

As a publisher, it's all about what we hear in the begining, demo and stuff, if we don't like this stuff or we think it's not good enough, we not gonna put you into camp. We have demo everyday coming so everyweek we have a listening session to new demo and we discuss if we like the demo we kinda make contact to you and we ask for more and if we like that we will have a meeting and we will just discuss about the whole business. If everything goes well, we like booking some session because we need to get to know all the writer before we sign them, so they completely understand what are we doing here.

You can tell the biggest star, hey I have new comer here, can you have a session, no, never. They've always asked for what you have done, they want to hear your stuffs, they need to have references. So our main things is building cv for our writers, who have they been writing with. It's a career building, you need to prove yourself everytime you go with the artist. So if you get a chance and don't perform well, the artist is like well, I don't want to work with that person, so that's why we need to know them, they really need to know the process, they need to be self-confident, that's come with the price and that's like you have to do it a certain months or years. But it's a easy process if you are really talented then we will sign you just because we see the potential there but you need to be the person that fit to our company, it's not all about song.

Do you think song writer should focus on 1 genres or as many as possible?

I think you should focus on what you love, I remember there was a time when I was trying to write J-pop and I just couldn't understand it because there were a lot of scales up and down, then K-pop, its different because it was more like international, there are lots of Swedish writers writing for that so they do like the normal like pop melody but then in K-kop you have a lot of parts, you have a lot of members in the group. So they are all want their own part, but that was more obvious for me, I understood that. We have songwriters who only do that. So as long as you understand the music, if you are a good writer, you gonna be able to write good song. But if you are just want to focus on the marketing, you don't understand it, you don't love it, you think this is how it sounds but it's a good money, you never gonna get a cut. Its about passion, it's still about like, you know you do it this for the love of music, for the love of that music. So I mean being a writer and just write for everyone just because they are big. If you don't understand what they are doing, you are not gonna be able to compete with the other writers. That's how it is, you have to find your own stuffs that you love and then you go and if that's successful then you just need to feed on that.

Appendix 2. Interview Sara Chaderia

Hello, Can you introduce a bit about yourself?

My name is Sara Chaderia from Hacate Entertainment Group, music publisher based in Oslo, Norway and you asked for advice as a topline?

My advice is to write everything and with everybody that you possibly can regardless of genres whether it's your specialty genres or not because of a good song is a good song as a good song. It can be performed Acapella with the London symphony orchestra or the thrash band and it will all come through as a good song and you will never know what opportunity might be this song that will translate into all genres and all languages and be popular for years and years and years to come.

How do you connect with people in order to do co-writing?

Reach out to people, it's a lot easier now than it was says 20, 30 years ago because the internet. You can get the track from some places and write over them or reach out to people, say I'm a topline, I would like to see if we could do something together, are you also write music?

Yeah, I do

Okay, then you are in how to delete especially good condition because in mean as an example, who does great topline and comebine with great lyrics?

My all time favourite from my first job in the business, Elton John, does toplines essentially but of course he does the piano accompany as well with lyrics is pretty. So you never know when you find that perfect partnership or where to find it but just keep on looking for it and if you don't find it, especially such you are also a lyricist, you can do everything yourself and then knock yourself out of what you come up with.

We have one writer in Norway that we work with consistently and he is just phenomenal and I met him and he had a band called Yuma Sun and the review was like such a, if I was@ soundtrack, this would be it. So fantastic! And then what do I do? I take him to Japan and he writes J-pop.

You know, he can come up with a track that complete in big bang arrangement and do it in two hours, turn around briefs like that.

So all kind of things that you can do, advertise for dance production, always always get permission, may I include this in my demo reel? Always ask permission And build up a body of work it has people go: Wow, you can do that! Oh, you can do that! Wow, I need somebody does that! Do everything you can, collect it and it becomes you Resume, your CV, your musical CV and with that kind of legacy, that kind of shall we say flexibilities and all doors are open, none are closed.

Who should I ask for the permission?

Let's say if you do music for dance production, in general, they will film it so they can show it to other dance production, the theatre to be able to perform that there. Get permission from the dance production company to use that clip of your music in your presentation.

Same thing if you are doing a film, get permission from a film company and it might be a little tricky because you might need to get permission from actors as well, maybe the scriptwriter, maybe the director but ask whoever hire you or bring you on board to get the music, ask who all do I need to talk about? Talk to them to get permission in writing on email, so you can make sure that you can prove that you have permission to include that in your presentation of your music. Ask everybody that you work with, ask them is there anyone else I need to ask, always ask that question.

Because that, like if you do music for film, even if it's with one cue, you don't know what other writers in that cue, so let's say that little session from that film that 45 seconds also include say a major international chocolate bar, then some production companies can give permission for that chocolate bar to be in your presentation, so you need to call chocolate bar company and make sure it's okay. Always important to make sure no other rights for you in the clip that you want to use.

If I am an independence songwriter, topliner, do I have a chance to work with other professional songwriters, producers, toplineers that are signed with publishers?

You have all kind of chances. I kinda suggest submitting your material to song writer camps which are run all over the place, I'm sure they have them in Finland, I know they have them in Norway, I know they have them in Sweden so within the region, you can find song writers camps that you can apply to and while you are at the camp, even without a publisher, you can apply to all of the camps and all of sudden you write with other people and then the connection is just grow, keep in touch with people, always say thank you!

Thank you so much for your time and your valuable discussion!

Appendix 4. Interview Christian Blad

Chris is a music supervisor for Orange Blue Supervision, songwriter, producer, topliner based in Sweden

Hello Chris, Do you have any advice for songwriters who have just started their career?

Try to get as many sessions as you can, contact artists, songwriters, contact producers, just use Instagram, contact

You don't have to be singed to do a co-write. I mean if you do a song that get cut and you get put out, then you would have more attention. You have to just go the studio, you have to do the work. You just have to be in the room and if it's a bad vibe, then okay let me try again, onto the next one. And you learn how to work with different people, you learn how to cope with money. It's so important. Just reach out to people.

As a unsigned songwriter, you have to get in to the ground level do something, contact people, go to the studio, maybe before you go to the studio, say I think we should do equal spilt. Let's say if you are 3 people in the studio, right. So you only deal with the publishing, so then I would say, I think we should split equally, I think that's the best. Let's do 33% each, maybe you have to do a contract, have lawyer if needed.

Music industry is not fair, its luck, talent and hard-work. If you don't have either one of them, you are not gonna be successful. And everything in music business is open for negotiation Also having a management who believe in you is so important especially if you are not from the industry and you don't know anything, someone who can help you with sessions. They can help you and they can guide you.

Here is the link of those three songs:

https://soundcloud.com/0-ug/sets/pitch-songs/s-v9gQsWMI5cZ?si=1f291b26492a407b90463d88a8ed5e35&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing