



**INDEPENDENT BY CHOICE**  
**A critical study of international songwriting and artist culture.**

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Bachelor's Thesis

Culture and arts management

2024

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Independent by choice, a critical view of international songwriting and artist culture.

Arcada University of Applied Sciences: Culture and arts management, 2024.

## Abstract:

This thesis delves into the landscape of the global music industry, exploring the perspectives and experiences of songwriters and artists regarding independence. Employing qualitative research with thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews, the study investigates the decision-making processes concerning independence versus signing with record labels or publishers. Five overarching themes emerged in the analysis: the impact of technology on careers, industry relationships, independent artistry, financial aspects, and branding for songwriters. The results highlight the music industry's evolving nature, with digitalization facilitating new collaborative opportunities while challenging traditional structures. Independence is celebrated for promoting artistic authenticity but comes with challenges such as financial limitations and time management. The study also sheds light on the nuanced relationships between artists and industry entities, emphasizing the importance of personal connections and ethical considerations in decision-making. Additionally, it explores the role of branding and social media in shaping a songwriter's reputation, revealing strategies for maintaining professionalism and reliability. Overall, the research contributes to a better understanding of global songwriter culture and the cultural variations and ethical values that guide contemporary artists. Looking ahead, the study anticipates an increase in independent artists and alternative paths within the music industry, calling for fair compensation structures and advocacy for the rights of artists and songwriters. The results lay the groundwork for further exploration of economic dimensions, global songwriter culture, and the impact of technology on the industry. The study focuses on songwriters and artists, and to a lesser extent other stakeholders in the music industry.

**Keywords:** music industry, songwriters, artists, independent artistry, labels, publishers, technology, songwriting culture, creative freedom, global networking

# Lärdomsprov

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## Sammandrag:

Detta lärdomsprov fördjupar sig i den globala musikindustrins landskap och utforskar låtskrivares och artisters perspektiv och erfarenheter när det gäller självständighet. Genom en kvalitativ forskning med tematisk analys av semistrukturerade intervjuer, undersöker studien beslutsprocesserna gällande oberoende kontra att signera med skivbolag eller förlag. Fem övergripande teman framkom i analysen: teknikens inverkan på karriärer, relationer i branschen, självständigt artisteri, ekonomiska aspekter och varumärkesbygge för låtskrivare. Resultaten understryker musikindustrins föränderliga karaktär, med digitalisering som underlättar nya samarbetsmöjligheter samtidigt som traditionella strukturer utmanas. Självständighet hyllas för att främja konstnärlig autenticitet, men kommer med utmaningar som ekonomiska begränsningar och tidshantering. Studien belyser också de nyanserade relationerna mellan artister och branschenheter, och betonar vikten av personliga kontakter och etiska överväganden i beslutsfattandet. Dessutom utforskas den roll som varumärke och sociala medier spelar för att forma en låtskrivares rykte, vilket avslöjar strategier för att upprätthålla professionalism och tillförlitlighet. Sammantaget bidrar forskningen till att förstå den globala låtskrivarkulturen, samt kulturella variationer och etiska värderingar som vägleder samtida artister. Framöver förutser studien en ökning av oberoende artister och alternativa vägar inom musikindustrin, och efterlyser rättvisa ersättningsstrukturer och förespråkande av artisters och låtskrivares rättigheter. Resultaten lägger grunden för ytterligare utforskning av ekonomiska dimensioner, global låtskrivarkultur och teknikens inverkan på branschen. Studien fokuserar på låtskrivare och artister, i mindre utsträckning andra aktörer inom musikbranschen.

## Nyckelord:

musikindustrin, låtskrivare, artister, oberoende artisteri, skivbolag, förlag, teknik, låtskrivarkultur, kreativ frihet, globala nätverk

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## Foreword

As an artist and songwriter with a publishing deal, I have worked in the music industry for 7 years while getting to know people from around the world, travelling for music and studying my industry at a hands-on level. In the present moment, I am also an independent artist under the artist name WLHELMINA. Songwriting culture is a fairly new phenomenon, and I am still learning about my craft as a songwriter while navigating the various cultures and spaces of the music industry. A big question that a lot of us artists and songwriters tend to ask is “Should I be independent, or should I sign with a label?”, and if you choose to work with labels, what are your expectations of a label or publisher? I have used up many hours and sleepless nights on these questions, and I keep gaining new perspectives on this complicated industry through working with new people and sharing experiences. Therefore, I would like to dive deeper into this field, to widen my experience also from a theoretical perspective.

# 1 Introduction

In this thesis I want to find different perspectives and experiences regarding the music industry from interviewing colleagues around the world. I want to gain insight into how international artists and songwriters approach their practice from an independent versus a signed perspective. I want to know what motivation drives one to be either independent or published/signed. As an artist and writer who has written songs for myself and others for years, I have felt precious about my own music, and I've thought going independent would "waste my potential", but I have also feared that if I do sign with a major label, I will remain a small fish in a big pond or lose all my creative freedom. Of course, things can work out much better than these scenarios, but the industry can be tricky to navigate even for a positive and resourceful person. Another taboo, but important variable in any industry is money. It may forcefully affect some of the decisions we as songwriters and artists make, and I am interested in diving into the topic of values, ethics and how we act in our work because of money being a part of the equation. Do we have to give a part of ourselves away in the trade when music becomes our livelihood?

## 1.1 Research objectives

The relationship between labels and artists has undergone significant changes in recent years, with a growing trend towards independence among musicians. I keep hearing phrases like "I am independent, by choice." The industry is moving fast, and the new wave of songwriting and artistry has not been widely reported on.

My research aims to explore the evolving landscape of the music industry and its impact on the global community of songwriters and artists. By investigating how these changes are perceived and navigated by individuals within the industry, I seek to gain deeper insights into the implications of the shifts, particularly in terms of the choice between self-releasing music or entering into contractual agreements with labels or publishers. I rely on my network of songwriters and artists to research their experiences, cultures, and views to better understand the relationship between independence, freedom and authenticity in artistry and songwriting.

## 1.2 Research question and scope

In my study I am to answer the following research question: *"How do songwriters and artists make decisions about whether to stay independent or take the traditional route with signing to labels or publishers?"*

Moreover, I aim to meet the following research objectives:

- Gain insight into the culture and artistry of the global songwriting community.
- Analyze the benefits and challenges associated with maintaining independence versus signing with labels or publishers.
- Explore variations in perspectives on independence across diverse cultures.
- Discuss the ethical considerations guiding the decision-making processes of contemporary songwriters and artists.

I focus my studies primarily on songwriters and artists, to a lesser extent the other actors in the music industry.

## 1.3 Method and material

Songwriting culture and the music industry at large is a space filled with implicit knowledge, therefore it was necessary to interview people who have immersed themselves in the industry and could articulate this knowledge. Therefore, I am conducting a qualitative study using thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews according to Steinar Kvale (*Doing Interviews By Steinar Kvale*, n.d.). As stated in my research guide, I will ask the respondents five pre-determined questions and then allow for a free discussion to give the opportunity to explore themes to a further extent. I will analyze the material thematically, identifying interesting patterns, trends and phenomena in the data.

Each interview is roughly one hour long, and all of them were done through Zoom. The interviews have been recorded with the permission of the interviewees and later transcribed through Word online. The transcribed interviews encompass 30 pages of valuable research material. I have analyzed the transcribed interviews with the help of color-coding the information. I have been looking for similarities and differences in the answers, grouping the issues according to the codes and further into select themes. The interviews have been held during the months of April, May and June of 2023.

To gather comparable, cross-national empirical data, I chose six individuals for my interviews with the basis: that they are either artists, songwriters or both, roughly half of the subjects were currently signed while the other half were independent actors, and the subjects all represent a different culture to enhance the global aspect of the study. The genres represented are branches of Pop music, ranging from K-pop to indie-pop and African pop. In an industry that has long been male dominated, I chose to interview four women and two men. I had a certain level of familiarity with approximately half of the interviewees whereas the other half comprised of individuals who were either entirely unfamiliar to me or recently established contacts. In order to maintain impartiality within the study, I ensured a varied spectrum of acquaintance levels among the interview participants while utilizing my network. To maximize this study being a safe space and ethically sourced, I wanted to give each interview object the chance to remain anonymous. Later in the process of working through the interview material, I chose to keep everyone anonymous to protect the privacy of the interviews while also simplifying the writing process.

Two of the people I interviewed were artists and songwriters from Germany, one was a songwriter from the United States, another one was a songwriter from Finland who predominately works in the Asian music industry, one was an artist and songwriter from the United Kingdom and lastly, I also interviewed a former artist turned songwriter from Sweden who has worked globally, including a career in Africa. Therefore, the study encompasses research material from Europe, Africa, Asia and the United States: All of the actors interviewed represent different parts of the industry and have different experiences, which makes the study reflect a part of the unique mosaic of the global music industry.

*Table 1. Interviewees*

Int.	Position	Date	Country	Quote ID
1	Artist and Songwriter	27.04.2023	UK	UK
2	Producer, Artist and Songwriter	02.05.2023	Germany	G1
3	Songwriter, and former Artist	02.05.2023	Sweden	SW
4	Artist and Songwriter	09.05.2023	Germany	G2
5	Songwriter, Producer and Publisher	19.05.2023	Finland	FI
6	Songwriter and Producer	09.06.2023	USA	US

My interview guide consisted of the following questions:

1. For someone who is independent, what are the benefits and drawbacks compared to being signed to a label?
2. As a professional musician, how do you balance the creative side of making music with the business side of the industry?
3. What are some of the challenges you face as a musician trying to make a living from your music? How do you overcome these challenges?
4. How do you approach sessions right now, is there a difference between your role as writer or artist in your sessions?
5. How do you maintain artistic freedom and creative control while still meeting the expectations and demands of fans, the industry, or other stakeholders?
6. How do you see the role of technology and artificial intelligence changing the music industry, and what opportunities or challenges does it present for artists and songwriters?
7. What are some strategies or tactics that songwriters and/or artists can use to promote their work and build a brand, if they need one?
8. How have your experiences with publishers and labels shaped your perspective on the music industry? And how do you navigate the relationships and power dynamics involved?

## **1.4 Delimitations of the Study**

I acknowledge the limitations that may influence the interpretation of my findings. The study was conducted with a relatively small group of interviewees, only six persons which may limit the representativeness of the findings. Additionally, the participants have been selected based on their connection to my network as the researcher, which can introduce selection bias. As previously mentioned, I deliberately selected respondents with varying degrees of acquaintance to mitigate this bias. Still, the individuals interviewed may not fully be able to represent the range of experience and diversity within the global songwriting and artist community. The interviews were also conducted during a limited timeframe, which may not allow for a comprehensive exploration of the vast and ever-changing music industry, changes that occur after the interview period will not be reflected in the findings of the study. The study was also limited to songwriters and artists, therefore actors like managers and record label executives are not explored, which may affect the capturing of the music industry's various dynamics. Though efforts have been made to maintain anonymity and ensure a safer space for interviewees, ethical considerations may still be present that can affect the participants openness and honesty during the interviews.

## 2 Independent songwriting and the big labels

To be an independent artist means that you build your music career without the assistance of a record label. There are reportedly more independent artists becoming popular without a label now, than ever before. Technological advancements, digital music distribution and online marketing tools like social media have changed the way that artists can reach fans and release their music. The advantages of self-releasing can be the increased creative control, bigger profits, the ownership of your music, freedom to negotiate deals and the access to releasing music directly through distribution services. What signing with a record label can bring to an artist ranges from increased resources and budget, an existing network and opportunities to reach larger audiences faster. Record labels historically also have a bigger influence and are positioned to help you with shows, media coverage and radio plays (*“Independent Artists Vs. Signed Artists”*, 2023).

A songwriter is according to the Cambridge Dictionary “a person who writes the music and words of songs”. The work of song writing ranges from composing, writing to creating melodies and/or lyrics. Songwriters tend to specialize in one aspect of writing and work with other songwriters to achieve a well-balanced song. There are many words and titles that go under the song writing umbrella: e.g. lyricist, topliner, beatmaker and composer. Becoming a songwriter is dependent on networking, sharing your work, and maximising one’s skills. Traditionally, songwriters have been found working hard in cities like Los Angeles or Nashville, but today song writing can also happen through online presence from the advanced online networking platforms (*“What are Songwriters? How to Become a Songwriter Explained”* Landr, 2022).

Music reflects our culture and the world around us, nothing you make as an artist or songwriter is made in a vacuum. We express our thoughts, experiences and feelings in music which can be very personal, yet universal. Throughout history, music has been used to show the values, experiences and beliefs of different societies and heritages. Songs are testaments to the different times humans have gone through, and songwriting has been used to express cultures by utilizing languages, dialects, stories and even social movements. There is no question about songwriting being a highly impactful art form for many generations and societies (*“The Impact of Culture and Society on Songwriting”*, 2022).

Record labels function primarily as facilitators in the creation, production, and distribution of recorded music. They operate with exclusive contracts with artists, providing financial backing, studio resources, and promotional support in return for a share of revenue generated from album sales, streaming, and similar avenues (Mulligan, 2020). Conversely, music publishing companies specialize in the management and exploitation of musical compositions. They collaborate with songwriters and composers to license their works for utilization in many media formats such as recordings, films, television shows, and advertisements, thereby generating royalties for the creators (Passman, 2019).

### **3 Findings and analysis**

For the analysis, the research is categorized into four distinct sections. The first part of the analysis is a light introduction to the topic of songwriting culture by tackling how the interviewees write songs at the time and what the current changes are within the songwriting industry; how technology is shaping the way songwriters and artists around the world work in 2024. The second part of the analysis addresses independence in the music industry at large and the role publishers and labels play; the reasons actors in the industry choose independence, with complementing perspectives from the respondent's experience with publishers and labels. The third part of the analysis is dedicated to examining the business aspects of being a songwriter and artist; challenges of making a hobby into a line of work, different revenue streams and the ethical values of making art. The fourth and last part of the analysis is devoted to brand management; How songwriters discuss their brands.

#### **3.1 How respondents view songwriting culture**

It is clear that the respondents approach songwriting differently depending on if they are the artist or writer in the sessions. It seems that when the artist is choosing collaborators for their own work, they emphasize the importance of a personal connection which contrasts to them having a more open and inclusive attitude in general song writing sessions for other artists. Consequently, among many respondents, a shared emphasis is placed on continuous learning and embracing diverse perspectives. They recognize that each collaborator contributes valuable insights, emphasizing the importance of adopting a student mindset and nurturing curiosity.

Therefore, maintaining such a mindset is considered paramount for the continuous growth of both writers and artists.

One respondent shared their experiences of having a tendency of booking themselves into a lot of songwriting sessions for their artist project, however they noticed that this approach resulted in a creative emptiness after an intensive period of writing. This indicates that artistic inspiration and energy might have a cyclical nature. The respondent felt like writing songs for others helped them be more creative and not run out of ideas. There seems to be value in combining songwriting for one's own artist project and collaborating with other artists for theirs. "I have phases where I do sessions. But I would hate to only work for my own project."  
(G1)

One of the interviewees highlighted that they live in an unconventional place for the music industry, but with a lifestyle of travelling and joining songwriting camps paired with sessions on Zoom they adapt to work as a full-time songwriter. Another interviewee is involved in music publishing and works with artists and songwriters in Asia, while only having time for on-request work as a songwriter. This interviewee also lives in an unconventional city in Finland while delivering work as a songwriter and publisher to Asia all through the internet. It is clear that in 2023, a songwriter or actor in the music industry does not have to live in a city that's buzzing with music. It seems that an internet connection and a willingness to work virtually can take you far.

I do all sorts of things. I mean, I don't live where there's an industry. Sure, there are a few producers here, but they're here because they want to be in peace. When I'm at home, I work on Zoom and stuff. Then I do camps and travel quite a bit. (SW)

Even though songwriters can work from virtually anywhere in 2023, the cultural variations in songwriting are notable and writers learn to adapt while travelling and exploring a new part of the industry. When comparing songwriting in Los Angeles, USA and to Northern Europe like Finland and Sweden, one respondent highlighted that they prefer the Northern European approach which was described as a more direct and focused approach to songwriting sessions as opposed to lengthy social interactions and less focused sessions in LA. Another respondent expressed potential inconsistencies in professional behaviour in LA with problems of people cancelling sessions and failing to follow through commitments.

I'm definitely more aligned with the European way. I think in LA, people a lot of times want to meet you for coffee before you do a session or try to see what your vibe is before you start working together. And also in the session, it's like you're talking for two hours and then you start. Or whereas in Europe ... we get right to it. In Europe you're not smoking and drinking something in the session, and talking for 2 hours before you write. I want to go there and work. It's like if we become friends after, cool, but I'm not trying to be your friend first and then write a song. I'm just there to do the task and focus on making the song great. (US)

Los Angeles was also mentioned once as a place for getting inspired and feeling hope about one's artist project. As seen in the following example, where one respondent mentioned that she faces a lot of disbelief in her artistry from her native German peers, while trips to Los Angeles remind her that the world is bigger than Germany, and she can continue on with her project elsewhere.

I had to separate myself from all those people and stop talking with them about music and about my artistry. With time I got frustrated and I started doubting everything. And I thought about, OK, maybe I should start a German project. Maybe this will never work, whatever. But when I got to LA, it was like, Oh my God, no, there's a different world. (G2)

While discussing cultural practices, Japan was mentioned as a place where songwriting happens in a more solitary way. Often, the artist is not in the room and the creative process is very focused for the songwriters. Another sentiment was expressed about challenges in local projects; the respondent shared that they have difficulties with getting paid for local music projects in Ostrobothnia, Finland. This could highlight a need for greater understanding and recognition of the professional aspects of the music industry, particularly in local settings.

The cultural aspects of songwriting seem to play a big part and the respondents all have their own scene they feel most comfortable working in, but technology is something that all actors seem to be affected by and need in the profession of being songwriters and artists. What made things interesting in the music industry, was how the global industry adapted to a global pandemic.

There were so many peoples jobs that were just on the line because of the pandemic and they either quit or they couldn't get paid or they were made redundant. Whereas for musicians, If you had a laptop, you had a bit of a crummy microphone and maybe some speakers or some headphones we could continue working, which was such a privilege. (UK)

### **3.2 The respondents' relationship with technology**

Technology is a big part of work for songwriters, and it is an ever-changing entity. The findings underscore the instrumental role of technology for songwriters and artists during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tools like Zoom and Audiomovers enabled songwriters to continue their work despite global challenges. According to some of the interviewees, Zoom single-handedly opened up new opportunities and songwriting rooms that might not have been accessible in person. One respondent also expressed gratitude for the privilege of technology afforded to musicians during such an uncertain time.

Technology has already completely changed the way the music industry works down to the pure and simple. We are able to work as songwriters even during a pandemic because of zoom and the internet. (UK)

Not only are sessions more accessible through the internet, now songwriting is also met with a brand new collaborator: artificial intelligence. The interviewees gave mixed responses on the subject of artificial intelligence; some were excited and some worried or uninterested in using it. The positive influence of the technology is highlighted in terms of efficiency, as one respondent is able to write songs at a faster pace with the help of A.I. However, there seems to be a challenge of advertisement music and music for movies and series (also known as Synchron-music) being written completely by A.I. which can result in less work for songwriters in this area of expertise, and a loss of soul in the music itself. While A.I. enhances productivity and can act as a third writer in the room, they bring complexity to the music industry while we also shift the focus towards algorithms and streaming platforms. Another positive of A.I. could be the ease of writing songs for a certain artist, when it's now possible to use tools that simulate the voice of an artist which aids the pitching process for a song.

In summary, the approach to songwriting differs based on whether the respondent is the artist or writer in the sessions. Personal connections are emphasized when artists choose collaborators for their own work, while a more open attitude is adopted in general songwriting sessions for other artists. Geographical location and cultural variations in songwriting practices are notable. Europe is contrasted with the lengthy social interactions and less focused sessions in Los Angeles. The introduction of artificial intelligence in songwriting evokes mixed responses. Technology on the whole is seen as a lifeline during challenging times, a tool for efficiency and innovation, yet a source of concern regarding job displacement and the potential loss of artistic integrity.

### **3.3 How the respondents view independence in the music industry**

The concept of independence in the music industry is a multifaceted topic, with artists and writers expressing varied perspectives based on their experiences. The topic of independence is the cornerstone of this study, and the interviewees all represent different roles and experiences in being signed or not. As this study focuses on both being signed with a record label and being signed with a publishing, it's important to note that labels and publishers are not the same. Some respondents have experiences of being signed at a label, some at a publisher and some had experiences of both. While diving into the topic of independence, creative control is first discussed.

Passman (2019) outlines the historical challenges independent artists faced in getting their music distributed and promoted by record companies. Historically, record companies held significant control over the music industry, requiring large organizations and substantial financial investment to manufacture and distribute physical records to stores. Additionally, getting music on radio stations for promotion also required significant resources and often necessitated the backing of a major record label. However, the landscape has shifted dramatically in recent years. With the rise of digital distribution and streaming platforms, physical record sales and traditional radio promotion have become less significant. Passman (2019) highlights the importance of alternative methods for music discovery, such as streaming playlists, and emphasizes the growing importance of direct fan engagement for marketing in the modern music industry (Passman, 2019, p. 75).

Independence is praised for the freedom it provides in decision-making, and it allows artists to have full control over their creative process and release strategies. A sentiment of feeling freedom from external control and having full autonomy is expressed. The control of one's own artist project seems to foster a sense of empowerment and ownership of work while one's artistic vision can be executed without compromise. It seems that authenticity and liberation is a positive in being an independent artist. "What I love about being independent is that I can just do whatever I want. I don't have to ask anyone for their opinion or permission for anything."(G2)

I work with a music publishing company, and I firmly believe that being signed is essential for gaining recognition. This is especially true in the international market. In Asian markets such as Japan, Korea, and China, achieving success as a songwriter is challenging without a publishing deal. The industry is highly regulated. In essence, there are no drawbacks to being signed, as you can't even work if you're not signed.(FI)

In certain international markets, singing with labels or specifically publishers is considered essential for recognition due to regulatory structures. From a global perspective, not all forms of independence appear to be equal. FI highlighted that there are no drawbacks to being signed as one cannot work in certain markets without it, which begs the question what is the drawback of being independent?

"Your reliance is solely on you and as an artist, it's quite a big ask to be good at everything. To be good at songwriting, production, having the creative eye to know what the artwork should be and what to be styled like. You have to know what timeline the release is going to have, how to promote it and pitch for Spotify editorials. That is a lot of pressure to put on one artist. One of the main drawbacks is that you can't push it further than you can push it."(UK)

The UK quote emphasizes the responsibility and that all aspects of the creative and business process fall solely on the artist. Artistic endeavours are often songwriting and production, but as an independent artist the work extends to various aspects of music promotion, visual decisions and even the timing of the release. Independent artists are expected to possess a diverse skill set and this requirement reflects the modern music landscape, where artists are

often engaged in roles that traditionally are handled by a team. The quote suggests that a limitation of independence is the extent an independent artist can expand their career due to constraints of time, resources and individual capacity.

A drawback is splitting your income. Songwriters and artists don't make that much to begin with. So now any money you get because you're signed with this company, you're going to have to give them some of it. But in an ideal situation, that company helps you get something so big that sharing it is not a problem and that's the goal. (US)

When it comes to trade-offs between independence and the support provided by labels or publishers, nothing comes without a cost. Income splitting is seen as a drawback since it reduces the already harsh economic reality of creatives in the music industry. Despite the drawback of earning less, the respondent suggested that a company's involvement can lead to opportunities significant enough to outweigh the shared income. If the primary goal is achieving substantial success or exposure as a songwriter or artist, the split may justify the financial arrangement.

The benefit is having a champion and someone to advocate on your behalf. Obviously, you must believe in yourself the most out of anyone regardless but having the infrastructure and resources of a team is great. Having a person in your corner cheering you on is super helpful for your work-morale. It's a tough business, so to not be totally by yourself is really nice. Another benefit is the resource of getting access to things that you can't get access to by yourself. Whether it's an artist you want to work with or someone you want to connect with that might not take you as seriously by yourself, but because you have this team around you, they're willing to have that conversation with you.(US)

Team support, boost to work morale and enhanced credibility are presented as good reasons to sign a publishing deal for a songwriter. Networking and collaboration is a topic often discussed in songwriting, and respondents shared that a positive with publishers is the access to new networks and finding new industry professionals. It might be hard to get serious consideration from peers, but the credibility of a publisher introducing a songwriter can help. While team building seems to be an important aspect for most of the respondents, good communication is emphasised to be an important aspect for success of a songwriter and artist.

According to Passman (2019), effective communication within a team is crucial, even if it means addressing small issues promptly. Passman (2019) emphasizes the importance of open communication, stating, "I have never known an artist ... who enjoys confrontation. But for your team members to do an effective job, you must have an open communication with them. If you can't bring yourself to talk directly to the person who is bugging you, talk to another team member and make sure they carry the message. Fast. Nothing is worse than letting small things snowball to the point that they build into a major drama. If you discuss them when they're small, they can usually stay small. Often they're just innocent misunderstandings" (p. 29).

It's hard not to become bitter in this industry. I realized that being an artist isn't where I belong. I needed to go back to being like my 13 or 14-year-old self and do what I did then, which was writing songs. And now I'm a thousand times happier. I was in the wrong place in the industry. It was like a hobby that by mistake became a profession.  
(SW)

The industry seems to be riddled with challenges like trust issues and potential disappointment. This can prompt some artists to reconsider their paths. The Swedish respondent shared that they rediscovered the joy of creating music after going through a tough phase as a signed artist within the industry, getting back to the roots of one's creative journey was important for their well-being. This narrative suggests that for some artists, rediscovering the authentic core of their creativity can lead to a sense of fulfilment and happiness.

I've actually only had positive experiences. When you have a functioning machinery behind you, it works. There has never really been any trouble or anything with these Asian projects. Well, it works well now because they know what they're doing, they streamline everything, especially the Japanese. (FI)

I think it's just about waiting for the right people and not just grabbing onto anything, because when you just grab onto that first thing and then you end up having a bad experience, you're like oh, this industry sucks. (US)

What I think now is that you never stop steering your own ship. You are the captain.  
You are in charge. Not the label or publisher or manager. It all has to come from you.  
If It doesn't come from you, it's not going to come from anyone else. (UK)

When asking the respondents about how their relationships and opinions have evolved with labels and publishers, answers are varied. While signing a deal with a publisher or label, expectations can be substantial. However, it is only through years of working together that the outcomes of the collaboration become apparent. One artist felt that during their time working with publishers, a shift in perception happened that highlighted the artist as the ultimate decision-maker. This underscores the idea that artists are captains of their own destinies, which is a departure from a traditional and hierarchical structure where labels and publishers held a more authoritative role. Some of the respondents had positive experiences of working with their publisher or label, and the relationship can feel even familial, which can imply a sense of support and positive interactions within industry entities. A respondent shared the experience of working with a publisher and their time in the industry as a teaching moment for how the industry works and how to avoid potential exploitation by it. The same respondent shared a sceptical view concerning labels and their commitment to supporting diverse music, this can reflect an issue of grappling with the balance between artistic authenticity and commercial goals. A sentiment of waiting for the right deal and the right team is also expressed, and finding an active team seems to be imperative to achieving mutual goals.

In summary, independence is praised for the freedom it offers in decision-making, enabling artists to have full autonomy over their creative process and release strategies. However, the limitations and challenges of independence are also discussed, such as the pressure on artists to excel in many roles and the potential difficulty of expanding one's career without a team. The next chapter will discuss economic aspects further, yet while asking questions about independence, the financial trade-offs are acknowledged. An importance of having a champion or advocate can contribute to improved work morale and access to resources. Positive and negative experiences with labels and publishers are shared, reflecting the diverse nature of these relationships. The exploration of independence extends to cultural and geographical variations, highlighting that not all forms of independence are equal on a global scale. Regulation in certain international markets can make signing with labels or publishers essential for recognition.

### 3.4 Views on the business aspects of being a songwriter and artist

The business aspects of being a songwriter and artist seems to be an uncomfortable topic for many. One respondent expresses discomfort with the abrupt shift from a social and creative environment to the business aspect. This analysis delves into the insights of respondent's experience with the intersection of artistic expression and the business demands of being in the music industry. According to Passman (2019), "As a songwriter, you may be interested in business, but your talents are best spent in creating. However, someone needs to take care of business, and that's where the publishing industry came from." (p.221).

I really quite enjoy the organizational side of it. And that's what we would call it the business side and the creative side. So following up on emails, scheduling and meetings – being able to give an elevator pitch. I actually really enjoy that side as well. I have two kind of parts of my personality at play in those different areas. (UK)

The UK respondent acknowledges and embraces the dual nature of their work, categorizing it to “the business side” and “the creative side”. It seems to not only be a daunting task to do the business work, as following up on emails and marketing oneself in an elevator pitch can be enjoyable. A sense of control, accomplishment, or the satisfaction of seeing the practical tangible, progress can be a positive bonus next to the creative process.

When I'm at home, it's more like I have time for TikTok. I have time to answer my emails and send out invoices. I do all this business stuff, but it's not a space for me to be creative anymore and make music. But it's still nice because you go somewhere else, you just change the setting, and you can just be creative. (G2)

Another quote highlights the divide between creative work and business-minded work, where a space can symbolize the context of a business working environment, while being in songwriting sessions at a studio symbolizes the place for creative work.

We all started making music as a hobby and we're still doing it for a reason, because it's fun and it does something to us and it helps us. But then when it comes to selling, or treating myself as a product, I'm pretty bad. I'm now in in a conversation with my publishing company in Germany and they also do producer managements. I work with the artists. I meet the artists, I connect with them, produce the song, and then as soon

as it's finished, and as soon as money and royalty talk comes in, they handle it. I don't want to have anything to do with it because it's always weird because we as artists and musicians come in a room and we try to make a song. We sometimes meet for the first time and it's a very heavy social situation as well. And it's just weird to get thrown into that situation and you have to get along and open up and be blunt about your personality and then you instantly switch to the money talk. (G1)

The quote highlights the dichotomy between artistic passion and business understanding. The initial motivation for making music seems to stem from a passion and enjoyment of the creative process, while transitioning to dealing with the financial side can be challenging and uncomfortable. The social setting of songwriting is also highlighted as a heavy situation that alone can bring pressure on the artists and songwriters.

I think there is a way to balance both, and sometimes you see things on the business side that may be corrupt and discouraging. It's important to remind yourself that not everyone in the business is like that. And just like you're a good person in the industry, there are other good people in the industry. You just have to find your way and make your way to those people and stick with that group and lift each other up and do good business. I think just being in the right circles, making sure you're around good people is a way to keep your head on your shoulders in this difficult line of work. (US)

To maintain a positive outlook while recognizing the presence of good individuals in the industry can be a powerful way to stay afloat in the music industry according to the US interviewee. There's an emphasis on surrounding oneself with the right circles and fostering a supportive professional network while understanding that the business side of the music industry contains its complexities. To align oneself with ethical and like-minded people seems to be a good way to not get discouraged.

A central part of the business aspect is the practical reason to do business: money. Respondents shared differing stories about how they support themselves financially, but a reoccurring theme is multiple revenue streams. Many respondents shared that there are no guarantees for when you are getting financially compensated for your work, if even at all. The pursuit of songwriting and being an artist can force you to work long hours in hospitality, apply for grants, play gigs and get support from your parents.

The pay structure in the way musicians get paid is kind of very backwards. It's not immediate. The pay structure in general for creatives is just messed up and it doesn't prioritize the person getting paid, it prioritizes the business that is giving out the payment. . . even if you do have a hit song, you're not going to see that money for a year or nine months. So everything's on a delay. I think that is difficult. . . It's made to be very difficult to even understand where your money is coming from, how much you're supposed to get, and a lot of times people are not willing to break that down for you and that's how people get taken advantage of all the time. (US)

Well, the biggest challenge, if you think as a songwriter, is that it's not a paid job from the outset. You can work hard for several years without really having any income from it. There are very few opportunities that provide advances even today; that's really the toughest part, enduring years of struggle without actually getting paid for anything. . . I wrote a ton of songs without knowing how it would turn out. Without knowing if I would ever get anything for all this effort. But it was worth it. (FI)

The quotes paint a picture of an uncertain income and delayed payments, while some respondents can fully support themselves with music. The respondents are all in different stages of their careers, which explains that some are still working other jobs while some are past that stage of their career.

One of the biggest issues is making money from a creative job. For the first eight years I pursued music to the best of my ability. doing emails, flying out, doing sessions and stuff alongside working in hospitality. I was working in bars because it was the only thing that was flexible enough. It incurred holiday hours so I could then take a week off, go to sessions for New York, come back, wipe tables, and then I do it again. For a long time I found a way to cope with both ... I'm very grateful to say doing that has got me to this point where I have a studio in my house, I work full time as a songwriter. And I haven't worked in hospitality for 4 years now. (UK)

I still get support from my mom. Just for the rent. I play cover gigs in a cover band. I have to play almost every weekend. I'm also working for a Chill House- label. And that's also pretty cool, because every song you write gets released and it's not hard to write ... I also do vocal jobs. I try to just do as many things as possible, to have many revenue streams. (G2)

The stories reflect an extended period of financial struggle faced by songwriters and artists in the early years. Sacrifices like giving up one's social life and working every weekend are highlighted. Multiple income streams is mentioned more than once; the uncertainty of getting paid in the music industry forces many to split their time in different jobs and pursuits to survive, while essentially working full-time as artists or songwriters. Furthermore, it seems that the pay structure for songwriters is complex and raises questions about potential exploitation. According to Passman (2019), artists' attitudes towards business discussions vary widely. Passman observes that while some artists avoid business talk altogether, others show keen interest and meticulously study the details of their business lives. The majority of artists, however, fall somewhere in between, not particularly enjoying business matters but still aiming to participate intelligently in their career decisions. This suggests that these artists recognize the importance of taking personal responsibility for their business affairs, as no one else will care for their business as well as they do (p. 5).

To summarize, the findings emphasize the need for a balanced approach to music and business, more ethical business practices and diversified income streams to sustain a career in music. The stories shared by respondents underscore the resilience and determination required to overcome financial hardships in the pursuit of artistic work.

### **3.5 How the songwriters discuss branding**

Brand management is frequently linked to artists, but songwriters also establish their reputation and become recognized within the industry. The last part of the analysis connects the dots between brand management and songwriting. The discussion ranged from songwriters maintaining mysteriousness on social media, to unexpected virality and gaining industry recognition.

The songwriter can be slightly more mysterious on social media than the artist. Generally, people who follow songwriters on Instagram are other songwriters. I kind of sat back in the songwriters' seat for a little while. I didn't post as much, and I was really enjoying it. The freedom of being like 'I don't really need to post anything.' ... Writers like John Bellion are able to every now and then put an Insta story up and it's just a screenshot of a song that they wrote that's got to Billboard #1. Which is amazing.  
(UK)

UK suggests that songwriters can have a flexibility to be more reserved on social media compared to artists. The quote also indicated that the primary audience for songwriters on Instagram consists of fellow songwriters. There seems to be a freedom with reducing one's social media activity by stepping back and songwriting instead of working as an artist. The quote also suggests that for songwriters, impactful and occasional posts about accomplishments can be as effective as frequent updates.

I do think songwriters need a brand, but I think it doesn't have to be external. I think your brand can be internal within the industry. Like for me, I want to be industry famous. I don't want to be famous to the public. I want people in the music industry who are respected and known to know about me and respect me and my work. So that is my brand. I think how you operate in sessions is your brand because that also gets around. So I think that's all part of your brand. (US)

US highlighted that a songwriter's brand can be essential but doesn't necessarily have to be projected externally to the general public. Industry recognition and reputation seem to be significant components of a songwriter's brand. The quote emphasizes the importance of gaining respect and recognition from influential figures within the music industry as a songwriter's brand is built of professional credibility, expertise, and the quality of their work. A songwriter's brand is also defined as their operational style during songwriting sessions together with what they are known for and good at.

Surely, as a songwriter, you need a brand in some way, a profiling of what you do. I think I've done that, but of course, I've tried to do a bit of everything, and some things work better while others work less well. Over time, I've learned what I'm good at, and I tend to stick with it these days. (FI)

FI acknowledges the significance of a songwriter having a brand, suggesting that it serves as a form of profiling to define their identity and style. The quote implies that having a brand is essential for establishing a distinctive presence in the music industry. The songwriter has diversified their work and explored various styles and approaches to songwriting, with some being more successful than others. The respondent shares that they have learned what their expertise is over time and the strategy is to stick to their strengths.

I'm also not the type of person who makes a big fuss about myself, like I don't post pictures of everything I do. For me, it's just work. But you can put things out there, and if you've had a hit somewhere, I like to show the world that I've done that. (FI)

The respondent also shared that they work in silence while letting the accomplishments speak for themselves coupled with an occasional social media post about how songs have charted.

Being nice is a thing, and that's what I focus on. Also, what's important to me is being reliable, meaning I never forget a session. I have to be really sick to miss one. I'm always on time because I find it so frustrating when people forget things. If I've booked a day and then, in the morning, the other person has forgotten or something? Yeah, it's like I've lost a workday or something, and I find that kind of thing so frustrating, so I try to be the opposite of that. (SW)

The quote demonstrates a strong commitment to songwriting sessions, indicating that SW prioritizes attendance and punctuality. A value of reliability seems to be crucial for maintaining a professional reputation. The importance of respecting scheduled commitments and being friendly for fostering professional relationships is expressed.

First of all, you have to find your style as a writer. Before you can have a brand, write and have cuts, I guess, and a solid social media presence. (G1)

G1 emphasizes the primary importance of discovering and establishing a unique writing style. A general social media presence seems to be important in the trajectory of a songwriter's career, while writing songs and having them picked up by artists (having cuts) are additional steps.

In summary, the findings suggest that songwriters can maintain a certain level of mystery on social media while thoughts on the importance of social media are varied. The internal nature of a songwriter's brand within the industry seems to be important for creating a sustainable career. A songwriter's brand is also described as a form of profiling. It's recommended to focus on one's strengths and uniqueness. Furthermore, a commitment to professionalism and the importance of being nice and reliable is highlighted to foster positive professional relationships.

## **4 Discussion**

This research clearly shows that songwriting and artistry is a unique endeavour that can't be fit into a standardized mould. A lot of the interviewees had different opinions and experiences from each other, but there were also similarities. From this material I can identify 5 themes. The themes are the following: technology's impact on careers, relationships in the industry, independent artistry, financial aspects and finally, branding for songwriters. As I discuss the themes in this chapter, I additionally share reflections of my own experiences and thoughts regarding to the topics at hand.

### **4.1 Technology's impact on careers**

The topic of technology was polarizing as an expression of both fear and excitement were shown. It seems as if digitalization is making us more lenient on algorithms, social media and tools like A.I. or zoom. We are perhaps moving into a world where collaborating as musicians is made easier than ever, and we are efficient yet easily distracted or replaced by technology. Even though there were sentiments of not having to travel for sessions because of zoom, it seems that writers and artists are still keen on getting some change of scenery and connecting with others internationally. The integration of technology has sustained the industry through a pandemic and opened new collaborative possibilities. I share the idea that one respondent had about travelling to a place like Los Angeles and finding a whole new world to get inspired by. As artists, I believe that every experience and every encounter with different places and cultures shapes us and shifts our creativity into a new level. Even though travelling seems to be favoured, some songwriters in the study do live and work from locations that aren't buzzing with music, which can be an inspiring point to remember.

### **4.2 Relationships within the industry**

The varied experiences with labels and publishers enriched the discussion, showing the nuanced relationships between artists and industry entities. The perspectives of the interviewees highlight the importance of active involvement and continuous steering of one's own artistic journey, challenging the traditional hierarchical structures in the industry. The findings emphasized the importance of personal connections in the collaborative processes like songwriting sessions, while also noting the cyclical nature of artistic inspiration.

With confidence, I can attest that working as a songwriter and artist requires possessing social skills. In this creative realm, one learns the art of collaborating and the ability to build connections through songwriting sessions and meeting new people in the music industry.

The geographical and cultural variations in songwriting practices, from the focused approach in Northern Europe to the social interactions in Los Angeles, underscore the diversity within the global songwriting community. As a songwriter who travels, I can attest that each city has its own customs, for example Nashville being community cantered and Helsinki being focused and task-oriented while songwriting shares a common denominator: music and relationships are made. It's worth noting that songwriters and artists often rank among the nicest individuals globally, as their sensitivity and empathy contribute to their skills at building meaningful relationships. I notice that no matter where I work, songwriting culture is often open, collaborative and friendly. As a person who works with many in the Finnish music industry, I notice that the songwriting scene is small and it's easy to network and build connections. It is surprising, but it seems that in Finland people are cheering each other on and building connections across publishing companies and labels, even if they are technically rivals. I'm also of the opinion that a lot of Finnish producers, artists and songwriters have a lot of skills and knowing, but we aren't the best at selling ourselves and marketing these skills. Given that Finnish creatives are often perceived as underdogs, this situation could serve as an advantageous position, so we can surprise the rest of the world with the extent of our talent and skills.

### **4.3 Independence**

Independence is celebrated for affording artists the freedom to make decisions without external interference, fostering artistic authenticity and empowerment. However, the discussion on independence also acknowledges the challenges faced by independent artists, particularly in terms of money, skillset and time-management. These factors pose limitations on the extent to which an independent artist can expand their career. Income splitting is recognized as a drawback for artists and songwriters who do sign with labels or publishers, further straining the already challenging economic reality of being a creative in the music industry. Yet, some argue that the support and opportunities provided by labels and publishers may outweigh the financial compromise, offering a chance for substantial success. While it's clear that independence presents both challenges and freedom for some, I align with the perspective that

releasing music as an independent artist demands considerable effort. Nevertheless, the satisfaction of making decisions independently and moving my career forward on my own makes the work worthwhile.

#### **4.4 Financial aspects**

The business aspect of songwriting and artistry is closely tied to financial considerations, with multiple revenue streams being a recurring theme. Respondents shared varied experiences, including uncertainty about income, delayed payments, working regular jobs and the challenges of the pay structure within the music industry. I relate to a lot of the experiences shared, for example having to do other things than songwriting and artistry to stay afloat financially while also feeling like the pay structure for artists and songwriters is rigged in favour of streaming platforms and labels. It is also important to note that releasing music as an independent artist is expensive and time consuming, which adds an extra layer of complexity to the process.

Respondents also shared that to be a songwriter or artist, one must work and make sacrifices to gain success; from one respondent working in hospitality and not having a social life due to songwriting pursuits, to another respondent writing songs for years before getting a single one out. The results emphasise that songwriting and artistry is a pursuit driven by passion, and those truly dedicated will persevere even in the face of challenges. One respondent expressed discomfort with the shift from a creative to a business environment, highlighting the dual nature of the work. I agree that songwriting and artistry may not be driven from financial goals, but a part of the work is to know how to do business. The dichotomy between the joy of creating and the challenges of the business side is evident. One of the coping strategies with the industry is to maintain a positive outlook and surround oneself with ethical individuals in the industry. From my experience, working with industry people who share my ethics and values help to boost my morale. I agree that it is important to find people you can trust and build a healthy work relationship with to help your career flourish as both a songwriter and artist.

#### **4.5 Branding for songwriters**

Songwriters are commonly seen as backstage actors of the industry, but do they need brands in order to have flourishing careers? Contrary to this common perception, songwriters seem to

actively shape their reputation and gain recognition within the industry. A notable theme is the role of social media in a songwriter's brand. The insights reveal that songwriters can find flexibility in maintaining an air of mystery on platforms like Instagram and TikTok particularly when their primary audience consist of fellow songwriters and industry professionals. The emphasis is on the impact of occasional posts about their achievements rather than frequent updates of their lives. As both a songwriter and artist, I find that there's less pressure to constantly post about songs that I'm only a songwriter on, and this sense of freedom is liberating. I can imagine the privacy that comes with being exclusively a songwriter, a space where one can relax without the obligation of being active on social media unless there are significant news or achievements to share. The findings also underscore the importance of a songwriter's brand as a form of profiling to identify their musical identity and style. Respondents acknowledged the evolution of their brands over time, emphasizing the strategic decision to focus on what they excel at and showcasing a commitment to their strengths. Another aspect of the brand is professionalism and reliability in songwriting sessions, it seems that a commitment to attendance and punctuality can be essential to maintain positive professional relationships within the industry. I agree that the brand of a songwriter is highly linked to their skillset and what they are known for in sessions. Additionally, I believe that one's reputation and social skills also play a role in securing opportunities in the long run.

## **5 Conclusions**

The music industry is evolving, new challenges present themselves and the professions of songwriters and artists are shifting. The need for labels and publishers might be changing, because personal branding is easier through the use of social media. Global connectivity is evidently on the rise as respondents who work remotely seem to successfully navigate full-time songwriting careers despite their location not being a music-industry hub. Insights from participants underscore never-ending learning and collaboration as a significant part of a lasting career as a songwriter and artist. A prevalent theme was balancing personal and collaborative projects, some of the respondents emphasized finding inspiration for their own artistry through songwriting for others. It seems that artistry and creativity have a cyclical life, and songwriting inspiration is certainly not linear and predictable.

The study demonstrates that songwriting and artistry resist standardization, with diverse opinions and experiences among interviewees. The identified themes collectively answer the questions by highlighting the independent perspectives of creators. The findings reveal varied practices within the global songwriting community, showcasing geographical and cultural differences such as the focused approach in Northern Europe and the social interactions in Los Angeles. A global connectivity fosters diverse collaborations and facilitates full-time songwriting careers, even for those outside traditional music-industry hubs. Support from peers and one's professional team seems to be important for a stable and lucrative career as an artist and songwriter. Independence is celebrated for fostering artistic authenticity, but the study acknowledges the challenges faced by independent artists, particularly in terms of finances, skillsets and time-management. Perspectives on labels and publishers enrich the discussion, emphasising the nuanced relationships between artists and industry entities. The study also addresses the dichotomy between the creative and business aspects of songwriting and artistry. It emphasizes the importance of ethical values, maintaining a positive outlook and surrounding yourself with trustworthy individuals in the industry. Support systems are highlighted for peers and professional teams.

In summary, the research not only answers the primary research question "*How do songwriters and artists make decisions about whether to stay independent or take the traditional route with signing to labels or publishers?*" but also achieves the outlined objectives by providing an understanding of the global songwriting community, examining the pros and cons of independence, exploring cultural variations, and discussing the ethical values guiding contemporary artists and songwriters.

The themes explored in this study add to the limited existing research there is about songwriting and independent artistry. Moreover, this study serves as a snapshot, capturing the state of the industry in 2023. I anticipate that over the next decade, there will be a rise in independent artists and alternative avenues for work in the music industry, bypassing traditional gatekeepers. Additionally, I hope to see labels, managers and publishers advocating for artists' and songwriter's rights and a shift towards fair compensation structures for both artists and songwriters.

This study sets the stage for further exploration into the economic dimensions of songwriting and artistry, global songwriting culture, songwriter branding and technology's impact on the music industry. Further studies could include conducting interviews with key figures in the industry such as managers, A&R professionals, label executives, and publishers.

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## Appendix 1: Glossary

**Actor:** Individuals or entities involved in the music industry, including but not limited to artists, songwriters, producers, managers, labels, and publishers.

**Algorithm:** A set of rules or procedures used in computing and data analysis, often employed in music recommendation systems and content curation algorithms on streaming platforms.

**Artistry:** The creative expression and craftsmanship involved in the creation of music, encompassing elements such as songwriting, performance, production, and visual presentation.

**Artificial Intelligence (A.I.):** Technology that enables machines to simulate human intelligence, often used in music composition, production, and analysis tasks.

**Authenticity in Artistry:** The quality of being genuine, sincere, and true to one's artistic vision and identity.

**Branding:** The process of creating and maintaining a distinct identity and image for oneself or one's work, aimed at establishing recognition and building a loyal audience.

**Changing Music Industry:** Refers to the evolving landscape of the music business, including shifts in distribution models, consumption patterns, and artist-label relationships.

**Creative Freedom:** The ability for an artist to express themselves and make artistic decisions without external constraints or influences.

**Creative Potential:** The untapped artistic capabilities and possibilities of an individual artist.

**Digitalization:** The process of integrating digital technologies into various aspects of the music industry, including production, distribution, marketing, and collaboration.

**Global Songwriting Community:** The interconnected network of songwriters and artists from around the world, sharing experiences, techniques, and cultural influences.

**Hierarchical Structures:** Organizational arrangements characterized by levels of authority and decision-making power, often found in traditional music industry institutions like record labels and publishing companies.

**Income Splitting:** The distribution of earnings between multiple parties involved in the creation and exploitation of musical works, such as songwriters, performers, and publishers.

**Independent Artist:** An artist who operates without being signed to a major record label or publishing company, retaining control over their music and career decisions.

**Major Label:** A large and well-established record label that typically has significant influence and resources within the music industry.

**Pay Structure:** The system or framework governing how artists and songwriters are compensated for their work, including contractual agreements, royalty rates, and payment schedules.

**Profiling:** The creation of a detailed portrait or representation of a songwriter's identity, style, and professional attributes, often used for promotional purposes and networking within the industry.

**Revenue Streams:** Different sources of income generated by musical works, including streaming royalties, live performances, merchandise sales, and licensing fees.

**Signed Artist:** An artist who has entered into a contractual agreement with a record label or publishing company, often relinquishing some degree of creative control in exchange for support and resources.

**Songwriting:** Songwriting is the creative process of composing lyrics and melodies to create a musical composition known as a song.

**Traditional Route:** The conventional path that artists have historically taken, involving signing contracts with record labels or publishers for promotion, distribution, and other support services.

**Zoom:** A popular video conferencing platform used for remote collaboration, meetings, and communication.

## Appendix 2: Svensk sammanfattning

### Bakgrund

I detta lärdomsprov vill jag hitta olika perspektiv och erfarenheter gällande musikbranschen genom att intervjua kollegor runt om i världen. Jag vill få en inblick i hur internationella artister och låtskrivare närmar sig sin praktik från ett självständigt kontra ett signat perspektiv. Jag vill veta vad motivationen är som driver en att antingen vara självständig eller publicerad/signad. Som en artist som har skrivit låtar för mig själv och andra i årtal har jag känt mig sparsam med min egen musik, och jag har tänkt att om ja är en oberoende artist skulle jag "slösa bort min potential". Jag har också varit rädd för att om jag skriver kontrakt med ett stort skivbolag kommer jag att förbli en liten fisk i en stor damm eller förlora all min kreativa frihet. Jag har även erfarenhet av att vara en självständig artist med mitt projekt "WLHELMINA". Naturligtvis kan artistkarriärer och låtskrivarekarriärer fungera mycket bättre än dessa scenarier, men branschen kan vara knepig att navigera även för en positiv och påhittig person. En annan tabubelagd men viktig variabel i alla branscher är pengar. Det kan påverka de beslut vi som låtskrivare och artister fattar, och jag är intresserad av att dyka ner i ämnet värderingar, etik och hur vi agerar i vårt arbete på grund av att pengar är en del av ekvationen. Måste vi ge bort en del av oss själva i handeln när musiken blir vårt levebröd?

### Forskningens syfte och mål

Förhållandet mellan skivbolag och artister har genomgått betydliga förändringar under de senaste åren, med en växande trend mot självständighet bland musiker. Jag hör hela tiden fraser som "Jag är självständig, av eget val". Branschen rör sig snabbt och den nya vågen av låtskrivande och artisteri har inte rapporterats i någon större utsträckning än.

Min forskning syftar till att utforska musikindustrins föränderliga landskap och dess inverkan på den globala gemenskapen av låtskrivare och artister. Genom att undersöka hur dessa förändringar uppfattas och navigeras av individer inom branschen försöker jag få djupare insikter i konsekvenserna av förändringarna, särskilt när det gäller valet mellan att ge ut musik på egen hand eller att ingå i avtal med skivbolag eller förlag. Jag förlitar mig till mitt nätverk av låtskrivare och artister för att undersöka deras erfarenheter, kulturer och åsikter för att bättre förstå förhållandet mellan självständighet, frihet och autenticitet i artisteri och låtskrivande.

## Forskningsfråga

I min studie ska jag besvara följande forskningsfråga: "Hur fattar låtskrivare och artister beslut om huruvida de ska förbli självständiga eller ta den traditionella vägen med att skriva kontrakt med skivbolag eller förlag?" Dessutom strävar jag efter att uppfylla följande mål:

- Få en inblick i kulturen i den globala artist- och låtskrivargemenskapen.
- Analysera de fördelar och utmaningar som är förknippade med att behålla självständigheten jämfört med att signera med skivbolag eller förlag.
- Utforska variationer i perspektiv på självständighet i olika kulturer.
- Diskutera de etiska överväganden som styr samtida låtskrivares och artisters beslutsprocesser.

Jag fokuserar mina studier främst på låtskrivare och artister, i mindre utsträckning på de andra aktörerna i musikbranschen.

## Metod och material

Låtskrivarkulturen och musikindustrin i stort är ett utrymme fyllt av tyst kunskap, därför var det nödvändigt att intervjua personer som har fördjupat sig i branschen och kunde artikulera denna kunskap.

Därför genomför jag en kvalitativ studie med tematisk analys av semistrukturerade intervjuer enligt Steinar Kvale (*Doing Interviews By Steinar Kvale*, n.d.). Jag kommer att ställa fem förutbestämda frågor till respondenterna och sedan tillåta en fri diskussion för att ge möjlighet att utforska teman i ytterligare utsträckning. Jag analyserar materialet tematiskt och identifierar intressanta mönster, trender och fenomen i datan.

Varje intervju var ungefär en timme lång, och alla gjordes via Zoom. Intervjuerna har spelats in med tillstånd av de intervjuade och senare transkriberats via Word online. De transkriberade intervjuerna omfattar 30 sidor värdefullt forskningsmaterial. Jag har analyserat de transkriberade intervjuerna med hjälp av färgkodning av informationen. Jag har letat efter likheter och skillnader i svaren, grupperat frågorna enligt koderna och vidare in i utvalda teman. Intervjuerna har genomförts under månaderna april, maj och juni 2023.

För att samla in jämförbara, gränsöverskridande empiriska data valde jag ut sex personer för mina intervjuer med utgångspunkten: att de antingen är artister, låtskrivare eller både och, ungefär hälften av försökspersonerna var för tillfället signade medan den andra hälften var oberoende aktörer, och att försökspersonerna alla representerar en viss kultur för att förstärka den globala aspekten av studien. De genrer som representeras är grenar av popmusik, allt från K-pop till indiepop och afrikansk pop. I en bransch som länge varit mansdominerad valde jag att intervjua fyra kvinnor och två män. För att maximera denna studie som en säker plats och etiskt framställd, ville jag ge varje intervjuobjekt chansen att förbli anonym. Senare i processen valde jag att hålla alla anonyma för att skydda intervjuernas integritet och samtidigt förenkla skrivprocessen. Jag ville också se till att jag inte introducerar bias i studien så jag valde att intervjua en blandning av personer, som var från nära kollegor till helt nya bekantskaper. Två av de personer jag intervjuade var artister och låtskrivare från Tyskland, en var en låtskrivare från USA, en annan var en låtskrivare från Finland som främst arbetar inom den asiatiska musikindustrin, en var en artist och låtskrivare från Storbritannien och slutligen intervjuade jag också en före detta artist som blivit låtskrivare från Sverige som har arbetat globalt, inklusive en karriär i Afrika. Därför omfattar studien forskningsmaterial från Europa, Afrika, Asien och USA: Alla de intervjuade aktörerna representerar olika delar av branschen och har olika erfarenheter, vilket gör att studien speglar en del av den unika mosaik som den globala musikindustrin utgör idag.

## **Avgränsningar**

Studien baserades på sex intervjuer med låtskrivare och artister, men den begränsade gruppen kan påverka resultaten. Deltagarna valdes utifrån mitt nätverk, vilket kan leda till urvalsbias. Intervjuerna utfördes inom en begränsad tidsram och inkluderade enbart låtskrivare och artister, vilket kan påverka studiens omfattning och generaliserbarhet.

## **Resultat: en introduktion till låtskrivarkulturen**

Teknik är en stor del av arbetet för låtskrivare, och den förändras ständigt. Resultaten understryker teknikens avgörande roll för låtskrivare och artister under covid-19-pandemin. Verktyg som Zoom och Audiomovers gjorde det möjligt för låtskrivare att fortsätta sitt arbete trots globala utmaningar. Zoom öppnade på egen hand upp nya möjligheter och hypotetiska

låtskrivarrum som kanske inte hade varit tillgängliga personligen. Det uttrycktes tacksamhet för det privilegium som tekniken ger musiker under en osäker tid.

Det är tydligt att respondenterna närmar sig låtskrivande på olika sätt beroende på om deras roll är artist eller låtskrivare i sessionerna. Det verkar som att när artisten väljer samarbetspartners för sitt eget arbete betonar de vikten av en personlig kontakt som står i kontrast till att de har en mer öppen och inkluderande attityd i allmänhet låtskrivningssessioner för andra artister. Det läggs även en gemensam betoning bland många respondenter på kontinuerligt lärande och att omfamna olika perspektiv. De inser att varje medarbetare bidrar med värdefulla insikter, och betonar vikten av att anta ett elevtänkande och behålla sin nyfikenhet. Därför anses det vara viktigt att upprätthålla ett öppet tänkesätt för kontinuerligt lärande för både artister och låtskrivare. Även om låtskrivare kan arbeta från praktiskt taget var som helst under 2020-talet, är de kulturella variationerna i låtskrivande anmärkningsvärda och låtskrivare lär sig att anpassa sig när de reser och utforskar en ny del av branschen. När man jämförde låtskrivande i Los Angeles, USA och med norra Europa som Finland och Sverige, betonade en respondent att de föredrar det nordeuropeiska tillvägagångssättet som beskrevs som ett mer direkt och fokuserat tillvägagångssätt för låtskrivarsessioner i motsats till långa sociala interaktioner och mindre fokuserade sessioner i LA.

## **Självständighet i musikbranschen**

Självständighet i musikbranschen är ett mångfacetterat ämne, med artister och författare som uttrycker olika perspektiv utifrån sina erfarenheter. Ämnet självständighet är centralt i denna studie, och de intervjuade representerar alla olika roller och erfarenheter av att vara signad eller inte. Eftersom denna studie fokuserar på både att vara signad med ett skivbolag och att vara signad med ett musikförlag, är det viktigt att notera att skivbolag och musikförläggare inte är samma sak. En del respondenter har erfarenhet av att vara signade på ett skivbolag, en del på ett förlag och en del hade erfarenheter av båda.

Självständighet hyllas för den frihet det ger i beslutsfattandet, vilket gör det möjligt för artister att ha full autonomi över sin kreativa process och releasestrategier. Men begränsningarna och utmaningarna med självständighet diskuteras också, såsom pressen på artister att utmärka sig i många roller och den potentiella svårigheten att utveckla sin karriär utan ett team. I nästa kapitel kommer de ekonomiska aspekterna att diskuteras ytterligare, men samtidigt som frågor ställs

om oberoende erkänns de ekonomiska kompromisserna. Vikten av att ha en förkämpe eller förespråkare kan bidra till förbättrad arbetsmoral och tillgång till resurser.

Positiva och negativa erfarenheter av skivbolag och förlag delas, vilket återspeglar den mångfacetterade karaktären hos dessa relationer. Utforskandet av självständighet sträcker sig till kulturella och geografiska variationer, vilket belyser att inte alla former av självständighet är lika på global nivå. Regleringen på vissa internationella marknader gör det nödvändigt att underteckna avtal med skivbolag eller förlag för att bli erkända.

## **Ekonomiska aspekten av att vara låtskrivare och artist**

De affärsmässiga aspekterna av att vara låtskrivare och artist verkar vara ett obekvämt ämne för många. De intervjuade uttrycker obehag över den plötsliga övergången från en social och kreativ miljö till den affärsmässiga aspekten. Denna analys fördjupar sig i respondenternas insikter om skärningspunkten mellan konstnärligt uttryck och de affärsmässiga kraven för att vara i musikbranschen.

Berättelserna speglar en lång period av ekonomisk kamp som låtskrivare och artister stod inför under de första åren. Uppoffringar som att ge upp sitt sociala liv och arbeta varje helg lyfts fram. Flera inkomstströmmar nämns mer än en gång; Osäkerheten att få betalt i musikbranschen tvingar många att dela upp sin tid i olika jobb och sysselsättningar för att överleva, samtidigt som de i princip arbetar heltid som artister eller låtskrivare. Dessutom verkar det som att lönestrukturen för låtskrivare är komplex och väcker frågor om potentiell exploatering.

Sammanfattningsvis betonar resultaten behovet av ett balanserat förhållningssätt till musik och affärer, mer etiska affärsmetoder och diversifierade inkomstströmmar för att upprätthålla en karriär inom musik. Erfarenheterna som delas av respondenterna understryker att uthållighet och beslutsamhet krävs för att övervinna ekonomiska svårigheter i strävan efter konstnärligt arbete.

## Hur låtskrivare diskuterar sina varumärken

Varumärkeshantering är ofta kopplat till artister, men låtskrivare etablerar också sitt rykte och blir erkända inom branschen. Den sista delen av analysen kopplar ihop varumärkeshantering och låtskrivande. Diskussionen sträckte sig från låtskrivare som upprätthåller mystik på sociala medier, till oväntad viralitet och att få branscherkännande. Resultaten tyder på att låtskrivare kan upprätthålla en viss nivå av mystik på sociala medier medan tankarna om vikten av sociala medier varierar. Det interna ryktet av en låtskrivares varumärke inom branschen verkar vara viktigt för att skapa en hållbar karriär. Ett låtskrivarvarumärke beskrivs också som en form av profilering. Det rekommenderas att fokusera på sina styrkor och sin unikheter. Det lyfts även fram att ett engagemang för professionalism och att vara trevlig och pålitlig främjar positiva professionella relationer.

## Slutsatser

Musikbranschen utvecklas, nya utmaningar dyker upp och låtskrivarnas och artisternas yrken förändras. Behovet av skivbolag och musikförläggare kan vara på väg att förändras, eftersom det är lättare att skapa ett personligt varumärke genom att använda sociala medier. Den globala anslutningen är uppenbarligen på uppgång eftersom respondenter som arbetar på distans verkar lyckas navigera i låtskrivarkarriärer på heltid trots att deras plats inte är ett nav för musikindustrin. Insikter från deltagarna understryker oändligt lärande och samarbete som en viktig del av en varaktig karriär som låtskrivare och artist. Ett genomgående tema var att balansera personliga och samarbetsprojekt, några av respondenterna betonade att hitta inspiration till sitt eget artisteri genom låtskrivande för andra. Det verkar som att artisteri och kreativitet har ett cykliskt liv, och låtskrivarinspirationen inte är linjär eller förutsägbar.

Studien visar att låtskrivande och artisteri motstår standardisering, med olika åsikter och erfarenheter bland de intervjuade. De teman som identifierades svarar tillsammans på forskningsfrågorna genom att lyfta fram nya perspektiv om att vara oberoende artist eller låtskrivare. Resultaten visar olika praktiker inom den globala låtskrivargemenskapen, och visar på geografiska och kulturella skillnader, såsom det fokuserade tillvägagångssättet i norra Europa och de sociala interaktionerna i Los Angeles. En global anslutning främjar olika samarbeten och underlättar låtskrivarkarriärer på heltid, även för dem som bor utanför traditionella musikindustrinav. Stöd från kollegor och ens professionella team verkar vara

viktigt för en stabil och lukrativ karriär som artist och låtskrivare. Självständighet hyllas för att främja konstnärlig autenticitet, men studien bevakar de utmaningar som oberoende konstnärer står inför, särskilt när det gäller ekonomi, färdigheter och tidshantering. Perspektiv på skivbolag och förlag berikar diskussionen och betonar de nyanserade relationerna mellan artister och branschaktörer. Studien tar också upp tvåfaldigheten mellan de kreativa och affärsmässiga aspekterna av låtskrivande och artisteri. Studien betonar vikten av etiska värderingar, att upprätthålla en positiv inställning och att omge sig med pålitliga personer i branschen. Stödsystem lyfts även fram för kollegor och professionella team. Detta arbete är en överblick av musikbranschen i 2023, och vidare studier kan även göras med hjälp av A&R managers, låtskrivarpersonal, managers eller förläggare.