

Collaboration, a Creative Catalyst

Developing the Warehouse project through Producer Mediation,
Band Influence and Facilitation for Musical Practice.

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Preface

I've always considered myself a creative person. In my adolescent days, I was utterly enamored with drawing, carpentry, the limitless potential of Lego, and in general, watching my ideas come to life. Although the final product was never precisely what I had envisioned, it was close enough, and the result was still an outcome of my imagination. As I became older, I saw that many of my concepts, regardless of the medium, could be developed further by peers, neighborhood friends, family, and virtually anyone interested in my vision. Their assessments would also stick with me, like how my mother would criticize me for using random colored pieces of Lego instead of hand-picking matching colors and building from there. The elements' function and interconnectivity were more exciting to me than how they matched in color, but after her statement, I became increasingly aware of it and realized that matching colors, although more challenging and time-consuming, gave the construction coherence in function and look.

As I grew older, Lego climbed further and further down my ranks of priority in my everyday life. I started playing and creating music. It was just as enjoyable in my own company as with others. Like Lego, it gave me room to play and create, and explore connections within systems.

At 19 years old, I attended a music folk high school. It was a year full of personal and musical experiences. Although creating and playing music was a similar experience for me as that with Lego, engagement with music started manifesting in a profoundly emotional way. It became a means of expression deeply connected to my innermost thoughts and feelings. It was challenging to introduce my songs to others, invite them in to have a creative opinion, or even pass it on to someone for further production. That was until I, at the beginning of my Bachelor's degree at the University of Agder, started creating with others from *scratch*. With like-minded and equally tuned aesthetics aims, some collaborations opened doors to new worlds filled with play and musical exploration. This world has since expanded daily as I attain new influences and meet people in new musical contexts.

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1. Introduction

“No man is an island,” as the seventeenth-century author John Donne stated. Upon finishing my bachelor's degree at The Faculty of Fine Arts in Agder, I re-evaluated my artistic practice and creative process. The collaborative work, the demos, finished songs, and thoroughly crafted projects, all of which were made in various constellations of creative people, had been mediated by each group member in some way or another. How could I identify multiple contributions to a song within these groups, and which of them were mine? A melodic motive created by the guitarist is the guitarist's contribution. The question will thus be, “How and why did the guitarist's contribution come to be?”. To further understand my own contributions and others', I have explored my artistic practice in solitude.

This thesis is an arts-based exploration of my encounters with different creative practices within music. This includes collaborating with an external producer, influences from band collaboration, and how it affects my artistic practice. I have structured the thesis into three sections to illuminate this process: Theory and Method, Results, and Discussion. The theory chapter highlights knowledge I attained through my research, which is later deemed relevant through my findings and discussion. The result chapter provides an insight into the creative process behind each song within the EP, and is supplied with complimenting audio files. In chapter 3.5, as part of my results, I have taken artistic freedom in extending the explanation of the creation-process. In this next chapter, I will highlight some of my core strengths as a creative individual, how I utilize them, and what my main musical influences are.

1.1 The Vocalist

I have been singing since I started in a children's choir at age five. I had my first stage performance at the age of 12, and by the age of 15, I performed at a TV Christmas special streamed by NRK from Sogndal Kulturhus. “Vocal performance” is the field in which I have specialized for my five years at the University of Agder, and before my higher education. Therefore, it is also the field in which I possess the most expertise. At the time of writing this thesis, I am responsible for tutoring six bi-instrumentalists at the Bachelor's level, as well as a vocal talent program for high school students led by the University. Through my vocal practice over the last years, I have garnered experience in vocal performance, theory, technique, and vocal recording, as well as knowledge about psychological factors in play

when singing. Understanding and developing the voice is my greatest asset as an artist developing the project Warehouse, and it plays a substantial role in my discoveries throughout this dissertation.

1.2 The Instrumentalist and Producer

Instruments and music production have been crucial in forming my understanding of music. At 14 years old, I bought myself a loop station, the RC-300 by Roland. This pedal helped me explore the creative possibilities within the constraints of repetition and motives and develop my time and feel while playing. I utilized my vocal and instrumental abilities, blending guitar, bass, keys, beatboxing, and voice to make short but interesting loops. I discovered that slight alterations in tones fundamental to the harmonic information of a loop (i.e., bass notes) or minor changes of accentuation in key rhythmic components could significantly impact a simple piece of music.

After playing around with a limited set of tools, I turned to the computer. In 2015 I discovered the two DAWs(Digital Audio Workstations), FL Studio and Ableton Live. At this time, I used FL Studio to play around with, creating electronic music, while Ableton Live was utilized as a songwriting platform for recording audio. I was no longer pinned to the constraints of using three tracks on a pedalboard but rather “unlimited” tracks within an “unlimited” timeline.

1.3 Musical Influences

I grew up in a home where my mother was a gospel choir instructor, and my father was an acapella group member. With three sisters regularly engaged in singing and dancing, I quote the oldest of us after coming home from her first year as a student: “It is like entering a very bad unsynchronized musical.” All four siblings grew up in the choir with our mother as our instructor. There we gained a general understanding of harmonies in choir music, especially *pentatonic* gospel harmony.

In addition to the influence of *gospel* music and harmony, I discovered the singer and multi-instrumentalist Jarle Bernhoft at age 14. Although I don't listen to him as much anymore, I believe his soulful music and live performance style have significantly impacted my aesthetic preferences and understanding of popular music arrangements. At the height of my interest in

Bernhoft, his live shows were mostly centered around the RC-50, an earlier model of the RC-300 loop station. Bernhoft and his music were my doorways into the world of loops.



Figure 1.3 – The RC-300

In addition to what one may call inspiration of a technical/practical sort, I have listened to various genres of music. Closest to my heart are the genres EDM(Zedd, Martin Garrix, David Guetta, Botnek), 80s Rock (Journey, Bruce Springsteen, Prince), and R&B(Bernhoft, Jon Bellion, Red Hearse). The relevance of these genres regarding my artistic practice will reveal itself through this dissertation.

1.4 My External Producer

In the autumn of 2020, a close friend and I started a project where we wrote songs weekly. I was the songwriter and vocalist, and he was the producer. The project’s portfolio grew quite large, and the fluency of our collaboration increased for each writing session in the studio. We shared our musical influences, creating a sound unique to us. As a producer, he did a great job of further developing my ideas, and I, as a songwriter, developed his. Our collaboration went on for two years until we split up. He is the *external producer* referred to in this thesis.

1.5 The Project and Research Question

For the last few years, I have expanded my artistic practice of producing, singing, and writing songs. The “Warehouse” project is the sum of my experiences and development as a vocalist, songwriter, and producer. At its core, the project is my creative outlet seen through three different lenses, which are now concluded in a six-track EP. These lenses are:

- Producer Mediation
- Band Influence and Performance
- Facilitation for Musical Practice

Each of these lenses represents what I believe to be core perspectives for my artistic practice. The first lens, “producer mediation,” refers to the adaptation of a song through production in the studio or atelier by external producers or myself. The second lens, “band influence and performance,” addresses the different aspects of playing with and adapting the music to my band. It encompasses activities such as instrumentation, arrangement, playing, and performing. “Facilitation for musical practice” addresses how I engage in necessary actions to improve my process on stage and in the studio. This perspective also blends into the two other perspectives, as I am required to facilitate for optimal production and creative *flow* in the studio, as well as prepare for band practice. All three perspectives have in common their application to engagement with external sources such as band members, producers, and audiences.

Thus, I have taken inspiration from the renowned pedagogue Lev Vygotsky's assertion that it is through others that we become ourselves (Bolis & Schilbach, 2020, p. 1) and realized the significance of collaborative work in shaping my creative identity. This thesis aims to shed light on my creative process through the “Warehouse” project, examining how collaborative work has influenced my musical ideas, workflow, performance, and identity. The research question is thus formulated as follows:

How does collaborative work affect my creative practice?

2. Method and Theory

The construction of a comprehensive science of the subjective will require the harmonious melding of many components... (Jahn & Dunne, 2007)

2.1 Artistic Research

Michael Biggs and Daniela Büchler (2010, p. 85) state that there is *satisfaction through coherence*. This statement refers to the relationship between a community's value system, the activities the community deems relevant, and the actions that comprise these activities (Biggs & Büchler, 2010, p. 83).

Asking what model would constitute valid research in the arts presumes that there is a model that would satisfy both the creative practice and the academic communities.
(Biggs & Büchler, 2010)

If research is to supply a professional community with relevant academic insight into its activities and values, it must engage in relevant research methods to its practice, such as *Artistic Research*. Henk Borgdorff (2010, pp. 45–46) describes the characteristics of artistic research as such:

Characteristic of artistic research is that art practice (the works of art, the artistic actions, the creative processes) is not just the motivating factor and the subject matter of research, but that this artistic practice – the practice of creating and performing in the atelier or studio is central to the research process itself. Methodologically speaking, the creative process forms the pathway (or part of it) through which new insights, understandings, and products come into being. (Borgdorff, 2010, pp. 45–46)

Borgdorff (2010, p. 46) further elaborates on how art research contributes with new insights and experiences in its discourse and new products and experiences meaningful to the art world. These experiences connect with Biggs and Büchler's (2010, p. 85) statement about the necessity of relevant composition of action and experience within a community's value system. Nina Malterud (2012, p. 1) states that *artistic research* is an established term within higher education and its practical framework. She insists that the practice of what is directly

translated to *artistic development practice* is fundamental within art education (Malterud, 2012, p.2). Thus, placing artistic practice and creation within the constraints of relevant methods makes it valuable to its professional community.

We can justifiably speak of artistic research ('research in the arts') when that artistic practice is not only the result of the research, but also its methodological vehicle, when the research unfolds in and through the acts of creating and performing.
(Borgdorff, 2010, p. 46)

In this thesis, the artistic practice is happening in the studio and in a practice atelier with the band. The artistic research method is used to pinpoint what theories and activities fit together regarding my artistic *practice* and *creation*, and how the respective theories and activities affect each other.

2.2 The Producer as Nexus

As parts of this thesis are built upon the craft of producing, it is essential to address the producer's role and how it affects my work process. Mike Howlett (2012, p. 2) explains the role of the producer like this:

Put at its simplest, the producer's task is to produce a satisfactory outcome. The definition of a satisfactory outcome varies considerably according to the aims and aspirations of all the involved parties. (Howlett, 2012, p. 2)

Since I am the main producer of my own songs I am a party involved with aims and aspirations for what my music should be. This goes to say for my external producer as well, who, with his interpretations, will be inclined to fulfill his own artistic aims through his additions and adjustments. The art of record production is to realize a vision expressed by the artist's articulation (Howlett, 2012, p. 5), and both parties, in this case, have artistic visions regarding our separate practices.

2.2.1 Producer - Roles

With his observations and experiences, Howlett lists the roles a producer may undertake, such as arranger, interpreter, visualizer, engineer, creative director, performance director, logistical

facilitator, project manager, psychologist, counselor, priest, and mediator. He clarifies that different circumstances require different roles in any given production (Howlett, 2012, pp. 2–3). Out of his list, the most relevant roles to this thesis are:

- Arranger
- Interpreter
- Visualizer
- Engineer
- Creative Director
- Performance Director
- Mediator

Solitudinal creative work in the studio merges these roles together. The same goes for my external producer, reworking my songs, mediating my already-established productions, visualizing, and interpreting. Although he has had to work within a certain framework regarding arrangement, his practice still applies to most of these roles.

2.3 Performance and Creation: The Stage vs. the Recording Studio

The task of performing and recording a song bears certain challenges. The activities engaged within a recording studio, on stage, and inside a practice room can all add new perspectives and insights into whether or not certain elements within a song bear a purpose in its respective environmental setting. A song's component can certainly be deemed *redundant* or *essential* to the artistic vision. Eliminating or enhancing components is thus necessary to appropriately represent a song within its respective environmental setting. Furthermore, performers are required to eliminate or enhance the various factors concerning their stage and studio presence.

2.3.1 Live Mediation

In the article *Live Mediation: performing concerts using studio technology*, Yngvar Kjus and Anne Danielsen (2016, p. 334) illuminates the emerging challenges of adapting studio works to the stage.

...what an artist is able to create in the studio can be hard to re-create on stage, and what one actually creates on stage can be difficult to perform in a manner that reveals the creative process and supports the artist's ownership of it. (Kjus & Danielsen, 2016, p. 334)

Their study addresses the technological development of the 21st century, the creative freedom it affords, and how the technology enables artists to realize their vision in the studio and on stage (Kjus & Danielsen, 2016, p. 333). The development of recording technology and its resulting artistic creations challenges the traditional live set-up of a performance and its expectations. There is a correlation between the sonic characteristics of an instrument, mechanical laws, and its coupling of action and sound, and how it all affects the audience's expectations (Kjus & Danielsen, 2016, p. 335). In the realm of sound-manipulating technology, it is possible to change an instrument's sonic character to a point where its original source is no longer identifiable (Kjus & Danielsen, 2016, p. 335). When the listener hears a guitar, she also expects to see a guitar. If the guitar recorded in the studio is manipulated beyond its distinguishable sonic traits, it poses a threat regarding adapting the present musical work to the stage.

Since this thesis revolves around *creating* and *performing* songs and how the two affect each other, the theory of *live mediation* provides a fitting perspective for adapting different elements from the studio to the stage and *vice versa*.

2.3.2 The Psychology of Performance

In the article "*The Effects of performance adrenaline on the performing singer*," Belinda P. Jimenez (2015, p. 150) introduces us to the neurotransmitting chemicals endorphin, serotonin, dopamine, and adrenaline and how their increased levels affect the body during a performance. These chemicals each serve distinct bodily functions, but also share similar positive effects (Jimenez, 2015, p. 151), that form what is called "performance adrenaline." "Performance adrenaline" increases pain relief; blood pressure, body temperature, *respiration regulation*; memory; and cognition (Jimenez, 2015, p. 151).

The countering perspective to Jimenez's(2015) assertion on the psychology of the performing artist, is the absence or presence of performance anxiety. According to Spahn et al. (2021, p.

2), *Musical Performance Anxiety* (MPA) can affect the performer's attention and concentration, as well as increase body tension and intensify emotional experiences. MPA within the realm of vocal performance can thus affect the singer's ability to perform with proper technique. According to Coutinho et al. (2014, p. 302), the physiological changes accompanying emotions often affect speakers' breathing, phonation, and articulation. This also corresponds with Jimenez's (2015, p. 151) assertion that the bodily changes from performance adrenaline alter the singer's live performance, especially *breath*.

Although the positive effects of performance adrenaline, such as boosted attention and memory, increase a singer's cognitive function on stage, certain challenges emerge in the physiological state of the matter. This paragraph from Jimenez summarizes the supposed negative effects of PA on singers:

Due to the many muscles and organs involved in breathing for singing, breathing can be more successful if the body and muscles function as they do without the increased chemicals of "performance adrenaline." (Jimenez, 2015, p. 151)

What is then affected within the realm of vocal technique? The next chapter explains some of the key terminologies within vocal technique relevant to this thesis.

2.3.3 Vocal Technique

There are many technical terms within the realm of vocal performance and its teachings. Anne Peckham(2000, p. 52) introduces us to the terms chest voice (low), mixed voice(mid), and head voice or falsetto(high). The *break*, as some people call it, is in other terms also referred to as the *passagio* (the Italian word for passage) and locates the transition between *head* and *chest* voice within a register. Recent studies by David Harris and Laurel Irene (2019, pp. 177–178) suggest that the presupposed "on/off" operation the terms *head* and *chest* voice address, isn't that on and off. They introduce us to two laryngeal muscles controlling vocal technique: the thyroarytenoid (thickening muscle) and the cricothyroid(stretching muscle). These muscles don't work like a regular bicep/tricep antagonism but are ever engaged (Harris & Irene, 2019, pp. 177–178). This could argue that mixed voice is attained by producing different qualities in the vocal registers, and altered through adjustment of the thickening and stretching muscle. In the discussion of this thesis, I will use the terms *chest*

voice, mixed voice, and head voice to visualize my exploration of different techniques during my dissertation.

Relevant Vocal Effects

In addition to the different registers mentioned above, there are certain effect techniques a vocalist can utilize to enhance their performance further. These effects are created instantly within the larynx of the singer:

- Distortion (Aaen et al., 2021, p. 2), example: “Summer of 69” by Bryan Adams, is not to be confused with the effect added when audio post-processing.
- Exaggerating the register *break* when switching between *chest* and *head* voice one (Peckham, 2000, p. 53).

2.3.4 Vocal Performance in Recording

In many ways a recording studio is a most unnatural environment in which to achieve an inspired performance. Many artists tell of what is known as “red light syndrome” – the intimidating effect that pressing the record button can have - by the implied demand that now is the moment to produce the best that the artist can give. (Howlett, 2007, p. 1)

In the article *Fixing the Volatile*, Howlett (2007, p. 1) addresses different factors affecting vocal performance in the studio. Some of these are external and internal expectations, location, mental state, the constant availability of a replay button, and headphone settings (Howlett, 2007, p. 1). When these factors affect the performer in recording session to the extent it becomes a problem, the producer can turn to different countering actions. Some of these include setting the right compression levels, making a good headphone mix, and ensuring the volume level is right, because too much volume can make a singer perform flat, and too little can make them sing sharp (Howlett, 2007, p. 1).

What Howlett (2007) addresses in his article is later applied to the various performance of my songs in the recording studio, both when recording in solitude and with others.

2.4 Songwriting

Fundamental parts of creating and performing songs revolve around the art of songwriting. To gain perspective on how to reflect upon my own songs and how to write them, I turn to the renowned songwriter Ralph Murphy.

Next time someone tells you a joke that really impresses you, notice the ingredients of the joke involve not just the punch line. The punch line would be worthless without the proper setup. Ninety percent of what entertains you is the details, the assembly of minor glimpses into the character, the timing and the presentation. What the dog says is as important as the fact that it was said by a dog. Think of your title/hook as the punchline of the song. If you tell the joke badly or fail to set it up properly, the listener won't be there to enjoy the punch line. (Murphy, 2013, p. 98)

If we are to expand on what Murphy describes in this statement, we must make a framework for how to work within and view our songs. Philip McIntyre's ethnographic study on the domain of songwriting identifies its structure as such (McIntyre, 2008, pp. 46–47):

1. Lyric and melody,
2. form and structure,
3. rhythmic components,
4. simple harmonic components
5. accompaniment, arrangement, and orchestration, and
6. performance and production characteristics that enable their work to be manifest in material form. (McIntyre, 2008, pp. 46–47)

With this structure at hand, one can more easily identify what elements in a song work and *needs* work. Each point represents the various responsibilities for this thesis's different roles: producer, songwriter, and performer. One can also argue that each of the three roles has more responsibility over one point than the other, like how the songwriter sticks to the song's lyrics and the producer to the sonic characteristics of the production. My analogy to McIntyre's songwriting structure is thus relevant, as I take on these roles at different times through this dissertation, both as producer, songwriter, and performer.

2.4.1 Expectations and Punchlines

Ralph Murphy comments on the act of creating and fulfilling expectations (2013, p. 83). “Chekhov asserted that if you put a loaded gun in act one, scene one, you have to fire it before the end of the play (Murphy, 2013, pp. 84–85).” It is the details of a story that builds expectations toward a conclusion. The conclusion is often what we can refer to as the joke's *punchline*, chorus, or title of the song (Murphy, 2013, pp. 98; 83). Evidence of this phenomenon is prevalent in popular music. In the Beatles' song “Yesterday,” the details of the story is placed in-between an introduction and conclusion to the theme:

Yesterday,
all my troubles seemed so far away,
now it looks as though they're here to stay
Oh I believe
in Yesterday (The Beatles, 1965)

This example shows the effect described by Murphy (2013, pp. 84–85). Not only does the *verse* encompass the description a theme and details, building to a conclusion. The same thing happens in the *chorus*, with the same conclusion; “Yesterday.”

Mixing the theories of McIntyre (2008) and Murphy (2013) builds a strong yet simple recipe for conveying a story in songwriting. It can also be used as a lens to gain new perspectives on already established musical pieces, as seen in the example of “Yesterday.” In this dissertation, certain results within songwriting will be viewed through the lens of Murphy and McIntyre's theories.

2.4.2 Overwriting and the 60-second rule

Ralph Murphy (2013, pp. 83–84) explains how a story is supposed to be told to keep the listener interested. Don't try to say more than what you *need* to say. *Never* overwrite. After you've told your story, you've got to hit your hook and get out. Too much will always be too much (Murphy, 2013). He states that “you, the writer,” have got about 60 seconds from the start of the song to get the listener's attention, and in the real world, probably a tenth of that (Murphy, 2013, pp. 83–84). It takes five to seven listens before a listener really takes a song to the heart (Murphy, 2013, p. 84).

As technological development enhances availability and communication, it poses a challenge for the *songwriter* to gain attention. “...The attention span (...) varies depending on the task and the natural inclination of the doer (Subramanian, 2018, p. 5).” It is one thing to have listeners (doers) already engaged in your artistic work, like a fan-base. It is another thing to gain a fan-base and keep it. Follow the intention of the song, but don't waste the listener's time.

2.4.3 Language in Songwriting

An interesting practice within songwriting worth addressing is the use of mumbled lyrics when creating a song. Jeff Tweedy (2020, pp. 140–141) states that recording mumbling melodies is better than letting go of your musical impulses. The key is to “surrender to the nonsense.” Instead of focusing on recording instant lyrics with the first take, record the melody with fake words and interpret the *nonsense* after (Tweedy, 2020, pp. 140–141). In his book “How to Write One Song,” Tweedy is also clear on his thoughts about fancy multisyllabic words in lyrics. He states that most of his favorite songwriters stick to common, simple, and precise language. There is no need to shoehorn the word “plethora” into a tune if it doesn't fit (Tweedy, 2020, pp. 68–69). This method is utilized in various ways during my research, as I also tend to use simple and common language in my songs.

2.5 The “Flow”-state

In his article *Play and Intrinsic Rewards*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2014, pp. 136–137) refers to the experiential state of *flow*. When a person reaches a *state of flow*, they are completely immersed in the activity at hand, where action follows upon action following an internal logic without conscious intervention of the self (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, pp. 136–137).

We experience it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which we feel in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment; between stimulus and response; or between past, present, and future.
(Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 137)

The term *flow* is often used when addressing *play* within a musical context. Philippe et al. (2021, p. 1035) explains it as a state of experience where musicians can produce high-quality

performances while protecting themselves from the harmful effects of stress or anxiety. Mental and psychological preparation regarding social standing, performance preparation, connection to one's body, awareness of skills and self-confidence, intrinsic motivation, and attentional focus are relevant variables for inducing flow (Philippe et al., 2021, p. p.1035). The importance of flow-state facilitation is also present within its physical domain. Tweedy (2020, p. 19) claims it is necessary to put the tools of creation in our hands every day to invite inspiration in.

...while it's important to aim at things we'd like to achieve, I truly believe, with songwriting, that being in the "process" has to at least be a goal if not the only goal. (...) Being fully engaged with a song I'm working on is what I look forward to the most in my life. (Tweedy, 2020, p. 53)

Jeff Tweedy (2020, p. 17) declares that *process* is the only name he knows for whatever series of contortions and mental tricks we have available to lose ourselves in when we create. This declaration clearly connects to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's assertion about the absence of conscious intervention within play, or flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 136). John Braheny(2006, p. 24) calls it the "Stream of Consciousness"-technique, where spontaneity is encouraged, and the "inner critic" is ignored. In this thesis, I consciously and unconsciously evaluate my physical surroundings and mental state through the acts of *creating* and *performing*. These theories are used to research what facilitations I can partake in to further enhance the probability of flow within respective acts of creating and performing music.

2.5.1 Facilitation

Tweedy's (2020) claim about the importance of engagement with the tools of creation is crucial to this thesis. It addresses the benefits of facilitation for flow, which one can – and probably should – follow if one is to gain results, that is, works of art.

To me, process is whatever act you can engage in, whatever steps you can take, and whatever device you have at your disposal that you can use, together, that reliably results in a work of art. "Process" is also the only name I know of for whatever series of contortions and mental tricks we have available to lose ourselves in when we create. (Tweedy, 2020, p. 17)

According to this statement, one can conclude that if we are working in the studio or on stage aiming to reach a flow state, complimentary facilitating actions must follow. These actions vary from practice-related preparation before a concert to minimize stress, to a comfortable height of the mic stand before recording vocals. Tweedy also seems adamant about the term “inspiration:”

Let’s talk more about what we call “inspiration.” It’s overrated. Have we established that? (...) , I believe that you have to invite inspiration in. I’ve found that most people who have a fulfilling life in art are, like me, the people who work at it every day and put the tools of creation in their hands frequently, who not only invite inspiration in but also do it on a regular basis. Instead of waiting to be “struck” by inspiration, they put themselves directly in its path. (Tweedy, 2020, p. 19)

To me, the core of this statement is to “put the tools of creation in our hands.” If I wish to reach optimal flow within the studio, I must facilitate for it. In Chapter 5.1, I will further elaborate on how I worked to put myself on the “path of inspiration.”

2.5.2 The Home Studio

Yngvar Kjús and Anne Danielsen(2016, p. 327) address how their informants each have integrated home- or project-based studios and how they utilize hardware and software for sequencing, recording, editing, and processing in a customized setup with a personal computer at its heart. My setup is more or less the same and will be presented in the discussion chapter, as it is necessary to give a quick overview of what tools are used in this dissertation.

2.6 Delimitations

The process of creating a work of music differs for every individual. The Warehouse EP was, and still is, a work in progress as of the conclusion of this thesis. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, it is essential to give the reader the proper perspective from which to view this thesis. The submitted material is labeled with different names. Some of the audio-files are labeled “pre-mix”, some are tagged “demo”. All audio-files are organized to clearly represent which day or session each file was created.

None of the submitted audio files have been thoroughly mixed, or edited beyond their time of creation, and no elements, like vocals or instruments, were re-recorded after their designated time frame or session. Some minor adjustments have been made, like adding *glue compression* on the song's master bus to level each attachment to the same volume. The sole reason for this was to make all musical elements audible on each audio file. That said, the music is presented in a most *honest* manner to give a clear insight into what the process of creating “Warehouse” was like. To cite David John Farinella (2006, p. 23) on the topic of mixing: “... sometimes it doesn’t even matter how it sounds. If it’s this beautiful, heartfelt song, it’s going to come through, and that’s what I work on.”

Although mixing is considered essential to representing a song in various mediums, I do not consider it relevant to this thesis’ finds and insights. I do not want to discontinue the art of mixing, and its professional community has my everlasting respect. I believe that mixing engineers represents the scope of a rifle and that the music is the target, and although the outlines of my music may not be as clear, they’re clear enough to represent the elements addressed in this thesis.

This thesis has also affected much of my work, both in and outside the project *Warehouse*. I’ve engaged in many creative music sessions through my five years at the University of Agder, with other producers, as a songwriter, and producer. This has left me with an extensive portfolio of finished and unfinished projects and songs, both related and unrelated to each other. To make my research most relevant for my professional practice in the future, I considered it necessary to focus on a single project and product, that is *Warehouse*. If there is any interest in listening beyond this thesis’ focus, a hyperlink is provided to the portfolio of other projects I have deemed relevant to my development but couldn’t discuss through this thesis¹.

¹ https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/19Ku1regijttTlJdg3gOTpe1JbgVBa2Ur?usp=share_link

3. Results

In this chapter, I will attempt to illuminate the process of writing, producing, and performing the songs of the Warehouse EP. All of the songs were originally created with the *DAW*² Ableton Live. Like many other DAWs, Ableton includes an *arrangement view* and a *session view*³, a *virtual mixer*, a *sample library*, *virtual instruments*, and *VSTs*. These tools are utilized throughout most parts of this chapter. Along with the results, links for the results of each session are attached with a direct link in the footnotes.

3.1 Life To Give Ya

The idea of the song “Life to Give ya” came to my mind one morning in February of 2022. The best way to describe how *that* works is to compare it to having a song *stuck in the brain*. I believe my ideas derive from the combination of bits and pieces of my musical influences and that it all forms new ideas subconsciously. Sometimes it just happens, and the song “Life to Give Ya” was one of those cases where I had to record the idea at once, so that I wouldn’t forget it. The MP3 file attached is a recording of the original idea recorded with my phone that morning⁴.

I brought the recording to the studio with a plan to further expand upon the idea, thus the *first session* had begun. I was fooling around in Ableton Live with one of its tools called “Simpler.” *Simpler* is the name for the stock *sampler* of Ableton Live. The *sampler* in Ableton can take a sound sample and *map* it to any source, be it an external *MIDI source* or an internal one, like the *piano roll* within Ableton. In this song, I used the sampler to play an 808-kick⁵ sample with the built-in piano roll of Ableton. The decay of the sound in this particular sample was so long that the sample, initially intended as a kick sample, functioned as a bass. Using an 808-kick as a bass is quite common in popular music production, mostly hip-hop, so I figured I’d do the same. For the drums, I added a kick drum in a “four to the

² Digital Audio Workstation, used to produce, record and manipulate audio, as well as utilizing VSTs (Virtual Studio Technology). These VSTs may include everything from equalizers and reverb, to guitar amplifier simulations and virtual instruments and synthesizers.

³ Session view, although not utilized in this thesis, is unique to Ableton's workflow. It allows the producer to work in a non-linear way with no start or end-point (Ridgway, n.d.)

⁴ https://drive.google.com/file/d/111esDN-59KWtUH25NKQpotmoQorzDaMU/view?usp=share_link

⁵ Roland TR-808 is one of the most famous drum machines made. The term “808” has in later years been the name for a specific kind of bass within the RnB and Hip Hop community.

floor”-pattern and some tom samples with accentuations on the triplet groove of the song. Instead of using a hi-hat to accentuate the triplet groove further, I added a high pulsating pitch played on the Electric Piano VST included in Ableton. To make the sound of the keyboard spread evenly across the stereo spectrum, I added an external VST called *Microshift*⁶ as a form of *chorus-effect*⁷. That concluded the end of a two-hour production session⁸.

In the second session, I recorded vocals. Initially, I intended only to record vocals for the Chorus part of the song. Instead, the process of vocal recording resulted in two new parts; an “*a capella*” intro, and a part resembling a *pre-chorus*. The most noticeable changes in the song’s production in the second session include an added *Clavinet* pattern accentuating the triplet groove and a global key change of the song⁹.

The third session was a short 1 hour session. I wrote a new part, added an organ to said part and recorded some electric guitar to various sections of the track. One prominent element of this session was the change in the bass and guitar motive halfway through the chorus. The bassline was reworked after I came up with a transitional riff following the lyric “Why do you care?”¹⁰

The fourth session concluded *my* work as a producer on the track. The song started taking shape this session, as two additional *parts* were added; a *verse* and a *pre-chorus*. These parts were composed of a new bass- and guitar riff, played in *unison*. The organ part written on the *third session* was doubled in length and moved to the end of the first chorus(1:01) to function as a *bridge* into the last chorus. The first part of the *bridge* is me improvising some simple lyrics based on the song’s theme. Improvised harmonies accompany these lyrics to give the *bridge* a breath of spontaneity. The part following the bridge is the chorus doubled in length. The first repetition of the chorus is comprised of only the bass line and the drums, while the last part is all the instruments added, as well as some ad-libs in the vocals¹¹.

⁶ “Microshift” is an external VST made by the company Soundtoys which specializes in the development of sound manipulating software for all DAWs.

⁷ A chorus effect is somewhat self-explanatory. This manipulates the audiosource so that it sounds like multiple sources, resembling a choir.

⁸ https://drive.google.com/file/d/16sBfomz0msEYSzN05Fb4pdw5rRRNBgSQ/view?usp=share_link

⁹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/19DHx-Wb6U_Kk6SGMI_863hM231JYrvGW/view?usp=sharing

¹⁰ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1P_-TGpaWHT5An-iNkHF9qMLMesLEw4mQ/view?usp=sharing

¹¹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Fn1FSr49ZX5X2DqWO9t8gGIFCDiWZr04/view?usp=sharing>

After my fourth session working on the song, I passed it on to a producer. The producer added more layers of synthesizers, expanded the drum pattern with live recorded drums, made it fit the form I requested, and recorded some guitars with a guitarist, expanding on the initial bass and guitar riff on the verses. We then finished the song by recording new vocals in the studio at the University¹². Although the *backing vocals* remains unrecorded for now, it is still the most *finished* version of the song.

3.2 Slow Down

The idea for the song “Slow Down” started with a simple *backbeat*¹³. The beat consists of a kick, a snare, and a hi-hat. Initially, the tempo of the song was 156 *beats per minute*. After recording the *arpeggiator* bassline, I jokingly decided to increase the tempo. Eventually, I figured the energy generated through the tempo increase suited the sound of the drums, and I came up with some lyrics and recorded them right there and then. I added a high-pitched keyboard playing a sustained octave on the “1” and “3” in the beat to add some sonic texture to the instrumentation. This also aided me in *intonating* when recording vocals. That concluded session one¹⁴.

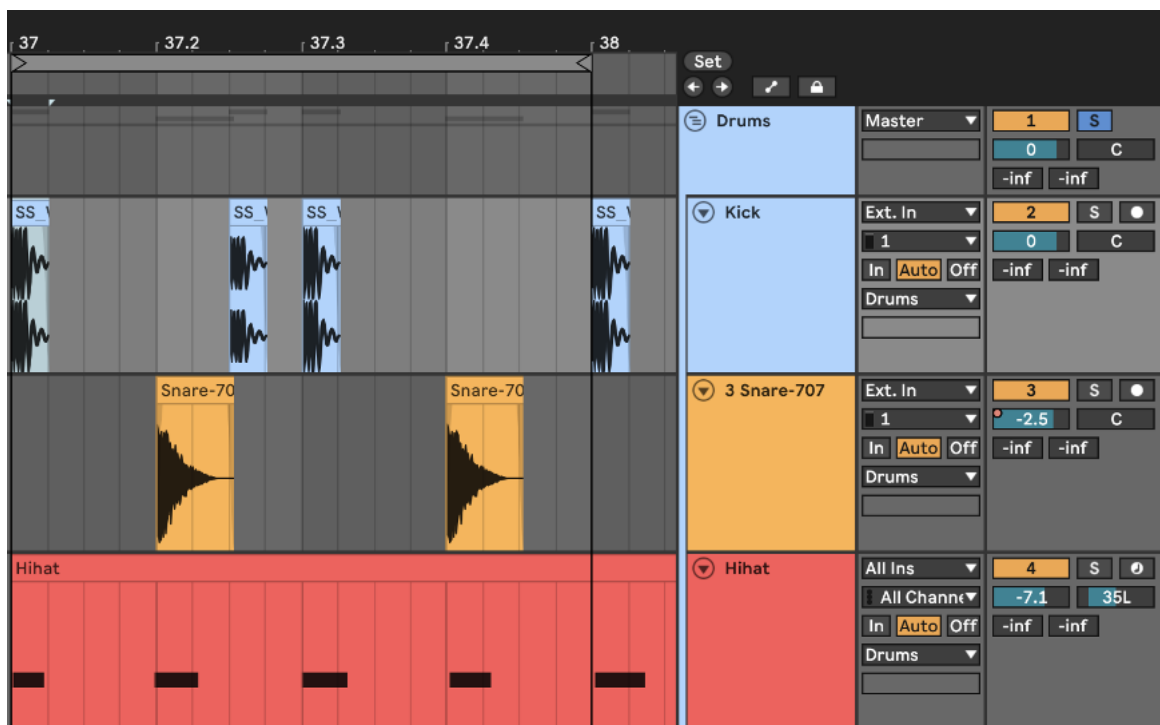


Figure 3.2 – an overview of the drums in “Slow Down.”

¹² https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JPK-22GfcUPP5B0Bzjbt2j_ptfJkB_Xo/view?usp=sharing

¹³ Beat with snare accentuations on the “2” and “4” in a “4/4-beat.”

¹⁴ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JsOaHjsSE75QIzRmSknopA7HlncSWSb4/view?usp=share_link

I was determined to finish the form during the second session of producing and writing “Slow Down”. For that reason, I copied and pasted the different bass loops, drum loops, and some keyboard sound clips to make a form like this:

Intro - verse - pre-chorus - chorus - break - verse 2 - pre-chorus - double chorus

Organizing the parts of the song gave a perspective on the story and a clear view of each part in order. I recorded guitar parts, most of which were rhythmical accompaniment and some doubling of the synth motives. At the end of the session, I added vocal harmonies to back up the *lead vocal*¹⁵.

When working in the studio, spontaneous melodies, phrases, or motives often pop into my mind. The synth melody from the intro and the descending synth motive in the pre-chorus was a result of having a keyboard available during the session. This resulted in the writing and recording of a second verse, added vocal harmonies, new guitar parts, and bells on the last repeat of the double chorus. Some of the new guitar parts were spontaneously decided to be played by a fellow student as he walked past the open studio door with his guitar. He is now a member of the band.¹⁶

In the fourth session I added finishing touches before I passed it on to my producer. This included some transitional drum fills, guitar swells, as well as vocal ad-libs on the last chorus, and an outro with *ad-lib* vocals¹⁷.

The process so far consisted of me producing, recording and playing everything on the song. At this point I decided to pass it on to my producer. He re-programmed the drums and added some layers to the keyboard and synthesizer section. That, in turn, influenced me to record new guitar-tracks on the version he produced. After putting it all together, we did a listening session on the instrumental of the song. In that session we did some minor detail tuning on the drums before scheduling a vocal recording session.

The session took place some weeks later in his studio in Oslo. I recorded new backing vocals

¹⁵ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ep3oCGNBHzStvoO1aTwq_PTB18CtneJi/view?usp=share_link

¹⁶ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hegOgIyaL2Zg5bK8I-5SXeH4QpXpp9A5/view?usp=share_link

¹⁷ https://drive.google.com/file/d/10FyEi443DzYdyos_ITETM8eoggEK0Am/view?usp=share_link

in my own studio in Kristiansand prior to the session, using our newly produced instrumental as guidance. This way, we only needed to focus on the lead takes for the session. Since neither of us considered ourselves mixing-engineers at the time, we did a quick raw mix of the whole song before bouncing it out as a pre-mix version. That is also the final version attached to this thesis¹⁸.

3.3 Late at Night

“Late at Night” is an *up-tempo* song in 4/4. The syncopated chords in the piano are the fundamental element of the song on which the rest of the instruments are built. The first version I recorded consisted of the piano motive with accompanying bass, a simple kick, and a hi-hat groove. The song was initially called Fireside, and the vocals written in the first session addressed the theme of staying inside in the cold winter. The first version of “Late at Night” includes some mumble lyrics¹⁹.

The second session involved editing a piano beyond its original character, adding new instrumental parts, and experimenting with song structure. The most important aspect of this session was how I manipulated the piano to be almost unidentifiable. I added a Delay-VST called EchoBoy²⁰ to the *signal-chain* and turned the *dry/wet*-knob²¹ to a hundred percent. The settings on the EchoBoy was adjusted to have a long attack on the wet-signal. This made the sound more washed out since it eliminated the transients from the hammer hitting the string inside the piano. To “finish” it off, I adjusted the new “piano”-motive to the metronome to fit the accentuations of the delay to the feel. Later the same session, I re-wrote the lyrics of the song to have a more “all year round”-appeal. The sentence “lighting the fireside,” to me, was loaded with associations towards Christmas and the Holidays²².

The third session consisted of structuring the arrangement, writing a verse after the first chorus, and making an instrumental part with synthetic strings and horns. The *stab* part from the previous session was removed as I couldn’t see a use fit for it, at the time. I recorded some

¹⁸ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CLU61mi_pCWKB-aJywfKJ8wVHmXWGrJo/view?usp=share_link

¹⁹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/12SidRWSwqlcqDfGL_pmve6ZnedGq0I8B/view?usp=share_link

²⁰ “EchoBoy” is an external Delay-VST, also made by the company Soundtoys.

²¹ Some effect-VSTs have a “dry/wet”-option. This determines how much of the original signal is affected and not.

²² https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZaO6tEFvuuWjqINP0YCsxKzbP_WhRC2k/view?usp=share_link

simple guitar parts and placed them in the *background* of the recording. I also adjusted the volume levels of the individual components of the song so that the message, the vocals, could shine through. The floating *pad*-motive made from the manipulated piano was enhanced and put further in front of the mix, as it, through the session, became a key motive of the song. I added a snare with gated reverb to add more energy, then compressed the whole drum section before placing *the kit in a room* utilizing various reverb and delay VSTs. This provided more energy to the song²³.

The fourth and final “Late at Night” session occurred after band practice. In this session, I reworked the form and added vocals to the bridge to further enhance the message and theme of the song. The stab-part was re-introduced as a transition from the bridge to the double chorus towards the end of the song. It was further enhanced by arranging for the rest of the band, with an altered bassline ascending and re-harmonizing the static chord structure of the song. This gave a whole new harmonic perspective to the final part of the song²⁴.

²³ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ouzs2pFvZ0OnkIAJODeQV_VhOtg9HgFU/view?usp=share_link

²⁴ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qCxxEPPAv8QMpaUJj1mYaL_RsQeLJc3V/view?usp=share_link

3.4 Bedside

The initial idea for “bedside” actually came to me in our cabin's kitchen as I explored Ableton Live. I came across the different sample banks within Ableton Live, and realized they contained replicas of some of my favourite drum machines. This included the Linn drum, which is prevalent in Prince’s music from the 80s²⁵. I made a simple beat in 120bpm and added an arpeggiated bass line. This inspired spontaneous vocalization and resulted in what I today identify as the chorus and the first verse. It is worth noticing how some of the improvised melodies from the first session made it to the final version²⁶.

For the second session, I finished the form of the song and renamed it “Golden Young” as in the hook halfway through the chorus. The structure of the song then looked something like this:

Verse - Chorus - verse 2 - chorus - Instrumental - Chorus

In the second verse, I added hook-lines for the band. The instrumental part of this structure begged for an increase in energy, and for that reason, I decided to pass the demo on to a guitarist. He recorded a guitar solo above the instrumental, and thus the second session was finished²⁷.

After the second session the song “Bedside/Golden Young” was shelved for a while. It wasn't until march 2023 I decided, prior to band practice, that I needed to finalize the song. Thus, the third and final session took place. This session consisted of balancing audio levels, improving stereo-picture by placing the different elements through the use of reverb and EQ. I recorded some more guitar parts to saturate the sonic spectrum within the chorus-part and guitar pluck parts in the second verse to carry over the intensity from the chorus. The song reclaimed it’s name, “Bedside,” as the title itself is the final *punch-line* of the song's chorus²⁸.

²⁵ and the Revolution, Prince. (1984) *Purple Rain*. Warner Bros.

²⁶ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Vqb9XCu4Zhxqw-7fvuBf6BL-47orTEyR/view?usp=share_link

²⁷ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ajjQb6WKggv1IH-US60VhM85tpyYyn_T/view?usp=share_link

²⁸ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xBdl4RtHdrQj0VOqlNvVYP7s1Ojkqti-/view?usp=share_link

3.5 Intrusive - Extended Results

I vividly remember my drummer telling me, “I have never taken part in a project where I can’t decide what song I like playing the most.” As each instrumentalist interpreted my music with enthusiasm, I felt a growing responsibility as a front figure to convince them, the audience, and most of all, myself that my music is important to me and that my message is genuine. I came to find that the more I cared about the lyrics and content of my songs, the easier it was to deliver a performance that convinced me. I have long struggled with others' opinions of myself, my art, and to what extent they even care about it. I think most artists, no matter at what stage they are in their careers, have the same issue. Playing in a band with close friends who like the music I write and care about the project is crucial to my well-being at practice and in the studio. After realizing the importance of honest lyrics, I wrote and produced the song “Intrusive.”

3.5.1 The “Spark” of the Production

I was sitting in one of the recording rooms at the University when the idea for the track “Intrusive” came to my mind. I remember fidgeting and being restless as I, at the end of my writing session, had not come up with a single Idea I found worthy of finalizing. I decided to trust my drummer's assertion about my songwriting skills and opened a “new project”-file with the presupposition that every creative choice I made was final. This was where I discovered a new part of my musical self. As if the project “Warehouse” needed a strong negative energy opposing the up-tempo stereotypical pop songs about relational issues between love interests. What about the darkest part of our minds? What about the thoughts that inspire Quentin Tarantino’s violent movie scenes?

3.5.2 Lyrical Background

There is a new theme on the rise in social media. You may or may not have read the phrase, “They let their intrusive thoughts win.” Usually made as a joking comment on any video of someone doing a mindless act and hurting themselves or others in the process. Usually, these examples in social media are innocent, but I think it also subconsciously references the darkest parts of our mind.

For most people, violent or disturbing thoughts pass by as every other thought in a healthy brain does. Sometimes though, these thoughts produce an emotional reaction in the person, leading to stress and anxiety²⁹. As the project “Warehouse” is coined towards releasing the core of human emotion, I found it essential to write a song about the violent nature of humans and its distressing effects on someone struggling mentally.

*I had a vision of you lying on the floor
You were bleeding out, you were bleeding out, you were bleeding out
I had a vision of you flying on a tombstone
Reaching out, you were reaching out, you were reaching out.*

(...)

*Paper Towels, Watchu wanna know?
She's no longer here, let somebody go, no.
Anger issues, anger issues,
throwing knives, throwing knives at a party (x2)*

Since the tempo and the production's sound were intense, I figured the lyrics also had to be. The song's intro is meant to capture the listener with its disturbing images of violence. As I worked on finishing the songs' different parts, I renamed and re-recorded some of the voices in the intro and the chorus so that they fit the band's members. In this manner, the collective vocal delivery during our live song performance would reinforce the initial impact of the lyrics.

3.5.3 Production Process

In Ableton Live, I picked the first drum sample I rested my cursor upon. It was a “tom” drum sample from a retro classic drum machine. I distorted it to the point where the characteristics of the tom sound itself were unrecognizable and more alike to the characteristics of a synthetic bass. Since I was restless and fidgety, I decided to tap the tempo using Ableton's

²⁹ Lang, K. (2022, July 14). *Can we control unwanted thoughts? New research says, yes.* [Www.medicalnewstoday.com. https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/let-them-be-study-suggests-way-to-control-unwanted-thoughts](https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/let-them-be-study-suggests-way-to-control-unwanted-thoughts)

Tap Tempo function. It resulted in a tempo of 185 *BPM*(beats per minute). From there on, I pitched the tom sound down an octave, resulting in a doubling of the sample-length, and halving of the time-feel. That was what inspired the lyrics in the intro. The vocals of the intro were then placed within a room with the utilization of what is called a *convolution reverb*. The metronome click was on during the vocal recording, and it inspired the making of the song's main motive, which is the distorted and syncopated tom. From there, I improvised some mumble lyrics, gated them because "why not?" and improvised the hook before "the drop." This hook, which we can address as the pre-chorus, was not written with the intention of conveying anything. The "drop," as we may call it, was made by adding a synth bass and a drum loop. The first version of "Intrusive" was initially called "Death by Anger Management," also for no particular reason³⁰.

In the second session, I decided the song's initial lyrics were all connected and wrote two verses. The entire second verse was improvised, and due to its simple nature and enhancement of the message of *loosing sleep*, I decided to keep it as it was. The session included a lot of arranging and adding of instruments. I added a layer to the bass intended to be played by the keyboard player, a bass riff before the second chorus, recorded guitars, simplified the drum groove, added claps, and programmed a synthetic string motive for the second verse. It all together created a new atmosphere which inspired a re-recording of the initial pre-chorus with more intense vocal performance, adding both laryngeal distortion(Aaen et al.,2021, p.2) and distortion to the audio-signal(post-recording)³¹.

³⁰ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ikbrOMoCh9HKJuyHORDi5pHBUuG3Y15F/view?usp=share_link

³¹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hX_eA59pNHmDjTEyLoSVsurPEZrgEVsP/view?usp=share_link

4. Discussion

In this chapter, I will discuss the different insights I have garnered through two years of creating and performing in the studio and on stage. These insights will be addressed through the various theories introduced in chapter three and expanded upon with my subjective understanding of how I function within my artistic work and practice. Some of the findings are insights into my creative process, while others expand into fundamental discoveries to me and my art practice. Hopefully, these discoveries solve identical or similar situations or challenges other art practitioners encounter throughout their own work process.

4.1 Facilitation for Musical Practice

According to Tweedy (2020), it is important to put the tools of creation in our path and to facilitate reaching an optimal process. Through my experiences in my research, facilitating for flow increases the probability of reaching a *flow* state. This chapter addresses some of my actions to facilitate for inspiration and performance.

4.1.1 The Studio

This will only be a brief illustration of how the studio I spend most of my time in looks and what tools (Tweedy, 2020) I have available within. The studio I have available is my main facility and consists of a keyboard, two electric guitars, one acoustic guitar, monitors, a microphone on an adjustable boom arm, and a digital audio interface interconnected with all the equipment, including the personal computer in the studio's center. Furthermore, the desk on which the microphone boom arm and keyboard are connected is height adjustable. The reason for this is so that whenever I record, be it vocals, guitars, or keys, I have the opportunity to stand up, as in a live performance (Kjus & Danielsen, 2016). This gives a sense of how it feels to perform it on stage standing and also provides a generally healthy posture for proper singing technique and feeling a connection to one's body (Philippe et al., 2021). Figure 5.1 illustrates the setting used when recording keys, while Figure 5.2 shows the “performance setting,” usually utilized when composing music with high energy levels to keep me from sitting down and leaving the *flow state* (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). The dim lighting, flooring, and carpets are also considered to facilitate flow, giving me a sense of safety and private space when entering the room. There is no place I can give in to my musical impulses like in this studio.



Figure 4.1 – For sitting and less intense work



Figure 4.2 – The Performance Setting

4.2 External Mediation

This chapter will address the different roles and experiences through work with my producer. The first chapter discusses the different aspects of letting an external producer mediate an already-established idea. The second chapter illuminates the experience of recording vocals in various settings, while the third chapter addresses my own mediation of production work on the “Warehouse” EP.

4.2.1 Producer Mediation

The first two songs of the Warehouse EP, “Life to Give Ya” and “Slow Down,” were initially produced by me. After holding the productions without further developing them, I passed them on to my friend, the external producer, hoping he might instill some new excitement in the songs with his production. This is my experience of his contributions.

As I listened to the new instrumentals from my producer, I noticed a change in the character and attitude of the song. My producer developed his own artistic and sonic vision for the songs through the music I provided. If we are to take the claims of Howlett (Howlett, 2012) into consideration regarding the producer's role as nexus, we can argue that my producer realized my expressed vision through his enhancement of the elements I provided. In the song “Slow Down,” it is possible that he envisioned how the song would play out in a live setting and realized parts of the arrangement, like how the transition from the first chorus into the second verse lost its energy due to missing components such as bass and drums, and how he countered the missing energy by adding a new bass and drum pattern to said part. Although the guitar sound was thinned out in “Slow Down’s” first instrumental rendition, the arrangement generally felt more musical and like a live band. One can say that the external producer mediated (Kjus & Danielsen, 2016) the original production of the song to fit both a live setting and answer my artistic vision (Howlett, 2012).

As for the case of “Life to Give Ya,” the most accurate way to put it is that the sound-design, added drums, and synthesizers increased the perceived *size* of the song’s sound. It went from being an unpolished idea to a massive anthem production. My experience of it was two-sided. On the one hand, the new production exerted massive energy and seemed like a great song to finish a stadium concert. On the other hand, my initial version's low-profile and laid-back vibe was diminished. We gathered for a production session to resolve this issue, utilizing our roles as creative and performance directors, arrangers, and visualizers (Howlett,2012). At the end of the session, we achieved a form of arrangement we both felt represented as creative individuals.

4.2.2 The Vocal Recording Experience

As the “Life to Give Ya” and “Slow Down” instrumentals were done, we planned recording sessions for each song. The first session focused on recording the main vocals for “Slow Down” in the University Studio.

My experience varied from excitement to disappointment as we recorded the lead vocals. Although it sounded objectively good, it was as if some familiar emotions were missing from the earlier demos, and it affected my performance (Howlett, 2007). Not only did the instrumental feel off, but standing in a separate room from my producer and hearing him ask me over the talkback every take if I was “good to go?” made me tense up. I remembered the comfort I experienced when recording the demo vocals when the initial song was written. Some conditions of that session were the fact that I was sitting alone in a room with no expectations, experiencing flow within both a creative and performative state of consciousness (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). That was not the case during our session at the University studio. During our session recording “Slow Down,” I forgot to facilitate for optimal performance flow (Philippe et al., 2021) through preparation, and as a cause of that, I experienced a lack of technique and muscle control in the lower parts of my chest voice register when recording the first verse (Coutinho et al., 2014; Jimenez, 2015; Peckham, 2000; Spahn et al., 2021). This could probably have been prevented to some degree by adjusting my session expectations and addressing my intrinsic motivation for it (Philippe et al., 2021).

Fortunately, we rescheduled the vocal recording session for “Slow Down” as we were dissatisfied with the outcome. This time around, I pre-recorded all the backing vocals beforehand so that the only focus for the session was to get some *killer* lead-takes. These backing vocals were recorded in the comfort of my own studio, as introduced in Chapter 5.1³². This way, I *facilitated for musical practice* and set myself up with a buffer for what could go “wrong” in the upcoming session. The upcoming session went thus very well, as we also decided on recording the vocals in a home studio in Oslo instead, where the atmosphere was relaxed and laid back. The result of it all is the “Pre-mix” version of “Slow Down.”

³² A very important aspect of recording in my own studio is the constant availability of the microphone on the boom arm. This, paired with the use of what I call the “punch-in” technique (recording without count-in), greatly reduces the time expense of recording sessions in solitude, and increases efficiency and flow-state. The count in becomes obsolete as I feel the groove constantly, with or without the DAW-playback running. This is most likely due to the countless hours spent with the RC-300 loop station.

4.2.3 The Mediating Instrumentalist

At a certain point during my work on “Bedside,” I received the requested audio files for the guitar solo. It was an intriguing event, listening to the solo in context for the first time, imagining his initial thoughts, and the development of his interpretation (Howlett, 2012). Would the results have been different if I had been in the room reacting to it, responding, or acknowledging his playing? Is it possible that the provided guitar solo intervened with my artistic vision of what the song was supposed to be? These reflections keep following me through my future work on the EP.

4.3 Songwriting in Solitude

As I have written all of the EP’s songs, they represent an experience within the realm of songwriting. Since my creative choices and their influences, including writing, in this thesis revolve around the influence of others, it is necessary with a few insights on the matter. In reading Ralph Murphy’s(2013) theories about conveying clear messages, and studying McIntyre’s(2008) structure of songwriting components, I have attained new tools and perspectives in which to view my songs. When working in the studio, the choices regarding these theories and structures, more often than not, come naturally and uninterrupted by doubt instilled by external expectations (Howlett, 2007). Now, I have the knowledge to implement their theories into my work consciously, either when reworking songs or writing and producing new ones.

One reflection related to these theories is regarding the structure of the song “Late at Night.” Some of the responses I got during my performance for our interpretation class was the length of the instrumental intro. Murphy’s (2013) assessment of “getting to the point” suddenly posed relevance, as the chorus doesn’t play until 39 seconds in. On the other hand, the way the theory of the 60-second rule (Murphy, 2013) is presented, it seems as if it is coined towards the radio and streaming aspect of reaching through to the listener. When I produced the song “Late at Night,” I envisioned a dim stage with my band members entering one by one before I, nearing the arrival of the chorus, entered the stage and grabbed the mic. In that context, it is a perfect song to warm up a crowd.

4.4 The Band Influence

The more I have attended band practice, the more confidence I have garnered through supporting comments made by the band members, facial expressions of joy and awe, and the way too-loud drumming by an enthusiastic drummer hyping over my music. The one quote by my drummer especially impacted my self-confidence (Philippe et al., 2021) as it relates to them having a good time on my behalf. While composing my songs, I have, for the last few months, visualized my band and each musician's expression and stage presence. This way of working seriously impacted how I produced and wrote my songs. Much of this is in my opinion audible in the production of “Abusive,” introduced in the final chapter of this discussion.

The band itself consists of an electric bass player, a drummer, a keyboard player, a guitarist, and me singing and playing guitar. The band members can also sing backup vocals if the arrangement matches each instrumentalist’s vocal range.

4.4.1 Performing the Songs

Each instrumentalist has a set of technological accessories they use to improve the sound of their instrument further to fit a song’s aesthetics. As for the bass player, he uses an electric 6-string bass guitar. For the song “Life to Give Ya,” we initially considered placing him behind a synth bass on a stand. The issue in that situation was the lack of visual representation of the mechanical coupling between action and sound on stage (Kjus & Danielsen, 2016). To resolve that issue, the bass player utilized the range of his additional low B-string coupled with his hardware to mediate (Kjus & Danielsen, 2016) the sound of the initial recording. In that way, the connection and conveyance from the bassist to the audience aren’t interrupted by the visual blocking of a keyboard stand. Also, my bassist has garnered a great stage presence through his years of experience performing progressive metal, so utilizing that experience is also far better, in my opinion.

4.4.2 Reworking the Songs - Guitar

Playing the guitar posed certain challenges as I sang while playing. To solve this issue, I simplified the chord position of each song by utilizing a *capo*. This way, my guitarist could do the *heavy lifting* of playing the difficult riffs *I recorded*. An example of this is in the song “Slow Down,” where I mainly play chords in the fourth position of the guitar utilizing a capo

on the fourth fret while my guitarist plays the 8th notes, which was way too straining for me to do. This is again an example of Live Mediation (Kjus & Danielsen, 2016). I also gained a new awareness of my own skill-level (Philippe et al., 2021) in practice. In return, the awareness and simplification of my guitar parts gave me the freedom to convey the total message actively with more movement and physical gestures.

4.4.3 Technique - Vocal

During a class with my fellow students at the University, I presented and played the song “Late at Night” with my band. In this song, the chorus melody is placed between the *chest* and *head* registers, around what we refer to as the *break* (Peckham, 2000). The experience turned out to be rather uncomfortable, as the adrenaline (Jimenez, 2015), and the excitement of performing live affected my ability to control my breath and technique (Coutinho et al., 2014). Through this experience, I understood the necessity of understanding better how to utilize what I call my “low volume mix register” (Peckham, 2000) and control the intricate musculature at work within my larynx (Harris & Irene, 2019).

Another insight regarding vocal technique was the intensity at which I could perform during band practice. Playing the song “Intrusive” with the band induced a lot of excitement in me, and made it easy to access my “high-volume mix register” (Peckham, 2000) while singing. This manifested itself the clearest in the transition from the second verse into the pre-chorus, where I sing, “...I can’t ta-a-ake”. The stamina induced by this excitement, which can be argued is due to the *performance adrenaline* (Jimenez, 2015), resulted in great breath control and focus. As opposed to the experience with the song “Late at Night,” it is possible that I, in the case of performing “Intrusive,” found myself within a flow state, experiencing total immersion in the activity at hand (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

My last experience regarding vocal technique is my utilization of the vocal *break* (Peckham, 2000) in my own creative work. In the song “Bedside,” I remember struggling with addressing the melody to a certain register. The melody with the lyrics “golden young” in the song's chorus was too difficult to sing without utilizing multiple registers. Thus, I ended up “breaking” from *chest* voice to head voice partway through the melody before ending it again in the chest voice register. I also ended up really liking the sound of it!

4.4 Abusive – a Concluding Work of Music.

After practice in late March 2023, I felt a growing excitement for what the band was capable of. The songs I wrote were suddenly played and mediated into pieces of live music I found great joy in. We had been practicing for a total of eight hours the last two days, and on my way home from practice, I felt an increasing need to return to my studio. Upon nearing my home, I walked straight past my front door and towards Odderøya, where my studio is situated. I locked myself in the room, booted up the system, and got to work.

4.4.1 Time

The alarm goes off. The security system in our studio-collective is giving me a warning, as it is about to go active in 3 minutes. I remember thinking, "But that isn't supposed to happen until midnight." as I removed my headphones, I realized it had been seven hours since I entered the studio at 5 pm. And all that time, I was completely immersed in the activity at hand (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

4.4.2 The Combined Experience

With the confidence gained from my band's enthusiasm, I made a song(demo) completely different from what I was used to making. Within the process of making the song "Abusive" I had answered expectations with *punch-lines* (Murphy, 2013), mediated my own impulses (Howlett, 2012), recorded vocals with total immersion (Coutinho et al., 2014; Howlett, 2007; Jimenez, 2015; Spahn et al., 2021), written melodies with mumble lyrics(Tweedy, 2020), arranged a form to expand upon(McIntyre, 2008), and utilized vocal techniques with zero issues (Harris & Irene, 2019; Peckham, 2000), all within a state of flow experiencing little to no distinction between past, present or future(Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

It was as if there had been an exchange of impulses through the eight hours of practice prior. And the fact that this exchange, which happened through playing my own music, influenced me to make a piece of music that, in my own opinion, did not resemble the initial vision of the sound of Warehouse, instilled great wonder in what the future of the project holds.

5. Conclusion

Through creative and practical work with my project Warehouse, I have gained new insights into what factors affect my creative work in collaborating with others.

Through producer mediation, I have learned to accept the outcome and come to terms with others' interpretations of my artistic vision and my own. I believe another person's interpretation of one's artistic vision can be, in fact, in and of itself a part of the initial artistic vision, and the mediator's contribution should be considered a valid part of the vision as a whole.

Through performing with my band, I have been influenced to make choices based on their qualities, skill level, interest, and equipment regarding instrumentation and arrangement. I have also taken inspiration from my band's enthusiasm toward the project and gained a certain awareness of how and why they influence me as they do.

Through optimizing and facilitating my surroundings, I have gained insights into what tools I need, what actions I need to take, and what psychological and physical factors affect my creative and performing musical practice, both in solitude and in cooperation with others.

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Link to all attachments, including EP:

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