A CHORAL CONDUCTOR'S ARTISTIC PROCESSES

AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

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Abstract

This study delves into the artistry of the choral conductor. Being based on insider-knowledge, and thereby a subjective viewpoint, autoethnography has been chosen as the appropriate research method for this study. The study displays several traits typical to artistic research, especially in its use of an intuitive, creative analysis process and the presentation of results. Instead of describing the technical skills needed to execute the conductorship or the pedagogical abilities required to lead a group, this study attempts to address the agenda driving the artistic vision – the *why* rather than the *what* or the *how*.

The theoretical framework of the study approaches the conductor's artistry from two directions – firstly, via the different professional roles contained within the main function of conducting, and secondly, via Dag Jansson's (2018) model of the conductor's competences. The artistry is examined by identifying and analysing its key processes, as well as reflecting on how the roles or functions (the artist, the teacher and the leader) are visible within those processes. The field work took place over the spring semester of 2017, following the conductor-researcher's work with her choir Musta lammas. The conclusion of the study reinforces the notion that the different functions of the choral conductor are highly interrelated and interdependent, even when approached primarily with the artistry in mind. Along with locating aesthetic preferences, the results connect the artistic agenda to social and interpersonal processes such as building the group and becoming seen (both as individuals within the group and as performers in front of the audience). Relational processes like these can actually add to the artistic substance and be part of the artistic expression of the group. This study suggests that high ambitions and artistic emphasis actually invite a comprehensive vision with a distinctive pedagogic view and leadership.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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1 INTRODUCTION

My initial interest towards the choral conductor as an artist was ignited by what I experienced in the every-day life of a conductor as a push and pull between my inner artist and teacher[1]. The inner artist was yearning for the best, most satisfying and fulfilling musical experiences possible, whereas the teacher was determined to support my singers to grow, learn and express themselves. Many times, these inner voices were pulling me in the same direction, but sometimes they seemed to get into discussions, arguments or even full-on conflicts about how to best proceed in a given situation and which goal to work towards. As it turns out, similar mental constructs of different professional roles appearing within the main function of conducting have been researched and utilised previously – more on this in chapters 2.1.1 and 2.1.2. I am not the only conductor who has experienced such internal discord.

In the music studies I pursued at the time, both within music education and conducting, the conductor as a teacher and a technician (as in the technical execution of the conducting gestures) got plenty of attention and guidance. The conductor as an artist, I felt, was mostly left to her own devices. In my work life, the wonderful choirs I conducted provided me with plenty to bite into skill-wise, but afforded limited assets for following my most ambitious artistic yearnings. Here, the conflict between the inner artist and the inner teacher started to properly dawn upon me. I was hungry to explore my musical visions, but did not feel comfortable exposing my existing groups to those challenges.

In the autumn of 2015, a year before entering the thesis writing seminar, the circumstances were suddenly right to set a new project into motion. My vocal group (which had taken up the lion's share of my musical life for the past eleven years) was on a break, and I found myself in a discussion with a friend, talking about how I envisioned the choir of my dreams. It would be a mixed group with custom-made repertoire, combining the precision of a vocal group with the richness of a choral sound. We would aim high from the

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1   In Finnish music education vocabulary, *pedagogi* (literally: pedagogue) is a commonly used term that implies a teacher (*opettaja*) with abilities and interests in the principles of education and teaching. Due to the connotations in English of the pedagogue being strict and pedantic (OED Online 2019e), I have chosen to speak instead of *the teacher*, even though I assign them the same attributes as I do to the *pedagogi* in Finnish.

start and explore how far rhythmic music[2] could be taken in an a cappella setting, with voices as the only instruments. That autumn, the two of us gathered together 12 singers and experimented with two arrangements I wrote. In January 2016, we recruited our final lineup of 22 singers. Thus was born Musta lammas – a forum for exploring my artistry as a conductor. A year later, when my thesis seminar started, I was presented with the opportunity to investigate the topic from an academic viewpoint. I decided to embark on an autoethnographic journey, studying my work as the artistic conductor of Musta lammas.

Instead of merely investigating *what* I create as the conductor and *how* it is achieved, I want to investigate *why*.[3] This could be seen as a reaction to the previous studies I had pursued, where pedagogical approaches and conducting technique were given the spotlight. In this thesis, rather than focusing on technical skills like specific conducting gestures or the application of supplementary skills (piano playing, voice technique, ear training, knowledge of the score, pedagogy etc.), I want to examine the artistic agenda that requires those tools to complete its endeavours. I wish to shed light on a topic that otherwise appears to be left to intuition and the silent transfer of knowledge.

Not only is this study about artistry as a choral conductor, it is specifically about my subjective experience of it. By examining my own artistic process, I hope to add another layer to the discussion about musician-driven research. Conducting is often perceived mostly through the moment of performance, although the majority of the conductor's working hours are spent in the rehearsal room with the choir and in personal preparation. An attempt to present the conductor's full process has been expressed by other conductor-researchers before me (Bartleet & Ellis 2009, 12–13; Huovinen 2017). In embracing the insider perspective, I hope to be able to articulate and develop aspects of the profession that could not be revealed from the outside. As singer-researcher Päivi Järviö (2011, 330) describes it, in "research that positions the detailed description of the experience of the singer in centre, the emancipatory attempt is to give the maker of the music a voice, and to bring music making more prominently into the discussion of musical

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2   Rhythmic music (*rytmimusiikki* in Finnish) is one of the many attempts to name the subcategory of the non-classical music tradition. 'Rhythmic' in this context is not intended as a literal reference to rhythm, or to imply that classical music has no rhythm. Pop/jazz-music (*pop/jazz-musiikki* in Finnish), popular music, afro-american music, contemporary commercial music and what is referred to in Finnish as viihdemusiikki (*entertainment music*) and kevyt musiikki (*light music*) are all used (loosely speaking) for similar purposes. (Olsonen 2014, 7–8)

3   As it happens, in the final phases of the research process, I found Gedin (2015, 59) using the same comparison of question words to describe the intent of artistic research.

research"[4]. This is equally true for the experience of the conductor. The goal of this study is not only to contribute to research and shed light on a conductor's perspective, it also reaches inwards, with overlapping personal and professional interests (see f. ex. Chang 2008, 64). By putting words to my artistic experiences and holistically examining, interpreting and analysing them, I hope to further develop my understanding of my praxis.

So how is this study relevant for the field of music education, the department I am writing it for? I believe that any music teacher utilises both their artistic and pedagogic abilities when supervising a group. I hope to inspire my colleagues with my elaboration on artistry as explored from a leadership position. An interesting feature of the specific position I have within Musta lammas is that I am also in charge of creating or co-creating most of our musical material. This is a common situation for many music educators, possibly even more common than for most conductors. Chapter 5.4 relates to our repertoire choices and parts of chapter 5.1 compare repertoire-related objectives and outcomes. These chapters may be of specific interest for those music educators and conductors who create their own musical material.

At times, I have felt immensely self-centred and even awkward with my chosen research frame. As a friend put it, "Not to be offensive, but can dwelling on your own processes really be called research?" This is a reasonable concern that has been present throughout the development of the autoethnographic method (Andersson 2006; Chang 2008, 126–128; Coffey 1999 155–156; Stahlke Wall 2016). I base this study on the assumption that subjective insight can indeed produce valuable knowledge – knowledge that would not be attainable via other methods. What differentiates the autoethnographic effort from mere autobiographical musings is the careful execution, interrogation and anchoring of the subjective insight in wider cultural contexts. The arguments for my methodological approach are further explained in chapter 3, and the reliability of the research is discussed in chapter 6.2. The reaction of colleagues with whom I have shared my study has encouraged me to believe that an approach like mine serves a purpose. I presented my (then incomplete) research at the Nordic Network of Music Education intensive course in October 2018, and the feedback I received gave me the impression that my choice of topic also speaks to a peer audience of music educators and performers outside of the conducting profession. Another important moment of reflection was receiving peer feed-

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4   Originally *kokemuksen yksityiskohtaisen kuvaamisen keskiöön tuovassa tutkimuksessa onkin emansipatorinen pyrkimys antaa ääni musiikin tekijälle, tuoda musiikin tekeminen entistä vahvemmin osaksi musiikintutkimuksen piirissä tapahtuvaa keskustelua*. Translated by writer.

back from a conductor-composer colleague in the final stages of writing (more of this in chapter 6.2) and hearing that my findings not only spoke to, but actually related to and resonated with their experiences of the profession. There seems to be a genuine need for musician-driven research on the topics of artistry and artistic processes.

This thesis is primarily intended to be read linearly, with the contents building on each other along the way. The first chapter introduces the starting point and broad frame of the research, locates it in relation to previous research on choral conducting and sets the frame for the research with several research questions. The theoretical (or cultural) framework is presented in the second chapter. The third chapter explains the methodological choices made, along with a description of how the research was conducted. The fourth chapter is a brief introduction to my musical background and the founding of Musta lammas, laying the ground for the fifth chapter, in which the results are presented. The sixth chapter concludes the research while also discussing its reliability and possibilities for further research. Throughout the thesis, the writing style varies according to the purpose of each passage – as is customary and appropriate to the autoethnographic method.

1.1 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

It is estimated that between 1960 to 2010, approximately 5 000 choir-related publications have been made globally, consisting of articles, research publications, commemorative publications, master's theses, doctoral dissertations and many more (Geisler 2010, 2–3 & Geisler & Johansson 2014, 1). Choral research (conducting research amongst it) has been pursued within a multitude of different research traditions, such as music pedagogy (Bygdéus 2015 & 2012; Durrant 2009 & 2003; Sandberg Jurström 2011, 2010 & 2009), ethnology (Nenola 2019), leadership research (Jansson 2018, 2015 & 2014) and musicology (Konttinen 2007). The methodological variation within the topic is, accordingly, vast.

Research focused more specifically on choral conducting is equally distributed between the different disciplines. This describes the complexity of the conducting phenomena; no single discipline can claim sole ownership of it (Jansson 2018, ix). It would appear that the artistry of the choral conductor has not been explored as such before. In this chapter, in order to locate the study in relation to previous research, I refer to both choral and orchestral conducting research, as well as a methodological plethora of sources ranging from autoethnographies to interview studies. Due to my method, I have a special interest in not only conductors, but any musicians pursuing autoethnography.

Musically, I have not limited myself to a specific genre or aesthetic tradition; after all, the study is about conductorship, not a certain style of music.

Recently, studies by Bygdéus (2012 & 2015), Durrant (2009) and Sandberg Jurström (2009) have focused on the choral conductor's multifaceted communication in relation to shaping the music. Konttinen (2007) approached orchestral conductorship from a historical, sociological and practical viewpoint, whereas Jansson (2014, 2015 & 2018) utilises the choristers' experiences as his perspective. Inquiries into gender and conductorship have been pursued by Bartleet (2008a & 2008b), Ljungberg (2018) and Julén (2006). Research on specific conducting skills include studies on conducting technique (Kuusisto 2015), communicative skills (Karjula 2018), verbal feedback (Hirn 2018), verbal imagery (Black 2014), peer learning (Bartleet & Hultgren 2008), experiences of teaching vocal technique (Annala 2017, Rissanen 2010, Salovaara 2014 & Sivén 2002) and moreover, experiences of teaching vocal technique in a children's choir (Fuhrmann 2009).

While compiling this list, it struck me that most of the aforementioned researchers have a certain commonality. With the exception of Konttinen[5] and Black[6], all of them are also conductors themselves. Clearly, choral conductors have been drawn to direct their research towards their own profession.

Some conductor-researchers have explicitly chosen to investigate their own work.[7] In the written part of his research, Kari Turunen (2014) examines the historical performance practices of Palestrina's sacred music, and how it could inform and inspire modern performances of Palestrina. Positioning himself as both a scholar and a musician[8], Turunen relates to his research from both perspectives (ibid., 13–14). Noteworthily, Turunen positions the dialogue between these perspectives as being "not central to the thesis. I have chosen to show how the archival data can lead to practical considerations for performance; performers must make their own decisions about these considerations and how or whether they should be put into practice" (Turunen 2014, 13–14). The application of the performance practices is present in the several concerts which comprise the practical part of the research. Turunen prefers not to further debate his own application of the

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5   Konttinen's background is that of an orchestra musician.

6   Black's conductorship is unknown to me – I failed to retrieve more background information on her.

7   By saying this, I do not mean that the previously mentioned conductor-researchers would not have been impacted as researchers by their own conductorship. What I am pointing out is that they have primarily framed their research material to include the experiences of other conductors, choirs and singers rather than their own.

8   Turunen uses "performer" and "musician" parallelly, apparently seeing these roles as largely overlapping (Turunen 2014, 13–14). Besides being a conductor, Turunen is also a singer (Turunen 2019).

knowledge and leaves the decision making about his research results up to each reader (and performer). In many respects, the contrast to this study is stark; here the intent is to explicitly set words to, negotiate and analyse, the artistic agenda. Of course, my premise of working almost exclusively with material written in the 21st century is completely different from the historical aspects that come with performing music written five centuries ago. Hannu Norjanen (2015) researches a topic similar to Turunen's, also defined by repertoire choice. He delves into the institution of the ecclesiastical boys' choir and his own experience rehearsing and conducting Bach's *St Matthew's Passion* with that instrument. In his account of the work process, Norjanen describes the rehearsals in detail. Norjanen's study is also accompanied by a practical part consisting of several concerts.

I am not the first one to research conductorship utilising autoethnographic methods. Olli Vartiainen (2009) studies the conditions and tools that the student orchestra conductor needs to facilitate a constructive learning environment for the students. The focus is on relevant musical, artistic, technical and interactive skills. Vartianen concludes his results in the form of an information package for the student orchestra conductor[9]. Brydie-Leigh Bartleet (2009) considers autoethnographic writing in the context of her praxis as a choral conductor. The form of the study is crafted into an evocative narrative in which she recounts the realisation of how musical meaning is created via relationships and connections with the musicians.

Of the autoethnographies written within other musical disciplines, Päivi Järviö's (2011) study on her bodily experiences of singing Monteverdi has had significant influence on this thesis, providing another example of how to approach the experience of doing music via autoethnographic research. Cellist-researcher Guadalupe López-Íñiguez's (2019) autoethnographic account of the epiphonies that formed her path as an artist and musician served as inspiration regarding the combination of narrative approaches and analytical writing.

In the plethora of research on conducting, only a few pieces touch specifically on the topic of the conductor's artistry. "The conductor-as-artist is a neglected perspective in most research on choirs and conducting, which is biased towards pedagogical aspects." (Jansson 2018, 123, emphasis in original) Whereas my predecessors consciously distance themselves from explicit descriptions of interpretational processes (Turunen 2014), focus on competence-based frames with pedagogical interests (Vartiainen 2009)

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9   Originally *oppilasorkesterinjohtajan tietopaketti*. Translated by the writer.

or narrate mostly musical-technical problem solving (Norjanen 2015), this study is interested in the conductor as the artist. Through this research, I hope to contribute to the wider attempt to bring the practices and comprehension of the individual musician to light (Bartleet & Ellis 2009, 6–7; Järviö 2011, 89).

1.2 RESEARCH SETTING

This study investigates my experiences of artistry as a conductor. As the focus is explicitly on insider-knowledge, and thereby, a subjective viewpoint, autoethnography has been chosen as the appropriate research method. Moreover, the study displays several traits typical to artistic research, especially in its use of an intuitive, creative analysis process and a presentation of results. Structurally, it is a data-driven study where practice is given the lead. The theoretical framework is built accordingly.

As I perceive artistry as something in a perpetual state of change and development, I do not expect to end up with a result of absolute truths that would remain current forever. Rather, I hope to be able to catch an essence of what my artistic experience has been at a certain time. Instead of trying to grasp everything I have ever experienced related to artistry and over-reaching with a problem formulation far too vast to fit into the format of a master's thesis, a limited period of data collection seemed both purposeful and prudent. The time span for taking field notes was set to be the spring semester of 2017. From January to June, field notes were taken following my work with Musta lammas. During those six months, we were preparing for two full-length concerts and participation in two choral competitions: Kuorojen kapina in Helsinki and the Aarhus Vocal Festival in Denmark. The latter, taking place at the end of the term in June, had been a long-term goal for the choir and our most prestigious endeavour thus far. Having a clear, ambitious goal for the semester seemed like fruitful ground, ensuring a highly energised and committed period during which to perform research.[10]

As this study proceeded, I found myself realigning my argument of the inner artist versus the inner teacher. In the beginning, the contradiction between the inner artist and the inner teacher seemed evident to me. Now my focus shifted to how they were also overlapping and intertwined, and how intricate that collaboration was. Also, as several peer conductors and musicians alike kindly pointed out to me, approaching artistry

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10   Musta lammas' activities during the data collection period are presented alongside the timeframe of the study in chapter 3.4.1.

solely from these roles is only one view on the profession, and in some respects a rather limited one. Concluding these reflections, I decided to position artistry as the frame and viewpoint for the research – the defining point and highest priority. The inner roles are instead approached via how they play out in scenarios where artistry is taking the lead.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

According to Gedin (2015, 49), the traditional progression of question-research-conclusion poorly fits artistic research and its interests. Artistic work tends to gravitate towards research topics rather than questions. "A topic is more geographical, an area to research, which corresponds well to the artistic working process." (Gedin 2015, 49) Similarly, my research process was undertaken with the artistry of the conductor as the research area, with the intent of setting words to and further analysing the subjective perspective of the conductor-researcher. The research questions were developed to support this intent. They are:

What were the key processes within my artistic work as a conductor for Musta lammas over the set time span?

What kind of processes were they? Did they reveal specific aesthetic preferences?

Do these artistically inclined processes reflect my pedagogy and leadership? If so, how?

2 CHORAL CONDUCTING AND ARTISTRY

A Finnish choral conductor is usually called *taiteellinen johtaja*; the artistic leader.[11] This is the title that appears in numerous resumes, presentations and curriculum vitae alike. In their updated guidelines for choral conductors' salaries, the Finnish Choral Directors' Association presents a detailed list of functions commonly related to the profession by regarding them as either artistic, non-artistic, or non-defined.[12] If not otherwise agreed, the association advises that non-artistic tasks should not be assigned to the conductor. (Suomen Kuoronjohtajayhdistys 2018, 2–3)

The noun "artist" is partly of French and partly of Latin origin. In a musical context, an artist is "a person skilled in the art of music; a performer of music in public, as a singer, player, conductor, etc" (OED Online 2019a). The words "artistic" and "artistry" are both derived from the same word, and refer to the characteristics of the artist (OED Online 2019b & 2019c). The distinction between a mere musician and an artist reveals one of the most common musical tropes. Whereas musicians are characterised by the mastery of their instruments, artists are stereotypically expected to dedicate their lives to their art, unafraid of any sacrifice that may be required to touch the listener with their music (López-Íñiquez 2019, 166). In other words, what distinguishes artistry appears to be its performative and communicative aspects.

The conductor's artistry is indeed oftentimes associated with interpretational work.

"The choral conductor puts together the repertoire for the performance and supervises the singers' vocal technique. He/she develops the singers' abilities to make music together and refines the *artistic interpretation* of the music." (Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö 2002, para. 7, emphasis by the writer)[13]

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11   Other commonly used titles are *johtaja* (the leader) and *kuoronjohtaja* (the choral conductor, literally *the choral leader*).

12   **Artistic:** leading rehearsals, concerts and recordings, planning repertoire and learning it in detail, maintaining professional networks, further education, planning future activities etc.
Non-artistic: board meetings, ordering sheet music, providing information to the choristers and the board, organising events and projects, marketing etc.
Non-defined: yearly and weekly rehearsal planning, creating rehearsal material for the singers, instructing the individual rehearsing process etc.
(Suomen Kuoronjohtajayhdistys 2018, 2–3)

13   Originally *Harjoituksissa kuoronjohtaja valmistaa ohjelmiston esityskuntoon ja ohjaa laulajien äänenmuodostusta. Hän kehittää kuorolaisten taitoa musisoida yhdessä ja hioo musiikin taiteellista tulkintaa.* Translated by the writer.

"…the orchestra can only be conducted by one person at a time, and this person alone is ultimately responsible for, inter alia, the *artistic interpretation* at the performance." (Vartiainen 2009, 30, emphasis by the writer)[14]

This reflects a thought similar to the artist trope, namely that artistry is connected specifically to the act of conveying a message to the audience.

Among higher education studies in choral conducting, artistry appears to be connected to prestige, mastery and a certain level of expectation. During their studies at the Sibelius Academy, choral conducting majors within the bachelor's degree programme are expected to "acquire competence to work as a choir conductor with a high *artistic* standard" (Sibelius Academy [SibA] 2017, 9, emphasis by the writer). A similar standard is set for their colleagues at the Royal Academy of Music Aarhus/Aalborg, Denmark where "the [graduating master's] student has developed his/her personal and professional competences as *artistic* conductor of rhythmic vocal music[15] at a high pedagogical and *artistic* level" (Royal Academy of Music [RAMA] 2015, 3, emphasis by the writer). Whereas the curriculum of the Royal Academy of Music mentions pedagogy and artistry as parallel parameters, the corresponding curriculum at the Sibelius Academy bears no mention of pedagogical skills being required (SibA 2017; RAMA 2015, 3–25).

The artistry of the conducting profession is frequently mentioned and alluded to, but as a topic of its own it comes across as elusive and difficult to pinpoint.[16] The theoretical framework of this study is built specifically on two approaches to the topic. The first is a subjective perspective presented via research done on the different roles that choral conductors themselves perceive within their conductorship, the artist being one of them. This builds upon the topic touched upon in the curricula above – that of the parallel competences required of a conductor. Secondly, the artistry of the conductor is approached from a wider viewpoint provided by Dag Jansson's (2018) model of the choral conductor's competences. Jansson's model is relevant for this study due to its comprehensiveness, which spans from practical rehearsal situations to core values and beliefs. As the format of this thesis is built with the theory as the entry point[17], the width and flexibility of this model makes it a particularly apt tool for the theoretical anchoring of the study.

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14   Originally *mutta orkesteria voi johtaa vain yksi henkilö kerrallaan, ja tämä henkilö yksin vastaa viime kädessä mm. taiteellisesta tulkinnasta esiintymistilanteessa.* Translated by the writer.

15   See footnote 2 on page 7 for the definition of rhythmic music.

16   See also Jansson 2018, 39.

17   In contrast to f. ex. López-Íñiguez's (2019) autoethnography, which presents the narrative first and then ties it to and analyses it via a wide selection of literature.

With these viewpoints, I hope to introduce the reader to the conducting profession and its artistry.

2.1 THE ROLES OF THE CHORAL CONDUCTOR

The choral conducting phenomenon consists of a multitude of intertwined tasks and areas of expertise. It should therefore be examined from a holistic perspective, considering all possible factors involved and recognising them as deeply interconnected (Durrant 2003, 5–10; Jansson 2018, xi; Sandberg Jurström 2000, 54). This complexity could also be depicted by seeing choral conducting as a combination of different professional roles, with each role serving a different function. The high school choral teacher, for example, serves as the voice teacher, the error detector, the arranger/composer/improviser, the scholar, the manager, the leader, the mentor and the pianist/accompanist, to name a few (Madura Ward-Steinman 2010, 1–6).

In their master's theses, Sandberg Jurström (2000), Bygdéus (2006) and most recently Karjula (2018) have all researched conductors' own experiences of their professional roles using qualitative interviews, all within music education academia. Bygdéus (2011 & 2015) builds her further studies upon the same topic, whereas Sandberg Jurström's (2009, 2010 & 2011) additional research branches out into the communicative aspects of conducting. Alone, any one of these studies or theses would probably not suffice as reference material for a study like this, but together they represent a credible take on the inner role constructs of a choral conductor.

Before delving into the specifics, a lingual note is needed. A plethora of terms is used, not only by the layman, but also in research, to signify the position of being in charge of the choir. Besides artistic conductor, titles such as choral conductor, artistic leader, vocal leader, choir leader, choir director, choirmaster and choir teacher are commonly used. For reasons of clarity, I have decided to use the terms "choral conductor" and "conductor" as the definition of the profession itself, and "artistic conducting" or "artistry" as the main aspect that the study focuses on. Within the next chapter, however, I have attempted to preserve the original terminology of each source. When available, I have used the writers' own English translations. When not available, I have translated them to the best of my ability.

2.1.1 The Conductor, the Musician, the Artist, the Leader and the Teacher

Ragnhild Sandberg Jurström (2000) interviewed eight Swedish choral conductors about how they perceive their musical and educational roles and what they seek to achieve (ibid., 2). According to her research, "the leadership within a choir is seen as a pedagogic leadership"[18] (Sandberg Jurström 2000, 53). She defines leadership via four loosely framed categories. The structural leadership[19] (1) encompasses domains such as power, decision making and collaboration, as well as how these domains are allocated among the leader and the singers. The cultural leadership[20] (2) depicts tradition, earlier experiences and role models, and is where most pedagogical ideas are anchored in one way or another. The musical leadership[21] (3) is what is seen as the central part of choral conducting activity – the music, and making and learning it. The artistic leadership[22] (4) is a category that is partially separate from the others, as it contains the roles that the conductor actually enters into: being the conductor, being the musician and being the artist. The role of the conductor is as an exclusive, enjoyable part of the leadership that emerges in relation to the performance. The artist is described as the creator of concert experiences by utilising non-musical elements such as narrative, scenography, theatre, dance etc. The musician is characterised as the person playing the instrument that is the choir, and in parallel, as a co-musician in relation to the singers. (Sandberg Jurström 2000, 25–44 & 48)

Sandberg Jurström (2000, 25) states that the fundamental *raison d'*être for conducting lies in the music itself. Music is the conductor's cause and primary motivation. Participation in any activity creates a pedagogic environment that is then formed by the leadership involved. (Ibid., 51–52) Pedagogy is thus seen as an intrinsic aspect of the choral setting, always present in the conducting.

Pia Bygdéus (2006) studies how three Swedish conductors speak of their own profession. As a result, she presents a map of leadership, translated into English in her research in 2011 (see figure 1).

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18   Translated by the writer. Originally: *Sammanfattningsvis kan sägas, att i denna studie går det att i resultaten se att ledarskapet av kör uppfattas som ett pedagogiskt ledarskap.*
19   Translated by the writer. Originally *det strukturella ledarskapet.*
20   Translated by the writer. Originally *det kulturella ledarskapet.*
21   Translated by the writer. Originally *det musikaliska ledarskapet.*
22   Translated by the writer. Originally *det konstnärliga ledarskapet.*

Administrative...   ...(choir)leader

Social...   **LEADERSHIP**   ...(choir)pedagogue

Artistic...   ...(choir)conductor
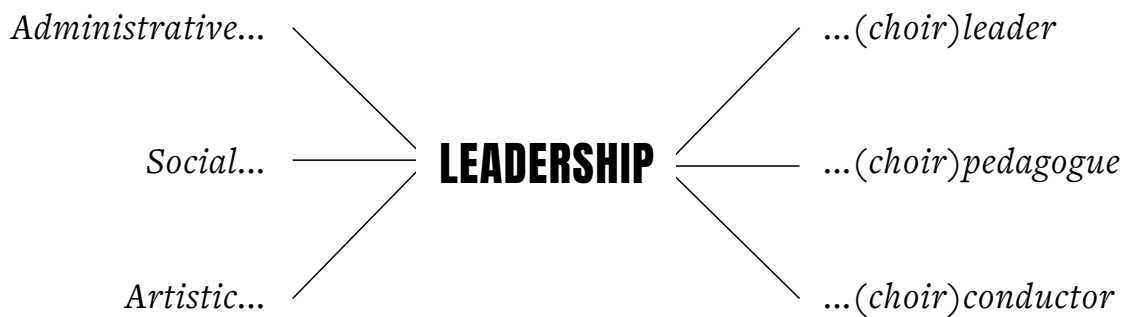
Figure 1, courtesy of Pia Bygdéus (2011, 81).

Each role (on the right) has characteristics of all three functions (on the left). The (choir) leader, the (choir)pedagogue[23] and the (choir)conductor are to a certain extent the same role, but they also have their own distinct tasks. The names of the roles are ambiguous in both content and usage and cannot be refined. Fittingly, different conductors see themselves differently despite being in the same profession. (Bygdéus 2006, 40–46) Bygdéus utilises this structure repeatedly in her continued research (2011, 2012 & 2015) on choral conducting.

Anna Karjula (2018) investigates social interaction in choral conducting by interviewing four experienced Finnish conductors. Three central roles emerge in her interviews: the leader, the artist and the teacher[24]. The role of leader is based on mutual respect between the leader and the singers. The leader makes the singers act in a desired manner. The role of the artist is based on the conductor's love of the music and infiltrates the entire work process, from choosing repertoire to conducting concerts. The role of teacher is first and foremost about tailoring the conductor's approach according to the singers in question and their needs. (Karjula 2018, 50–59) "The choral conductor" seems to serve as the main title for all three roles. According to the interviewees, superb skills in some areas can compensate for poor skills in others (ibid., 43 & 58). However, conductorship based on bad interactive skills, even in this context, is not regarded as meritorious or desirable (ibid., 58).

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23   This wording is Bygdéus' own, its Swedish counterpart being *körpedagog* (Bygdéus 2006, 45).
24   Originally *pedagogi*. As on page 6, this translation has been chosen to avoid the negative connotations of the English word *pedagogue*.

2.1.2 Tension and Hierarchy Between the Roles

Bygdéus (2015, 212) writes about future research: "One result in this study points to the fact that educational and artistic aspects cannot be separated in choral work. For example, the role of the choir director is described as encompassing a variety of tasks, and as situated in a complex working situation where many elements need to be managed in order to achieve an artistic whole. It would be interesting to investigate if there is a contradiction or conflict between these aspects [educational and artistic] in choral conductors' experience and, if so, from where this conflict emanates."

The biggest potential for tension appears to be between the pedagogy (the teacher) and the artistry (the artist) and their respective motives. The teacher builds on the standpoint of the singers and their needs, whereas the artist strives for a certain vision of the music (Durrant 2003, 7). However, in practice, the two functions are inseparable and interdependent since both are essential for achieving musical success (Bygdéus 2015, 111, 187, 210 & 212; Bygdéus 2011, 82–83; Karjula 2018, 56; Sandberg Jurström 2000, 53–54). Both are driven by a desire "to enable people to create the best" (Durrant 2003, 7). Successfully connecting the roles can create a dynamic group with a good balance between responsibility, individuality and expression on the one hand, and blend[25], focus and unity on the other (ibid.) – an artistic whole (Bygdéus 2015, 212).

During the rehearsing process, the dynamic between the roles fluctuates. When getting familiar with repertoire and forming an opinion of its artistic expression, the artist dominates (Karjula 2018, 53). The pedagogical role is crucial when rehearsing new material for the first time and in general has some dominance during the rehearsal phase, especially in the beginning (Bygdéus 2006, 35 & Sandberg Jurström 53–54). As the performance grows closer, the artist gains more presence. One interesting detail is that some of the conductors preferred seeing themselves as collaborating musicians in the performance situation. (Sandberg Jurström 2000, 53–54)

The balancing of artistry and pedagogy manifests itself in the conductors' perceptions of their profession. Bygdéus, Karjula and Sandberg Jurström all discover considerable variation among their interviewees. Some of them see the conductor first and foremost

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25   Within vocal music, the term blend is used to describe how the voices of individual singers sound or *blend in* together. Traditionally, blending well means achieving an entity where none of the individual voices can be distinguished (Ekholm 2000, 124). For more on how choral blend can be affected by singing modes and seating arrangements, see Ekholm (2000).

as an artist, others as a teacher who achieves artistic results via pedagogic skills. One conductor sees being the leader as the main function, and positions the pedagogic and artistic skills as servants to leadership. Several interviewees express an ideal in which the different roles are equally important, co-operating and serving each other. A few interviewees identify with a combined title of the different roles, for example "the artist-teacher". Some of these preferences are linked with a (subjective) perception of status, but the perceived precedence does however vary. (Bygdéus 2006 40–46; Karjula 2018, 50–56; Sandberg Jurström 2000, 44–47; see also Bygdéus 2015, 110–111)

Concluding, the artistry of the conductor is described as an exclusive trait based on the conductor's love of music and desire to create it. Artistry takes the lead particularly in the end of the rehearsal process, and is also dominant when the conductor is becoming familiar with the material and doing the planning and programming for the concerts. Artistry is strongly involved in the interpretation and expression of the music. Regarding the other roles, the conductor as an artist is intrinsically linked to the conductor as a teacher and leader, as any situation where choral activities are undertaken can be regarded as a pedagogic one.

2.1.3 The Conventional and the Unconventional Conductor

Summarising her findings, Sandberg Jurström constructs two conductor portraits – the conventional choral conductor and the unconventional choral conductor. *Conventional conductors*[26] have great authority and are responsible for the artistic interpretation of the music. Developing the choir's vocal skills and their knowledge of the history of music is important to them. Conventional conductors usually work on a tight schedule with a lot of new repertoire to learn, which leads to the choir always performing with sheet music. They see the choir as an instrument that is played in collaboration with the singers. *Unconventional conductors*[27] invite the choir to discuss and make decisions together. They see the shared process as a valuable tool to develop everyone's artistry. The rehearsal process is often time-consuming since unconventional conductors value knowing the material by heart and communication with the audience. Sandberg Jurström sees characteristics of both portraits in all her interviewees. Some resemble one portrait more than the other, but all interviewees display some characteristics of both. (Sandberg Jurström

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26   Translated by the writer. Originally *den traditionella körledaren*.
27   Translated by the writer. Originally *den okonventionella körledaren*.

2000, 48–50) A struggle between similar archetypes is presented by Bartleet (Bartleet & Ellis 2009) as she first tries to fulfil the role of the "all-knowing conductor", and then gradually moves towards a more collectively oriented approach in which connection and togetherness is what brings purpose to the music-making (ibid., 3).

Whereas Sandberg Jurström's portraits offer a more detailed picture of the conducting roles, they depart somewhat from the previously presented axis of pedagogic aspects versus artistic aspects. Both conductor portraits are described as having a need to both teach and make art, and both appear to have pedagogic and musical abilities. Neither, however, seems to prefer one need over the other, as the focus lies in the amount and source of input and direction. The conventional conductor provides most of the input him or herself, whereas the unconventional conductor invites input from the group. Seen as proposals for how to create the music (or art), both portraits have their distinct angles that lead to very different creative processes and thus, most likely, to different musical results.

2.2 THE COMPETENCES OF THE CHORAL CONDUCTOR

Researcher-conductor Dag Jansson (2018, 2015 & 2014) has studied musical leadership via what he calls "the third viewpoint", which is that of the choral singers. As opposed to choosing the perspective of the conductor (the first viewpoint) or the outside observer (the second viewpoint), he argues that the singers' point of view provides the most direct access to how musical leadership truly works. Being the executing party, immersed in the realisation of the music and exposed to the leadership guiding its making, Jansson (2018, 15; 2015, 2–3 & 2014, 143) believes that the singer has first-hand knowledge of the music's essence. Utilising (non-musical) leadership research, choral conducting research and his previous study (which involved interviewing experienced choral singers) (2013), Jansson constructs a model of *Choral conductor competence* (2018, 138) (see figure 2).

Artistic Reflexivity

MUSICAL-TECHNICAL MASTERY
Language skills
Vocal Technique
Repertoire Knowledge
Score Proficiency
Error Detection/Aural Skills
Gestural Vocabulary
Choir Acoustics

SITUATIONAL-RELATIONAL MASTERY
Control/Empowerment
Mentorship
Rehearsal Organisation
Rehearsal Interventions
Staging/Spacing

EXISTENTIAL FOUNDATION
Presence
Sincerity
Devotion
Aesthetic Will
Authority

Corporeal Congruence

Figure 2, courtesy of Dag Jansson (2018, 38).

The model is divided into three broad categories of professional practice: musical-technical mastery, situational-relational mastery and existential foundation. They are in no specific order, and are all important in their own right. Jansson suggests regarding them as layers of varying depth and reach. In real-life situations, all three layers are present simultaneously. The purpose of the model is to provide an overarching picture of the different competences and predispositions related to choral conducting. The emphasis is on researching the interrelations and connections linking them together. Even though, say, aural skills could be studied in isolation, the reality of the choral conductor's work is that their utilisation always depends on the situational-relational context (*How and at what point and is error correction being suggested?*) as well as the atmosphere created by the conductor's presence (*Is the conductor sincere? Does she/he have a sense of where the music is heading?*). The true impact of the musical leadership rises from the sum of all three layers. (Jansson 2018, 38–39)

Spanning all three categories is corporeal congruence and artistic reflexivity. Corporeal congruence describes how the competences ideally work together and reinforce one another, and it is manifested through the embodied process of conducting. Its absence is notable when there is a discrepancy between the competences, such as, for example, when a conductor who is deeply committed to the music comes across as insincere and therefore has difficulties connecting with the choir. (Jansson 2018, 91–96) These categories of professional practice are seen as deeply interwoven and interdependent, and their similarity to the professional roles of teacher and artist is evident. In order to act efficiently and successfully, the conductor needs to successfully connect all the different necessary aspects.

As Jansson (2018, 39) presents it, artistic reflexivity, i.e. the ability to reflect on one's own artistic practice and act accordingly, is a competence that can be nurtured like all others. However, instead of belonging in any specific category, this competence impacts the entire conducting phenomena. Jansson argues that this is why it is such a difficult target of scientific scrutiny. Artistic reflexivity is better perceived when it emerges together with another competence, such as visionary repertoire choices, for example, or the timely empowerment of singers. (Jansson 2018, 39) In order for the artistic process to remain alive, it requires a dynamic approach, an openness to discovery, and fluidity between control versus empowerment, all of which also invite risk and ambiguity. As such attributes are indistinguishably part of the making of the art, they are not regarded as liabilities. This does not mean that the conductor should have no agenda or vision, but rather that space should be left for the unexpected while pursuing those attributes. (Ibid., 70–71 & 87)

In its holistic approach with emphasis on interconnectivity between the competences, Jansson's model provides a comprehensive baseline for this study.

According to his model, the artistic dimension that I attempt to research could be perceived within any competence or predisposition of the conducting phenomena, be it the practical, the social or the existential. The primary focus of this research is the artistic agenda rather than the technical tools required for its execution, and thus I direct my attention towards the situational-relational and existential layers and the interconnectivity of the entire model. The musical-technical layer specifically relates to the technical aspects, which are mostly left outside the frame of the research.

2.3 THEORETICAL SUMMARY

Approaching conducting via the professional roles serves as a tool to understand the different motivations and negotiations that take place within conductorship. As the roles are portrayed as deeply interconnected (Bygdéus 2015, 111, 187, 210 & 212; Bygdéus 2011, 82–83; Karjula 2018, 56; Sandberg Jurström 2000, 53–54), investigating the conductor's artistry in isolation appears to be neither possible nor purposeful. This study therefore proceeds with the assumption that the internal negotiation between the different roles will continue throughout and be visible in the results. The viewpoint of the artist remains the prime interest of the study and the lens through which all the other roles are observed. Another balancing act that is brought to light is that between the collective process (the unconventional conductor) and the leader-led endeavour (the conventional conductor), for all conductors display some traits of both (Sandberg Jurström 2000, 48–50).

Within the distinctive roles, the artistry of the conductor is seen as stemming from a fundamental desire to make music (Durrant 2003, 7; Karjula 2018, 59; Sandberg Jurström 2000, 25) and manifesting itself especially in relation to the performative and interpretative aspect of conducting (Bygdéus 2006, 35; Karjula 2018, 53; Sandberg Jurström 53–54). Jansson's (2018) approach to artistic reflexivity challenges this to some extent with its view of artistry as a ubiquitous albeit elusive aspect of the conductorship (ibid., 38–39). His model does not differentiate pedagogy or leadership skills per se, but integrates them on a more granular level into each layer of mastery. One could argue that the model represents artistry as an imperative, fundamental dimension of the conducting profession; the pedagogy and leadership portrayed in the model is fundamental in a different way. The model's definition of corporeal congruence is very much in line with the professional roles requiring each other for any success to take place.

This study investigates the artistic processes that take place over one semester. With that in mind, Jansson's (2018) account that artistic pursuit requires vision and planning, as well as openness and the flexibility to accommodate discoveries (ibid., 70–71 & 87), seems fitting. Perhaps this suitability applies not only to the results, but also, on a meta-level, to the entire research process.

3 DATA AND METHODS

In this chapter I attempt to articulate the methodological approach of this research. I also elaborate on the lingual choices made within this study. Lastly, I present how the research was conducted.

3.1 AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Autoethnography is a qualitative approach to research that combines ethnography with autobiographic writing, using the experiences of the researcher as a source of research data. The term autoethnography first appeared within the social sciences in the late 1970s (Ellis & Bochner 2000, 739), and has since grown to include a multitude of narrative inquiries. What distinguishes it from other self-narrative works is its analytical and interpretive nature (Chang 2008, 43). Autoethnography challenges traditional research methods (which pursue an objective and impersonal approach) by stating that the subjective experience has valuable insight to offer, thus filling gaps in our knowledge that have not been filled before (Marx, Pennington & Chang 2017, 2; Stahlke Wall 2016, 7). Instead of distancing the researcher from the subject, autoethnography demands that the researcher be clearly present in the narrative, making their position and relation to the subject clearly visible (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011, 274–275). By embracing the "self", autoethnography seeks wider understanding of others, in terms of both culture and society (Chang 2008, 48).

Bartleet and Ellis (2009) see the subjectivity and complexity of autoethnography as a fitting tool for writing about musical experiences. According to them, autoethnography "encourages to convey the *meanings* of vibrant musical experiences evocatively" (Bartleet & Ellis 2009, 8, emphasis in original). Music and autoethnography have a lot in common. As processes, both deal with "complex layers of consciousness, meaning, and significance that vary from musician to musician, and autoethnographer to autoethnographer" (Bartleet & Ellis 2009, 8). Just as the autoethnographic attempt to look both inward and outward, backward and forward, can blur the lines between personal and cultural (see also Chang 2008, 130–137), so the musical navigation between layers of musical consciousness, memories, reference points and musical experiences entangles the personal and musical. Researching music via autoethnography is a somewhat irrational and even messy undertaking. When exploring the relationship between music and autoethnography, "the goal is to write in such a way that a musician's musical identity can be fulfilled

through research rather than restrained by it, and to think and feel in such a way that autoethnographers open themselves up to the possibilities offered by music." (Bartleet & Ellis 2009, 8–9)

Autoethnography allows the researcher uninterrupted access to the primary data source, as well as tapping into the holistic and intimate perspective of an insider (Chang 2008, 52). As the musician-researcher, I connect strongly to Järviö's description of her musicianship as an inseparable, interwoven part of herself, as something that cannot be put aside when researching, even if she would like to sometimes (Järviö 2011, 82–84). I have chosen to embrace this *insider knowledge* (Holman Jones, Adams & Ellis 2013, 33–34) and to utilise it to examine my artistic praxis. As I am both the objective of the study as well as the researcher, the analysis and refinement of the data continues throughout the process, deepening my understanding of both myself as well as others (Chang 2008, 52). This process, described as the transformative nature of autoethnography (Chang 2008, 52–53), opens up possibilities to develop my own artistic process, and to incorporate that into the results.

With an increasing surge in popularity amidst numerous fields of research, autoethnography has been applied and developed in a range of different methodological approaches (Stahlke Wall 2016, 2). It has been pursued emotionally and evocatively (Holman Jones, Adams & Ellis 2013), analytically (Anderson 2006), critically (Marx et al. 2017), moderately (Stahlke Wall 2016), poetically (Richardson 1994) and more. This flexibility means that the method has many possible applications, which makes the need to define a particular study's autoethnographic boundaries, foundations and purpose even more acute (Marx et al. 2017, 2–3).

Chang (2008, 56) urges the researcher not only to familiarise themselves with the usage of the term autoethnography, but also to explain their particular definition of it in order to avoid confusion. Autoethnographies differ in their emphases on research (*graphy*), culture (*ethno*) and self-reflection (*auto*), and this emphasis can shift around throughout the study (Ellis & Bochner 2000, 740; Saarnivaara 2002, 146–147; see also Ellis et al. 2011, 278). This study embarks on an autoethnographic path inspired by the one Järviö (2011) defines in her study of her bodily experiences of singing Monteverdi. The format of my master's thesis is, like hers, rooted in the scholarly research tradition. Investigating a theme that is tied to personal experiences, Järviö argues that the main emphasis naturally lies in self-reflection. She chooses to perceive culture as a phenomenon appearing within the personal experience (Järviö 2011, 92). The resemblance to my research setting is considerable. The means that I am using to grasp my artistic understanding is a

thorough investigation of my experiences during a set time span. Therefore, in terms of my definition of autoethnography, I choose to follow in Järviö's footsteps and position self-reflection in the forefront. I intend to place culture (*ethno*) and research (*graphy*), respectively, as the anchoring points for this self-reflection via analysis and theoretising (Stahlke Wall 2016, 7). The theoretical framework is built up in chapters 2 and 3, and the dialogue between this framework and the data-derived results is presented in chapter 5.

3.2 ARTISTIC RESEARCH

Whether or not this study qualifies as artistic research remains something of an enigma for me. Reflecting upon this question has produced insights that I believe are beneficial for the understanding of this study.

The tradition of artistic research is fairly young, having developed among postgraduate education in the arts in particular (Frisk et al. 2015, 7–9). Its methods are still in a state of flux, both within themselves as well as in relation to other research. The methods that are used and the research goals are diverse and even contradict each other. (Hannula, Suoranta & Vadén 2005, 5–17; see also Frisk et al. 2015) Some researchers embrace this diversity, arguing that it is a possibility for true understanding and experiencing the world as it is (Hannula et al. 2005, 5–17), while others contradict the attempt altogether, arguing that research as science can never serve the true goals of art (Dombois 2017). Methodologically, artistic research is a heterogeneous field, one that demands its scholars to familiarise themselves with a rich and diverse landscape of existing research. As there is no uniform method to execute artistic research, learning to do so requires sensibility, sensitivity and effectivity in the researcher. (Gouzouasis 2019, 2)

The starting point for artistic research is in the artistic practice, and the two should remain integrated (Gedin 2015, 58). Furthermore, artistic research entails "that the artist produces an art work and researches the creative process, thus adding to the accumulation of knowledge" (Hannula et. al. 2005, 5). In this study, I research the choral conductor's experience of artistry. But how do I define my art work? Performing a piece of music to an audience is not the final, completed work of art, but just one of the stages of a perpetual process (Järviö 2011, 107–108). Portraying a piece of art as something rigid and fixed that is then delivered at the performance leaves out the reflexive, continuous nature of musicianship and the time consuming process of refining and developing one's art (ibid.). As Hannula, Suoranta and Vadén (2005, 10) portray it, the different fields of art have their own characteristics, and therefore require some adjustment in approach.

This study focuses on the process of art-making rather than any single product of the process, however portrayed. Therefore, I suggest perceiving my art work within this study as a combination of Musta lammas' performances and the six-month time period for the research. The frequent performances provide declarations of the continuous artistic process – they are milestones of a kind. The six-month period gives depth to the perception of the process and its reflexive nature while still being a reasonable time span to grasp as a whole.

According to Hannula, Suoranta and Vadén (2005), the following are what characterise most artistic research processes:

1.) that the art work is always the first priority

2.) artistic experientiality28 and its transmission

3.) a self-reflective, self-critical and outward-directed research process

4.) that the research is continuously placed and located in the historical and disciplinary contexts

5.) a diversity in methods and committing them to the demands of the particular case

6.) emphasis on a dynamic group situation, providing feedback, experimentation and sharing of thoughts and emotions

7.) the interpretative quality of research (ibid., 20–21).

I find considerable resemblance between the first feature and my choice to position my experience of artistry in the forefront. Perhaps, in my case, a better wording would be that the *artistic work process* is the first priority. This is something that I have certainly committed to. The third, fourth and seventh feature resonate with the autoethnographic methodology discussed in chapter 3.1, and the second feature corresponds to the research setting, where I investigate the process of my artistic praxis and convey it in written form.

I am not sure whether I can commit to the fifth and sixth features. Even though my initial method (autoethnography influenced by artistic research) has been chosen with my topic in mind, the format of this study (the master's thesis) is defined by my institution. Writing this research has been characterised by an inner push-and-pull between interest in the topic itself and the need to fit the criteria of the given format. Researching artistic experiences via scholarly means has not been without friction. Therefore, I am torn about

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28   Note the distinction between experimental and experiential. Experiential means based on or derived from experience (OED Online 2019d).

the fifth feature. Regarding the group situation and feedback (feature number 6), this research process has been shared with both of my writing seminar groups, and they have kindly provided me with insight and peer support. Whether this meets the criteria of a collective effort to improve this research is another matter. On many levels, the singers in Musta lammas, being the core group contributing to the artistic process, are closer to the definition of 'collective effort', but they have consciously been excluded in the research process and were not invited to contribute to the study. Feature 6 is definitely the feature most disconnected from this research. In conclusion, it would seem that this study has at least several of the key characteristics of an artistic research project.

3.3 METHODOLOGICAL SUMMARY

This study operates within the methodological realm of autoethnography with influences from artistic research. It attempts to fulfil the scholarly requirements of the master's thesis, but also to be authentic to the artistic matter at hand. I have defined the frame for this research and the presentation of literature on academic grounds. The further the study proceeds into the formation of its results, the more it has been led by artistic reflexivity. As Bartleet and Ellis (2009, 10) suggest, "The process becomes somewhat improvisational in nature, involving the unexpected interplay between a script and exploration, between tradition and innovation". In my analysis, I have mixed and matched analytical and intuitive approaches alike in order to maintain the authenticity of my artistic voice. However, with the delivery of my results, I find myself leaning towards the moderate viewpoint suggested by Stahlke Wall (2016): combining evocative first-person narratives with analysis, reflection and theory. These choices are discussed in more detail immediately below.

3.4 CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

In this chapter, I present how this research was conducted.

3.4.1 Timeframe

	Research	Musta lammas (as included in the study)
Autumn 2016	Choosing research topic & method.	
Spring 2017	Presenting first draft of the research plan. Collecting data from January to June.	Kuorojen kapina competition Full-length concerts in March and May
Summer 2017	Finishing first round of data collection. Rigorous writing and revising. Gathering research material. First presentation of the results in mid-August.	Aarhus Vocal Festival
Autumn 2017	Reconsidering schedules.	
Summer 2018	Writing & researching. Results being formed.	
Autumn 2018	Presenting research at the NNME Nordplus Intensive Course 2018	
Summer 2019	Finishing touches.	

3.4.2 Collecting Data

My field notes act as a means to grasp my experience of the artistic process, as a way to trigger memories, thoughts, events and the understanding that arises from them (Coffey 1999, 127). The field notes from this six-month period are henceforth alluded to as 'data' or 'primary data'[29]. Data collection took place from January to June 2017. The data sets[30] are presented in a log (Table 1) constructed along the guidelines given by Heewon Chang (2008, 116–120) in *Autoethnography as Method*.

I started with writing about my apprehension[31] of how I perceive and define being a choir conductor and the artistic aspects of that profession. Sets 1–3 represent this phase. I also wrote about what I considered to be the main objectives for Musta lammas' spring semester (data set 4). From there onwards, the groundwork for my field notes was a writing assignment that I structured around our weekly rehearsals.

> **Before:** *What objectives do I have in mind for the rehearsal? Is there anything else that is relevant at the moment or that should otherwise be kept in mind?*

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29   "Primary" as in first, as a distinction from the secondary data set created later during the analysis.

30   "Data set" refers to data collected in one instance with one assignment or topic (Chang 2008, 116).

31   In Finnish *esiymmärrys*

After: *What did I succeed in? Which things left me hoping for more? What are the main things that I have in mind for the next session? Were my objectives realised?*[32]

I decided to apply the same writing assignment to concerts, gigs, competitions and rehearsal weekends alike, as they represent equally important phases of the process. Before any given performance there is always warming up and some rehearsing to do, and these require planning on my behalf, so the assignment seemed appropriate. I also decided to allow myself to write free-formed notes whenever I felt like something important had come to mind. This led to me often finishing the writing assignments with a free flow of anything that was on my mind, and two separate additions (data sets 23–24) during the rehearsal period. I consciously refrained from defining a certain time for collecting data.

According to Chang (2008, 121), ethnographic data collection does not follow a rigid structure, it is instead exploratory, even creative. Listening to intuition and going back to the broadly defined research goal is necessary in order to let submerged thoughts and forgotten memories surface. However, a process like this will easily generate excess data, while many relevant topics might be left aside. (Ibid.) I recognise these attributes in the undertaking of my data collecting. Throughout the writing, I kept returning to the dilemma of what *artistic* conducting actually meant, and whether my writing assignment truly worked in favour of my initial research questions. Here, the openness of the writing assignment turned out to be a relief, and at the time I let myself add whatever I regarded as relevant to my notes.

Data collection, though mostly pleasant, did not take place entirely without frustration. Writing field notes can indeed appear as an unwelcome and time-consuming activity (Coffey 1999, 121). My biggest challenges were finding the time and the focus for writing. At times, I felt the need to distance myself from my musical work (now consisting of both conducting and researching) in order for me to be able to come back to it with fresh perspective and energy. This resulted in occasional breaks from the data collection, the longest being in the month of February, when no data was collected. A part of this need was probably related to occasional difficulties verbalising thoughts and experiences. This will be further discussed in chapter 3.5. These thoughts were documented in the data on the occasions when I persuaded myself to write anyway, and after the periods of not managing to collect data. I see these periods as necessary evils, and as one of the phases of the process.

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32   Translated by writer. Originally: *Ennen treenejä. Mitä tavoitteita minulla on tulevalle treenikerralle? Onko jotain muuta ajankohtaista / mielessä pidettävää?*
Treenien jälkeen. Missä onnistuit? Missä jäi toivomisen varaa? Mikä sulla on päällimmäisenä mielessä ensi viikolle? Toteutuivatko asettamasi tavoitteet?

TABLE 1, DATA LOG (PRIMARY SET OF DATA)

	Data set #	Page	Data Collection Strategy (primary labelling)					Data Content (secondary labelling)		
			Date	Collector	Type	Location	Time	People Involved	Topic / Assignment	Place
January	1	1	17.1.2017	Olsonen	diary	not documented	present	self	artistic leadership	not specified
	2	2	19.1.2017	Olsonen	diary	not documented	present	self & choir	choral directing	not specified
	3	3	24.1.2017	Olsonen	diary	not documented	present	self	professional roles	not specified
	4	4	26.1.2017	Olsonen	diary	N building	spring 2017	self & choir	artistic objectives for spring term 2017	not specified
	5	6	28.1.2017	Olsonen	diary	Kallio-Kuninkala	28.1 Kuorojen kapina semi-finals	self & choir	writing assignment // post	Kuorojen kapina semi-finals
March	7	9	2.3.2017	Olsonen	diary	not documented	2.3 rehearsals	self & choir	writing assignment // pre	rehearsal room
	8	10	4.3.2017	Olsonen	diary	at home	2.3 rehearsals	self & choir	writing assignment // post	rehearsal room
	9	12	4.3.2017	Olsonen	diary	at home	3.3 concert	self & choir	writing assignment // post	rehearsal room
	10	13	15.3.2017	Olsonen	diary	M building library	8.3 rehearsals & 9.3 concert	self & choir	writing assignment // pre	M building
	11	14	15.3.2017	Olsonen	diary	M building library	8.3 rehearsals & 9.3 concert	self & choir	writing assignment // post	M building
	12	16	16.3.2017	Olsonen	diary	not documented	16.3 rehearsals	self & choir	writing assignment // pre	rehearsal room
	13	17	16.3.2017	Olsonen	diary	at home	16.3 rehearsals	self & choir	writing assignment // post	rehearsal room
	14	19	23.3.2017	Olsonen	diary	not documented	23.3 rehearsals	self & choir	writing assignment // pre	rehearsal room
	15	20	28.3.2017	Olsonen	diary	not documented	23.3 rehearsals	self & choir	writing assignment // post	rehearsal room
	16	22	30.3.2017	Olsonen	diary	not documented	30.3 rehearsals	self & choir	writing assignment // pre	rehearsal room
April	17	23	5.4.2017	Olsonen	diary	not documented	30.3 rehearsals	self & choir	writing assignment // post	rehearsal room
	18	24	6.4.2017	Olsonen	diary	not documented	6.4 rehearsals	self & choir	writing assignment // pre	rehearsal room
	19	25	6.4.2017	Olsonen	diary	at home	6.4 rehearsals	self & choir	writing assignment // post	rehearsal room
	20	27	18.4.2017	Olsonen	diary	at home	20.4 rehearsals	self & choir	writing assignment // pre	rehearsal room
	21	28	21.4.2017	Olsonen	diary	M building café	20.4 rehearsals	self & choir	writing assignment // post	rehearsal room
May	22	30	4.5.2017	Olsonen	diary	M building café	4.5 rehearsals	self & choir	writing assignment // pre	rehearsal room
	23	31	12.5.2017	Olsonen	diary	M building café	present	self	general thoughts	not specified
	24	32	17.5.2017	Olsonen	diary	at home	present	self & choir	general thoughts	not specified
	25	34	24.5.2017	Olsonen	diary	M building, summer seminar	18.5 concert	self & choir	writing assignment // post	Monitoimitalo Rastis
	26	35	26.5.2017	Olsonen	diary	at home	25.5 rehearsals	self & choir	writing assignment // post	rehearsal room
June	27	37	12.6.2017	Olsonen	diary	Kaisa library	spring 2017	self & choir	writing assignment // post	Aarhus Vocal Festival, Denmark
	28	42	16.6.2017	Olsonen	diary	Kaisa library	spring 2017	self & choir	final thoughts about achieved & future objectives	not specified
	29	44	21.6.2017	Olsonen	diary	Kaisa library	spring 2017 & 27.4	self & choir	recruitments	not specified
	30	46	27.6.2017	Olsonen	diary	Kaisa library	autum 2015—2016	self & choir	on founding Musta lammas	not specified
	31	49	28.6.2017	Olsonen	diary	Kaisa library	autumn 2015	self & choir	on founding Musta lammas	not specified

3.4.3 Analysing and Interpreting

Qualitative ethnographic analysis requires technique, principle and strategy on the one hand, and imaginative and creative engagement on the other. In methodological literature, significant emphasis is put on discussing fieldwork and a perception of the self, and significantly less attention is given to accounts of the actual analysis. The analytic movement from data to ideas and ideas to theory is elusive, hard to describe and difficult to demonstrate. (Coffey 1999, 136–139)

Dividing the autoethnographic process into distinguished phases of data collection, analysis and interpretation is always artificial to an extent, as these research steps often overlap and mix (Chang 2008, 61–62). My analysis started with a holistic review of the data collection (as advised by Chang 2008, 131–137) in which I attempted to map out the need for more data. I found several blind spots and central topics that had gone undocumented, and I collected data accordingly. I also realised the importance of specifying the origins of Musta lammas, and started looking for documentation from our first gatherings as a way to best trigger those memories.

Next, I initiated a read-through of the field notes, summarising each freely written data log into several sentences written in first person. I attempted not to interpret the data at this point, and tried to merely uncover the main topics and thoughts behind each paragraph. This created my secondary set of data, which I then used whenever I needed a brief overview of the entire research process. I discovered a few reoccurring topics almost immediately, and returned to the research questions, reviewing them again and again. In these discoveries, my analysis took a more explorative and innovative turn, one that allowed me to explore my creative practice further (see Bartleet & Ellis 2009, 6–9).

The main themes of the results occurred as an intuitive synthesis of the analysing process. I would not say that I created my own set of strategies as such, but I certainly departed from the methodical path and let my intuition of the topic itself steer the analysis. [33] I worked a lot with the definitions and wordings of each theme, attempting to clarify what I meant by each one of them. This interpretation phase was arduous, to say the least, as I was simultaneously debating which data to regard as excess and what was truly

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33   Some autoethnographers pursuing artistic research have argued that creating methodological prescriptions for autoethnography is counterproductive. They argue that every autoethnographer should sculpt their own research procedures and concepts according to their research process (Gouzouasis 2019, 2; Uotinen 2010, 178; Valkeapää 2012, 73).

relevant for my initial frame of research. Reflecting back and forth between the main themes, the primary and the secondary set of data helped in refining the results. Slowly, I started moving away from the data sets and towards creating my autoethnography.

3.4.4 Creating an Autoethnography

Within autoethnography, two main methodological directions can be established: the narrative, emotional and evocative; and the theoretical and analytical (Stahlke Wall 2016, 1–2). The options for writing and constructing tales of the self are many (Coffey 1999, 123). Evocative autoethnography is typically written in a first-person voice (Bartleet & Ellis 2009, 7), presenting a story that attempts to resonate with the audience through its personal, emotional nature (Marx et al. 2017, 2). The Handbook of Autoethnography (Holman Jones et al. 2013) provides examples of this in the format of short stories, poems and dialogues. Open-minded experiments within the research tradition have also included performance art, photographic essays and even compositions (Bartleet & Ellis 2009, 7).

Having read a number of evocative accounts, I found myself relating strongly to the trepidation Stahlke Walls (2016, 4–6) expresses over the use of sole narration in the presentation of research results. Whereas I admired the ability of these accounts to (at their best) draw the reader into the world of the narrator, they also seemed incomplete and fell short when it came to further application of the presented contents, additional speculation about the possible outcomes and more explicitly expressed conclusions. Also, I was struck by how strongly I reacted to the narratives that somehow did not appeal to me. They felt considerably distant, some even seemed dull or artificial. This is a risk that comes with utilising evocative narrative; not only does it require considerable narrative and expressive skill on the part of the writer (Anderson 2006, 377), its directedness and explicit intent provokes the reader to react (Holman Jones et al. 2013, 35). With these insights in mind, I began experimenting with a combination of two writing styles – narrative prose on the one hand, and a more analytical, yet personal account with ties to the theoretical framework on the other. After several rewrites, I started to discover my voice as a researcher-writer.

Finding the right tone in autoethnographic writing is crucial. Writing is not merely a practical act of transmitting meanings; we also express, construct and represent ourselves through it (Coffey 1999, 160). At times I found myself writing with considerable defensiveness and almost declaration, as if needing to justify my results rather than

curiously investigating them. When reworking these passages, I tried to follow Wall's (2008, 42–43) lead, attempting to take a step back from my initial assertiveness while still remaining honest and attentive to my experience. After all, the subjective viewpoint was supposed to be used as an asset. Wall (2008, 42–43) describes the dilemma: "[The emotion included in the writing] might cause problems for me if I want to demonstrate that I am behaving like a 'real' researcher, but it will serve a purpose that cannot be served by traditional approaches to knowledge sharing." This balancing act lies at the heart of autoethnographic writing.

3.5 LINGUAL CHOICES

The reality of what is presented as the product of a study like this is a representation created by language. Grasping the lived experience itself is impossible; the researcher is bound to present mere representations of them. For the researcher, writing becomes a way of researching that remodels and suggests interpretations of the phenomena. (Saarnivaara 2002, 122) Here I elaborate on the role of language within this study.

As a choral conductor, verbalising fleeting impressions in order to communicate them to others is familiar to me. I do recognise and relate to Järviö's (2011, 79 & 88–91) struggles with verbalising the inner happenings of making music. However, the instrument that is the choir requires frequent verbal dialogue and direction. How easily the wordings are formed, whether they are relatable and understandable, and whether I reach the desired effect with them is of course another matter. What I mean is that the nature of the choral instrument is prominently linked to words as one means of communication. Therefore, I am used to continuously searching for the appropriate words to convey my musical thoughts.

The artistic processes take place in this outer or inner dialogue with wording, and in hunches, impressions and emotions in a more subtle, un-articulated format. My intention is to equally observe and analyse the already worded thoughts as well as unveil and develop those that have not been verbalised before. Creating a representation of my thoughts, as described above by Saarnivaara (2002), is therefore an appropriate tool for studying my understanding further. Like Bartleet (2009, 729), I believe that approaching the creative process by writing can provide ample professional insight and realisation. Of course, the basis for my writing is in making, experiencing and thinking about music. As described above, verbalising that experience has at times been complicated, even

impossible.[34] I have on those occasions followed Järviö's (2011, 110) lead and held on to the experience, carefully listening and attending to it. Eventually, often much later, the appropriate words and phrases have appeared to me.

I am bilingual, and work, study and spend my free time speaking both Finnish and Swedish. Instead of going with either of those, I chose to write my thesis in English. This might be seen as a controversial choice for a study with an emphasis on personal narrative, so explaining why I chose English seems appropriate. For me, the peer community of choir conductors and a cappella enthusiasts has always been an international one. I acquired not only the foundation for my conducting studies, but also my biggest formal influences within rhythmic choral conducting during my exchange year in Denmark in 2012–2013. Prior to that, my musicianship as the member of a vocal group was immensely influenced by workshops during international a cappella festivals in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Germany. Professional terminology like *blend* and *circle singing* originally entered my world in English.

Upon completing my bachelor's essay about rhythmic choral music in Finland, I received several requests to share it with my international contacts. The essay was in Finnish, and therefore I could not comply. Using Google-translate (as someone suggested) did not seem very attractive. It means a great deal for me to be able to finally contribute to the international discussion with this study. Apart from wanting to reach out and give something back, I also see this as an opportunity to learn. While writing this study, I got accepted to and embarked on studies in an international choral conducting master's programme in Denmark. When it became clear that English would be the language of numerous conversations and reflections during the next couple of years, writing my thesis in the same language became even more attractive. Supported by my first thesis supervisor, I found the courage needed to establish English as the language for this study.

I collected the data and did the first phases of the analysis in Finnish. Musta lammas' primary working language is Finnish, with occasional exceptions for Swedish between the Swedish-speaking members. Being able to write without hesitation was essential for capturing the initial thoughts and feelings. When I started to construct the main themes for the results, I transitioned to English, striving to root the results in the language rather than forming the themes in Finnish and then translating them. Having decided upon the language early in the process meant that, apart from the first research draft, the majority

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34   See Bartleet & Ellis 2009, 9.

of the research has been done in English to begin with. In a way, the languages form a distinction between my role as the Finnish-speaking research subject, and the English-speaking researcher. Thus, my choices of languages add clarity to the otherwise challenging double-role of the autoethnographic researcher.

There is no doubt that doing research in a foreign language is more strenuous, time-consuming and cumbersome than in my mother tongues. The choice of language obviously affects the representation that I can provide of my thoughts. I am aware that creating an evocative narrative requires considerable skill and investment (Anderson 2006, 377), and that giving justice to the richness and complexity of lived life is difficult in writing (Wall 2008, 41). However, if I am to convey thoughts about my artistic understanding, my preference is to form and present them myself rather than having them translated afterwards. Thus I maintain control over what portrayal is given to the reader. As Järviö (2011, 332) puts it: *"Words are, however, not evil or neutral. They just exist differently for different people...even though words have this flattening effect, I can possibly have an impact on what other people think about things by writing about them."*[35]

Lastly, I would like to highlight the assistance I have received. My proofreader Adam Ulrich has not only helped me improve the overall flow of the writing and clarified my expression, but also taught me many valuable lessons about the English language in general.

3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Writing an autoethnography involves exposing parts of oneself to the public eye (Bartleet & Ellis 2009, 10). Indeed, the prospect of publicising this text has been both motivating and daunting at the same time. Knowledge of this vulnerability inevitably affects the researching and writing process. I treat my fieldnotes as confidential data, though selected excerpts have been shared with my supervisors. The public aspect was taken into consideration during the analysis and writing stage of the research. Thereby, I have made conscious and unconscious choices about which selves and experiences to share. The biggest anxiety in a research project like this lies in the presentation of myself and my work, and whether it will be understood.[36] My private and professional life in the world in which my

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35   Translated by the writer. Originally: *Sanat eivät kuitenkaan ole pahoja tai mitäänsanomattomia. Ne ovat vain olemassa eri ihmisille eri tavoilla. – – vaikka sanoilla on tämä latistava ulottuvuus, voin kuitenkin kirjoittamalla asioista ehkä vaikuttaa siihen, miten muut niistä ajattelevat.*

36   See Wall 2008, 41.

research is embedded will also continue after the research is completed (Ellis et al 2011, 281–282) and will be affected by its publication.

Although autoethnography is crafted from an exclusively subjective perspective, there are always other characters within the story that it exposes (Chang 2008, 55–56, 68–69; Stahlke Wall 2016, 4–6; Wall 2008, 49–50). In my case, that includes my singers as individuals and our group as a community, the music writers and arrangers via their work, and my thesis supervisors. Anonymising Musta lammas as a group would have required me to blur out most of the musical and structural characteristics that I regard as essential for this study, and even then it would have been problematic to execute. Having conducted two choirs over the said time span, both choirs would easily recognise Musta lammas as the group in question. Moreover, I feel that the reader being able to reflect this study to our existing musical works lends the research artistic credibility. The choice to openly name our group exposes it as a community, revealing its culture and identity for public scrutiny. A compromise like this can be made with the consent of the involved parties (Chang 2008, 69–70).

I approached the singers that were in the choir during the data collection period via email in July 2017, asking for their permission to conduct the study and promising that the individuals possibly visible in my text would be anonymised. Everyone consented, with no further comments on the choice of writing openly about our group. My impression is therefore that the singers trusted me in this choice, and felt I was qualified to make such a choice as founder of the group.

Some recognisability remains concerning both my thesis seminar groups (who I have shared supervisors with) and the singers. Where possible, I have created characters to act as my singers in the text as templates of people who could very likely sing in the group. In places where recognisable attributes or roles have been important to the narrative, my singers can probably see the link to the events and the people involved. The same applies to my descriptions of work on specific musical passages and their writers and those familiar with the material in question.

4 SETTING THE SCENE

By briefly sharing my background and the situational and cultural context of Musta lammas, I hope to shed light on my position in the research and set the scene for the presentation of my results.

4.1 MY MUSICAL BACKGROUND

My personal approach to this research stems from several viewpoints. My musical journey started by learning to play the cello, then the baroque cello, and taking singing lessons. Within this study, I am first and foremost the choir conductor, one who feels like she has finally found her instrument in the choir. Additionally, I am an a cappella enthusiast that grew into professional music studies via a lengthy journey of learning-by-doing in the vocal group Ensemble Norma. I am an arranger, composer and songwriter, first and foremost within vocal music, who loves approaching music via its architecture, i.e. how it is constructed. I am a music teacher specialised in vocal pedagogy, and I relish the moments when my students learn something new. Most recently, I have also experimented with becoming a researcher.

4.2 FOUNDING MUSTA LAMMAS

The idea of a choir specialised in rhythmic music of the highest achievable quality and ambition had been brewing in my mind for a good while. I think that the desire first came to me around 2009 when attending the Real A Cappella Festival in Västerås, Sweden, where I discovered a Danish choir called Vocal Line. I dreamt of being part of a choir like that. Six years later, in 2015, it had become apparent that no group within my geographical reach fulfilled the requirements of the type of choir I wanted. I needed to create the choir I envisioned. This is the moment of opportunity I mentioned in the introduction, the moments things started to happen quickly.

Musta lammas is Finnish for "black sheep", and humorously refers to our position as the black sheep among Finnish choirs. The local context for the choir is a Finnish vocal music scene (containing both vocal groups and choirs) that could be described as prosperous and internationally acknowledged. At the moment, there are three Finnish vocal groups that operate on a professional full-time basis and tour both nationally and internationally. These are Rajaton, Club For Five, and Fork. All three are primarily known

for their rhythmic repertoire, although Rajaton and Club For Five are known for incorporating elements of classical and folk music into their repertoire. Additionally, there are numerous groups working part-time on both a professional and amateur basis that do interesting and high-end projects regardless of genre.

The Finnish choral scene is vivid and multifaceted. Folk music, contemporary music and traditional chamber choir repertoire (national as well as international) is worked with and presented by a big variety of prestigious choirs. However, there has been a considerable underrepresentation of well-executed rhythmic music. By 'underrepresentation' I mean that the most prestigious and highly regarded Finnish choirs have mainly operated within classical music, folk music and cross-genre, with an aesthetic approach that stems from the classical tradition. Choirs specialising in rhythmic music have lacked local high-level examples from which to draw inspiration and musical standards. Most Finnish choirs, regardless of level, have the occasional rhythmic music number in their repertoire, though this appears to be an attempt to "lighten up the setlist" or "humour the audience".

I do not wish to speak badly of the choirs that are pursuing rhythmic music specifically, nor am I attempting to make choirs with a wide-ranging repertoire shy away from rhythmic music numbers. Both are commendable undertakings which I full-heartedly support! What I am concerned about is whether there is a genuine interest towards what the aesthetics of rhythmic music are, or an acknowledgement of the amount of work required to present rhythmic genres well. These things are recognised and applied in the Finnish vocal group scene, and there is no reason that the choirs could not internalise those aspects as well.

Very few groups approach, say, a piece by Bach, without going into some specifics of baroque aesthetics like sound colour, phrasing and the symbolism of the lyrics. Blues, pop and tango (to name a few) have the same specific needs and characteristics, and these must be studied with care. For me, it was a desire to participate in correcting the situation described above that provided significant motivation for the founding of Musta lammas. The Finnish vocal scene and its audience needed to see that rhythmic music could also be made in a choir, and done so with great precision, high ambitions and soulful, moving results.

Especially before founding the group, I kept worrying about how we would be perceived from the outside. I needed us to present credible results right in the beginning, from our first public appearances, in order to prove my point. These felt like very bold thoughts for someone like me with only a few years of conducting experience. Nonethe-

less, my vision for the choir was clear, and my eagerness to get going overcame my fear. The prospect of trying to gather the best possible singers into one supergroup with practically unlimited artistic possibilities was simultaneously thrilling and nerve-wracking!

With these ambitions in mind I established a few fundamental rules for the choir. From the very beginning, I decided to go with a numbered amount of singers in each part, first and foremost to establish a good musical balance within the group, but also to build a feeling of responsibility between the singers and clarify the recruitment process. Furthermore, I wanted to hold open auditions and thereby attract the most talented, motivated singers I could find (instead of inviting my friends or established contacts). Having worked on Ensemble Norma's repertoire for years, I had developed a strong feeling about what kind of arrangements I considered well-crafted. Musta lammas would only use tailor-made material, and instead of taking in works in progress, material would be well prepared and checked by me in order to optimise rehearsal time.

In January 2016 the recruiting process was set in motion, and the group was transformed from something being planned to something real. In the beginning, a lot of time was spent with me explaining my vision and ideas, but the further along the road we went, the more the responsibility for building our community was shared by the entire group. An important milestone was reached in September 2016 when Musta lammas' first code of conduct was discussed, formed and signed by everyone in the choir. In it, we established our core values:

> *"Musical ambition and professionality.*
>
> *A good team spirit. We give everyone space as individuals, we listen to and respect every member of the group as they are.*
>
> *Sharing knowledge and insights – both within as well as outside of the group.*
>
> *We commit to the group and respect our shared investment in it."*[37]

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37 Translated by writer. Originally: *Musiikillinen kunnianhimo & ammattitaitoisuus. Hyvä yhteishenki. Annamme jokaiselle ryhmän jäsenelle tilaa, kuuntelemme & arvostamme jokaista ryhmän jäsentä sellaisena kuin hän on. Tiedon ja oivallusten jakaminen – ryhmän sisällä ja ryhmämme ulkopuolelle. Sitoudumme ryhmään & kunnioitamme yhteistä satsaustamme.*

5 RESULTS

I embarked on this research journey wanting to examine the topic of the choral conductor's artistry. My research questions were set as follows:

> *What were the key processes within my artistic work as a conductor for Musta lammas over the set time span?*
>
> *What kind of processes were they? Did they reveal specific aesthetic preferences?*
>
> *Do these artistically inclined processes reflect my pedagogy and leadership?*
> *If so, how?*

I now attempt to answer these questions by presenting my findings. They vary in theme from how I perceive the role of the individual singer within the choir to what I am ultimately striving for when creating music. With the conclusion of this research in mind, this variety is both intriguing and challenging. Some of the themes in my findings are intertwined or to some extent even overlapping, whereas others stand on their own. Since the study examines an artistic process mostly via an internal viewpoint (creating an autoethnography), the findings are also inevitably characterised by a creative approach.

Lastly, I would like to remind you, the reader, of the nature of this autoethnography. It consists of a combination of more traditional analytic writing and evocative narrative. The narrative passages, visible as the longer excerpts in *italic* text, have been purposefully crafted during my analysis and interpretation process. I want to emphasise that **the narratives are not extracts from my initial data set.** This is a common misconception that I have come across several times while writing this thesis. The situations I present are indeed rooted in my actual experiences, but they are not documentative portrayals of those events. I have intentionally created narratives to illustrate and aid the reader in understanding my findings. As in any autoethnographic writing, the narrative is created to communicate subjective perceptions, and make them approachable in a way that other styles of writing or research would not allow (see f. ex. Marx et al. 2017, 2). In chapter 5.1, I also utilise mind maps (diagrams 1–3) as a visual aid in presenting my results.

5.1 A CONSTANT NEED TO DEVELOP

My writing assignment[38] for collecting the initial data is formed around objectives – deciding on them, describing how they were worked upon, evaluating that work and planning how to proceed. I set this assignment in order to gain relevant information for the study. Accordingly, I believe that the assignment itself reveals some fundamental truths about my thinking. Having set the focus on objectives, the field notes circle around development and musical growth. We appear to be in a constant endeavour of movement and learning. The way I perceive music making, it seems, is through a continuous process and the refinement of it, without true intentions to ever cease being in motion. As Järviö (2011, 327) puts it, "Every professional musician practises constantly and only few, if any, feels like they are somehow done."[39] The prerequisite for my artistic work seems to be a never-ending process, a perpetual journey towards my musicianship.

So, what happened with the particular objectives that were set and evaluated repeatedly throughout the writing assignment? They are analysed here by comparing three perspectives. I portray these perspectives as mind maps in the following diagrams:

DIAGRAM 1) beginning of term, setting objectives

DIAGRAM 2) end of term, evaluating the conclusion of our work

DIAGRAM 3) end of term, evaluating the outcome of my personal work

In the printed version of this thesis, the diagrams can be found as fold-outs within the front cover, final page and back cover. In the electronic version, links to the diagrams will be available in the list above. With possible offline-users in mind, the diagrams are also added to the very end of this document (see Appendices 1–3). The diagrams and this chapter complement each other. I suggest laying the diagrams out next to the text as you continue reading.

5.1.1 Forming the Perspectives

Seeing development on a weekly basis is something completely different than seeing it on a monthly or annual scale or, as in this particular study, in the span of one semester.

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38   Described in chapter 3.4.2
39   Translated by writer. Originally: *Jokainen ammattimuusikko harjoittelee jatkuvasti ja harva – jos yksikään – muusikko kokee olevansa jotenkin valmis.*

Recognising and understanding development over a longer period of time is an elaborate task of extremely subjective nature. As this research delves into the processes related to a specific artistic vision, it is interested in exactly that assessment. What objectives did I perceive as essential in the end, and what were the thought processes behind them? What is still important as I evaluate the semester as a whole?

The amount of time used to collect the data for each diagram varies. Diagram 1 is based on a single data set (number 4 from 26 January), whereas diagrams 2 and 3 are derived from a multitude of sources collected from May to June 2017, partially from data sets 25–31, and partially from the analysis of the entire data. Consequently, the diagrams differ in contents and emphases, even though many of the same categories can be found in all three diagrams. When writing data sets 25–31, the evaluation of the semester so to speak, I consciously refrained from familiarising myself with what I had written five months prior in data set 4. Instead I freely contemplated our achievements, attempting to capture as much as possible of what I deemed noteworthy at the time.

The diagrams were formed during the analysis. The hierarchy, grouping and headlines of categories that are presented were formed afterwards as part of the analysis in order to display and clarify the supply of selected data. For added clarity, the names of the categories are in **bold** text, whereas the subjects themselves are presented in *italics*.

5.1.2 Development as a Group

The large grey circle titled **Concerning us**[40] in diagram 1 presents the main objectives for our choir's development, whereas diagram 2 presents the corresponding outcome. In this chapter, I attempt to describe our development as a group by presenting and comparing these two diagrams. Amongst the main objectives that concern us, the category of **musical** objectives contains the largest number of defined objectives. Next to it are the other two main categories: **performance** and **planning and structure**. A fourth main category, **social and interpersonal**, emerged in the conclusion. This category is placed so that it partially overlaps with **musical** achievements. Large arrows marking causality point from **social and interpersonal** and **musical** towards **performance**. I have clearly perceived the achievements as more closely linked with each other than the initial objectives were when they were set.

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40   My particular use of "us" and "we" as a means of addressing the collective of the entire choir (myself included) is explained in the chapter 5.2.

The **musical** objectives I initially thought of were numerous and rather detailed. Most of them concerned repertoire; the rest concerned voice groups. It is interesting to see how few outcomes there are over all in the corresponding section of musical achievements – but they are of considerable essence and weight. The achievements placed outside the overlap were unplanned pleasant surprises. However, considerable causality could be seen between the objectives set for the voice groups, namely *Equalising the division of responsibility and effort* and *Further developing unity and expression in sound*, and the achievement of *Mastery of dynamic extremes*. They are in many ways overlapping in substance, and could be regarded as different viewpoints on the same development. Achieving an equal division in vocal responsibility and developing the sound overall are attributes that make the mastery of dynamic extremes possible – and the challenge of producing those nuances again calls for development in said areas. I believe that setting the objectives for the voice groups provided some of the foundation needed to nurture the mastery of dynamic extremes that I highlighted in the achievements.

Throughout the short existence of Musta lammas, I have put considerable effort into developing our rhythmic skills. When setting goals, I thought of those skills in terms of an area we had achieved sufficient proficiency in and would thus no longer require explicit attention on my behalf. Therefore, continuing that work was not include in the core objectives. During data collection, rhythmic training was addressed in one way or another at most rehearsals, just as strength training is an integral part of an ordinary ju-jitsu session, or scales and etudes are a regular part of the string players practice. It was not regarded as a separate or special point of attention. It is therefore especially interesting to see *developing advanced groove awareness* and *tapping into that awareness in prestigious performance situations* as two of the central outcomes. I believe they are somewhat related to the choir's tendency to be at its best in performance situations (though the same could not be said of my past experiences with my own musicianship). I will elaborate on this more thoroughly in chapter 5.6.1. The linkage, marked by an arrow, to *contact, awareness and listening within the group* works in both directions; developing better groove requires awareness and listening skills, and the specific practices for improving groove also advance contact skills in general.

My thoughts concerning repertoire are prominent amongst the objectives. As my conductorship in this group includes responsibility for creating and editing our repertoire in its entirety, I have the possibility to steer us in many directions. The repertoire sets the framework for our work, determining, for example, which skills will require the most practice, what kind of concert programmes we can create and which solos will be

offered for the singers to apply for. In short, the repertoire determines what our music will consist of. Therefore, it seems logical to give the repertoire choices a significant amount of attention when setting objectives. Within this research, the process of choosing what material to work with is discussed extensively in chapter 5.5. Considering the great extent to which the repertoire was planned in advance, its complete absence in the results seems peculiar. When looking back and evaluating our repertoire, my deduction is that it tends to merge with everything else that we do rather than remain an individual point of interest, thus allowing our actions to be the main focus of my attention (i.e. *enjoying being on stage*, *developing advanced groove awareness* and a *feeling of self-worth and pride*, to name a few). The repertoire is what sets the scene for our musical existence. From the perspective of evaluation of diagram 2, portraying repertoire as an individual agent was clearly not relevant. The remaining repertoire-oriented goal set in the overlap of the mutual and the personal, *a well-planned, healthy basis for the production of our repertoire,* will be discussed in chapter 5.1.3 alongside my personal development.

I find it fascinating how the category of **social and interpersonal** appeared among the conclusion without having any proper equivalent in the original objectives. Many of this category's achievements have been a part of my agenda, just perceived in a different light – rather like foundation stones of my musical agency, but not key objectives in themselves. Perhaps the appearance of this category in the results was an unconscious consequence of the artistic perspective being placed in the forefront of this research, ahead of pedagogics? My point of view clearly shifted between the two moments in time. When evaluating the semester, the social and interpersonal outcomes were strongly present in the data, culminating in the large, light circle encompassing all the conclusions – **An overall rising level of ambition**.

Of all the objectives, I believe that *contact, awareness and listening within the group* contains the most explicit references to the social and interpersonal category. However, when setting it as an objective, I thought of it explicitly as a musical parameter. In particular, it was about helping us survive live concerts with less than perfect monitoring (based on several difficult experiences in earlier performances). In general, it was about guiding the singers to be aware of musical entities rather than only their own parts. When the outcome of *contact, awareness and listening within the group* is placed as both a musical and interpersonal topic, I recognise many pedagogical aspects to it. Those aspects contain values concerning how the group should work together and what the general atmosphere should be like. Working with our group dynamics is something I have

continuously[41] found myself placing on our agenda, especially during warm-ups and team building exercises. During the semester, the original musical objective transformed into a socially oriented achievement related to the atmosphere of our group and the musical attributes discussed above. Seeing the way we interact holistically makes a lot of sense. Not only does it take place during the music, but also everywhere outside it and around it. I believe that improving *contact, awareness and listening within the group* is closely tied to the creation of *a trusting, safe atmosphere*, with both having contributed to each other. The outcomes related to *the recognition at the Aarhus Vocal Festival* were created through a mutual experience. The festival provided a big shift in terms of our self-perception. Until that experience, I had experienced occasions on which I needed to convince my singers of the full potential of our group, of how good we could actually get if we really gave it our all. When we placed first in the competition and got a lot of recognition, many things seemed to shift internally for all of us. Everyone's belief in our group was strongly reinforced, and I happily noted a new kind of pride and hunger for new challenges amongst my singers.

In diagram 2, the large white arrows pointing from **social and interpersonal** and **musical** to **performance** signify the considerable contributions of the first two categories and their individual contents to the latter. As the **performance** is where the musical artwork states itself most clearly, a kind of culmination point for the entire process, it would seem logical that most of our undertakings seek to further our performances.[42] It is within this category that I see the biggest difference between the viewpoints of the two diagrams. When setting objectives considering **performance**, I expressed the thoughts that were puzzling me at the moment without really considering the time span or the workload at hand. Having built our entire spring season around our *participation in the competition at the Aarhus Vocal Festival* and preparing ourselves for it, I had left little room for anything else. Exploring *what makes our concerts our own* definitely happened through the full-length concerts held during the spring, but with less purposefulness and intention than I initially intended. *Interesting concert venues*, *developing our interpretation as a group* and *developing more fluent live communication* were themes that yielded to more urgent focus points. There was not really time to keep up with them, nor did they get any dedicated attention during the spring term.

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41   Throughout the existence of this group.
42   The definition of "artwork" used in this study is articulated in chapter 3.2.

The outcomes in the corresponding category of performances all come across as descriptive. *Enjoying being on stage*, *improved stage presence and energy* and *a good concert flow* all depict how we are when we perform. I believe these are to a great extent built upon and enabled by the interpersonal and musical achievements described above; the social and interpersonal foundation allowed us to achieve these attributes in performance situations. Within *good concert flow*, a few tangible details are presented.

In terms of **planning and structure**, the development from the set objectives to the achieved outcomes could be regarded as rather logical, probably due to the practical nature of the matter. In terms of recruitments I found that *attracting good applicants has become easier*. As an exception, however, we did not manage to find a third bass singer.[43] After a sudden (and somewhat challenging) substitute recruitment mid-season, I decided that *future changes in the lineup should be timed to the beginning of each semester*. A key action towards this was to communicate more openly about the recruitment process to our singers, encouraging them to plan their participation in semester-sized chunks.

The objective of *optimising our rehearsal situation* was intentionally quite open and vague. The key target was to improve the rehearsal situation in all possible ways, responding to any emerging needs and ideas. One of my practical solutions was to have the *rehearsal schedule visible in the room*. I felt that this made a surprisingly big change in atmosphere and added a considerable amount of calm and motivation to our rehearsal. At the end of the semester, we had a big feedback session among the entire choir. It will be presented and discussed in further detail in the chapter 5.1.3, for it plays a central role in how I perceive my personal growth over the semester. One of the themes brought up in the feedback session was sharing and discussing different *rehearsal scenarios* in terms of individual preparation. This opened up the discussion of what we expect from each other and how each and every one felt about their own contribution, and it was a welcome reminder of how our daily actions contribute to the entire choir's work flow. After an ambitious semester with an extra project with its own repertoire running parallel to our core activities, we returned to evaluate *balance of repertoire, time management and ambition*. We all felt that we had taken too much on our plate. Even though both projects were a success, it was clear that we would not want to repeat this type of schedule any time soon. As the conductor, I regarded myself as the one mainly responsible for the planning and overall scheduling.

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43   We eventually did, in August 2017, after the set time span for data collection had passed.

5.1.3 My Growth as a Conductor

Collecting data for this research has provided me with frequent opportunities to pause and reflect upon my thoughts about Musta lammas' current undertakings. Such reflection has added considerable depth, perspective and reflexiveness to my own thought process. Gradually, **the research and my musical work has moulded into one** entity, one in which my roles as researcher and conductor overlap and fuse with each other. Similar to the **overall rising level of ambition** in diagram 2, this is presented as an omnipresent attribute in the personal outcomes in diagram 3. The merging of the musical work and research process provides me with deepened knowledge and professional growth. This chapter is mostly based on the post-perspective, presented in diagram 3, with some relation to the pre-perspective, which is portrayed in diagram 1 within the small light circle titled **Concerning me**.

Looking at diagram 3, the outcomes that are closely related to a practical context are placed in the upper half of the mind map – **performances** or/and **rehearsals**. I regard both outcomes as well as everything presented in diagram 2, titled **the conclusion of our work**, as the components that amount (thus the arrows) to **my growth as a conductor**, which is depicted in the darker rectangle on the lower half of the page. Its contents are grouped into two main areas that are partially overlapping – **improved self-knowledge** and **strengthened identity**.

Evaluating my personal growth in particular was not on the agenda for this study when I began to plan it. In terms of the research setting, I believed that writing a data-driven autoethnography with my own experiences of the artistic process as the primary source would already situate me in a very (if not even exceedingly) personal narrative. When setting objectives, I was not consciously differentiating my personal viewpoint from our mutual ones. At the end of the semester, when evaluating the spring term, the amount of personal reflection dawned on me. It was probably not that unexpected for my inner teacher and artist (me being generally prone to internal reflection), but it was truly a surprise for the researcher and her expectations. As the data-analysis of this research proceeded further, it became evident that I could not ignore the large quantity of self-reflection, however hesitant and self-conscious it made me feel. My self-reflections had become an unavoidable part of the results. This process is visible in the diagrams. The top left corner of diagram 1, labelled **Concerning me,** has three themes, yet these grew into the plethora of text that forms the entirety of diagram 3.

Looking back at this time period, two occasions come across as pivotal turning points or epiphanies, as they are called in autoethnography. An epiphany is a transformative experience, a moment that has significant impact on a person's life, an "event after which life does not seem quite the same" (Ellis et al. 2011, 275). I have debated whether to include these epiphanies in the results, and whether they qualify as "real" epiphanies. They certainly were impactful moments within my life as a conductor, but can I equate them to a "[m]oment of problematic experience that illuminates personal character and often signifies a turning point in a person's life" (Denzin 2001, 158)? Looking at diagram 3, however, I see only a few outcomes that are not related to these two moments and their repercussions. Therefore, I have decided to share them in order to better transmit the outcomes they contributed to.

◆

In order to evaluate and set the direction for the upcoming autumn, I had suggested that we'd dedicate a few hours of our rehearsal day in May for internal evaluation. The execution, formation and presentation were done by a volunteering singer. The entire group sat down for a summary and discussion based on internal feedback that had been gathered earlier via a web questionnaire. The questions were grouped around rehearsals, performances and artistic vision. Everyone had had the opportunity to participate in advance.

Although our repertoire and my leadership got a lot of appreciation, a multitude of improvement points came up. Many respondents mentioned that the atmosphere could sometimes get tense and stressful, sometimes at rehearsals, but especially at soundchecks. Someone expressed a worry about their personal input not always being respected and appreciated. Another person pondered whether our goals were in line with the time we had available. The spring semester had indeed been heavily loaded in terms of expectations and material to learn. I experienced the evaluation session as a huge, slowly dawning shock.

My mind instinctively latched onto everything that seemed even slightly negative. Comprehending what was being said (and taking in information that was to some extent internally contradictory) felt challenging. When listening to the summary and discussion derived from it, I noted most of the general improvement points as being directed towards me personally. Being the founder and conductor, I was the individual with single most power and responsibility in the group. If someone was to blame for the dysfunctionalities, it was me.

When evaluation ended, I was feeling terrible. Not only was I upset by the feedback, but also by my strong reaction to it. Rationally, I could see that the entire session and its contents were

intended as improvements for the future and reflections over what could be done better. So why did I feel it shutting me down and consuming the last ounces of energy that I had left? Why couldn't I just receive the feedback in a professional, composed manner, and hear what my singers had experienced? In an emotional fog, I pulled through the remaining two hours of rehearsal. As I came home, I broke down completely.

A few days went by with me being pretty much unable to do anything. It felt like I had suddenly run into this huge barrier and it was everywhere. Finally, I made myself ask for the bulk of the written feedback and go through and do a summary of it. Revisiting the feedback this way as well as processing the event slowly brought me to some key revelations. Also, we were about to present our departure concert and soon after that fly off to the vocal festival with its competition. I needed to pull myself together.

◆

For the purposes of this text, I will refer to the instance above as the feedback epiphany. The second one is, in many ways, its polar opposite.

◆

It is June, and I am finally back on track with the project called my thesis. I am sitting in the Kaisa library, trying to focus on my last writing assignment. It's the one that'll hopefully wrap up the data collection and be the last of my rambles. I'm having trouble finding the words to start with, but that doesn't really bother me. This feeling of lightness, bubbliness and profound gratefulness is something I don't mind lingering in.

WE DID IT! WE DID IT! Not only did we perform well and do our music justice, we actually got first prize in the choral series as well as a special prize for the most innovative arrangement in the entire competition. First prize! For sure I dreamed about it while preparing for the festival, but having it actually happen doesn't seem to make it less unreal. We really managed to pull off our best game. It was immensely gratifying to see my singers get so excited about the music at the festival and then go bonkers with pride and joy over our achievements.

Over the festival weekend, I had discussions with a multitude of conductors and musicians (many of them idols and sources of inspirations from way back) and they were all complimenting Musta lammas and the work we'd done. My conducting was portrayed as inspiring, and our performance overall were described as impressive. It felt great to be seen, appreciated and recognised.

◆

This second epiphany will be referred to as the success epiphany. A success like this is known to raise the choir conductor's status among peers and impact the choir's singers' perception of the group (Nenola 2019, 222), as was mentioned in the previous chapter.

Let us look at the diagrams. In the beginning of the term, I articulated three specific objectives for myself (see diagram 1): *developing my musical listening skills* (in the context of rehearsals), *being even more calm, present and positive in the rehearsal situation*, and *a well-planned, healthy basis for the production of our repertoire*. When comparing them to the outcomes in diagram 3, it strikes me how these objectives represent the practical and tangible aspects of the conducting profession – aspects that are mainly situated in the musical-technical and situational-relational layers of Jansson's (2018, 38) competence model (see also p. 21, chapter 2.2). These aspects are represented within the outcomes, but they are outnumbered by a plethora of outcomes related to **my growth as a conductor** that could be seen as strongly linked to Jansson's layer of existential foundation. I will now focus on the outcomes that are situated within the area of **performances** and **rehearsals**.

I have placed *the feeling of belonging* in the overlap between the two categories. It is something I have experienced from time to time throughout the existence of Musta lammas, and during the time that I was collecting data it was increasing somewhat consistently (although it was not present all the time). Overall, I feel that I *developed a better ability to listen to myself and my train of thought* during rehearsals, being less nervous and more present in the situation. Simply put, my overview of the musical process increased. To some extent, this outcome is tied to the original objective of *being more calm, present and positive in the rehearsal situation.*

Of the outcomes situated within **performances** and **rehearsals**, *gaining some distance within the conducting experience* and *wanting to help us seeing each other and feeling better* where heavily impacted by the two epiphanies. After the shock of the feedback epiphany, conducting during performances changed for me. Looking back, I described it as *gaining some perspective within the conducting experience*. Having gone through intense self-doubt and disappointment, I found myself approaching the performance situation with a healthy distance and newfound serenity. To the outside viewer I might have seemed exactly the same as always, but the difference within my head was immense. Being calmer and more emotionally grounded felt both more professional, and privately, more safe. Bartleet's (2009, 726–767) description of the clarity and collectedness of the performance experience

feels very relatable in this respect. There is no room for doubts and frustration when a performance is due (ibid.).

The feedback epiphany made me realise how much work we had left as far as seeing each other and accepting each other. Not only did I take in what my singers had brought up in terms of feeling unappreciated at times, I also realised that I was personally struggling with the same challenge. My strong reaction to the feedback came from the same source as the feedback – a feeling of not always being seen and appreciated. Since founding the group, I had taken pride in paying a lot of attention to our group dynamics and team building, and considered myself very attentive to building a good atmosphere. The epiphany became a reminder of how important it was to actually live by that principle, even in times of high pressure and exhaustion.

One of my personal characteristics is a *high level of commitment and ambition* that can be seen throughout my creative work. This I already knew and recognised as part of my musicianship. However, to top that off, I discovered an instinctive tendency to overdo rather than understate, and I relate this to the high commitment level. I tend to get very excited about new ideas or concepts and start to see opportunities for applying the new discovery almost everywhere. However, with that high level of commitment and desire to do all it takes I can also easily go overboard and demand a plenitude of an attribute when much less would suffice. This dawned upon me during a session with my singing teacher. We were working on finding the appropriate level of effort for a vocal exercise. I had trouble finding the right balance and was putting in either far too much or far too little effort. My teacher's perceptive analysis of my *natural tendency to overdo* was enlightening – I recognised a similar propensity in my work with the choral instrument! Somehow, I believe that this tendency was easier to recognise in the isolation of the singing lesson, with only us two present to observe my inner workings. Many of the elusive strands of thought that I had experienced while conducting suddenly made sense. I realised that I was prone to instinctively asking my singers to do too much.

In its most positive form, this *high level of commitment and ambition* produces a stream of thought that is *constantly striving forwards*, planning the next move and trying to figure out what is ahead. At its worst it can also turn against itself and produce not only *high level work product*, but also suffocate new creative input and even generate anxiety, guilt and a feeling of worthlessness. Naturally, striving forward rarely allows me to give due credit for things that already work or have already been achieved. This applies to both my inner world and to how I perceive the world around me. The feedback epiphany made me reflect properly on myself and confront the negative outcomes of my ambitions.

What I learned from the feedback epiphany was that I had exhausted myself to the point that I was not functioning well, and that I did not want to continue that way. Becoming overly emotional, only seeing the negatives and not being able to cope with a constructive discussion were clear warning signs. I needed to start *taking responsibility for my wellbeing*, *setting limits to my workload* and *managing my time* better. Substance-wise, these outcomes are linked with the initial objective of *a well-planned, healthy basis for the production of our repertoire* (see diagram 1). I had clearly experienced the production of our repertoire as something potentially stressful and unhealthy. Starting with an objective focused on a certain area of my work, I ended up with an outcome concerning all of it. The outcomes are all placed in the overlap of **improved self-knowledge** and **strengthened identity**, as I see them contributing and belonging to both.

The success epiphany was pivotal for several of the outcomes. Placed under **improved self-knowledge**, *balancing being proud of our work with knowing our next learning challenges* depicts the feeling with which I ended the semester. As a musician, there is a duality I have always found difficult to get right: being eager to develop, and enjoying the music you are currently able to make. Now I found myself inhabiting both and I enjoyed the balance immensely. Could I establish a mindset in which the benefits of both could be enjoyed? The other outcomes linked to the success epiphany are presented under **strengthened identity**: *beginning to see myself primarily as a conductor, getting recognition from respected colleagues* and *a change in professional confidence*. The experience of an audience of peer a cappella lovers, singers, audience members and conductors alike seeing and accrediting our endeavours had a noticeable impact on how I perceived myself professionally. It helped me realise that the choir had come to be my main instrument and that I could properly call myself a conductor.

5.2 MY USE OF "WE"

In this chapter, I account for my usage of "we" or "us" as a collective way of addressing me and the choir as an entity, and how becoming aware of that meaning impacted my research.

◆

We're sitting on both sides of a little round wooden table, crammed close to the entrance to my thesis instructor's office. I exhale slowly, trying to pace my nerves. Last night, in a sudden flash of inspiration, I ended up emailing a set of my first field notes to my instructor – my unedited,

sincere and sometimes rather rambling field notes. It doesn't seem like such a smart idea anymore. My instructor is looking at me curiously.

"I have to admit that I'm a little bit confused. This study is supposed to focus on your subjective point of view, right? Reading through your first field notes, I noticed that you often refer to both 'we' and a general passive." She takes a moment to scroll down on her laptop and reads off the screen, "You write: 'We worked on our intonation during the intro.', 'At this performance our energy and presence were much more unified.' and [she scrolls] 'That tenor solo section is not bad to begin with, but it lacks quite a lot in personality.'" She pauses and looks at me. "To me it seems quite ambiguous who is doing what. I'm not quite sure how you position yourself in all this," she says. "Do you understand what I'm getting at?"

"Perhaps, erm..." I start slowly and pause. "I guess that's how I think most of the time. I hadn't really thought about 'me' and 'we', at least not consciously."

"That's totally OK. You've just started collecting data, you don't need to know everything to from the get-go! That's why I'm here, asking these questions. How would you feel about attempting to write explicitly about yourself, what you experience, what you've chosen to do, and why?"

"But wait – isn't it obvious, I mean, the subjective viewpoint?" I blurt out confused. "We are inside my head, it's me talking us through my thoughts. Isn't it about as explicitly me as it gets, the narrative equalling my experience?"

My instructor smiles gently. "Let me try to explain," she says, "I believe it is very important that you express your thoughts as thoroughly as possible. Being within your head is, as you said, the natural prerequisite. It's how you distinguish yourself within the work you're doing together with the choir that we are interested in, right? I'd encourage you to articulate those thoughts as clearly as possible, so that you and your experience are visible on the page."

"Alright," I say with some trepidation, not really understanding but attempting to co-operate. "So, I need to cram in 'I' as often as I can? I'm not sure I'll feel comfortable with that. I mean, forcing it into those occasions where I would naturally write 'we' seems both artificial and self-centred. You know, I thought that I was knee-deep in the mud of my own thoughts already!" I chuckle, and sigh.

My instructor takes a moment, apparently looking for the right words. "Producing thoughts starting with 'I' could be one way to get there, but don't get too hung up on it. What I'm trying to say is that you'll benefit from making your position clearly visible to yourself. As you progress with the analysis and interpretation, you'll appreciate that. Just think about it and give it a try."

◆

It now appears to me that my obvious reluctance must have been rooted in feeling slightly uncomfortable about highlighting my own position and, quite frankly, taking space within the narrative of my field notes. Despite the fact that I had eagerly chosen and framed my own understanding to be the subject of this research, my supervisor's advice seemed to touch a nerve I hadn't been conscious of.

This discussion with my supervisor took place early in the data collection process and helped me become increasingly aware of myself during the following months. I found myself distinguishing my role and position with growing confidence. At its best, it added clarity and grounding to my perspective. At its worst, it made me uncomfortably self-aware when facing difficult situations when I realised how lonely my position within Musta lammas' community is. Nonetheless, the increased awareness proved helpful to both this research process and my growth as a conductor. Similar accounts of self-consciousness and trepidation in drawing attention to the researcher have been shared by Wall (2008, 48) and Järviö (2011, 101), and concern the entire research endeavour and autoethnographic method as well as explicitly exposing oneself in the written text. This seems to be a typical process within the autoethnographic journey.

This has made me aware of the occasions when using "we" clearly serves a purpose. When describing the choir and me working as one unit, "we" seems to be both my preferred wording and way of thinking. In my mind, it includes the entire choir as a community as well as where the community is heading, without specifying individual roles or responsibilities. At a concert, *we* perform and sing our hearts out. At a rehearsal, *we* figure out the music and work with the details until they fit. The *we* allows me to place myself as a cog in the wheel, serving the team from my own position.

Some of Sandberg Jurström's (2000, 46) interviewees expressed a desire to blur the lines of their conductorship much further. They stated that they did not see their role as explicit conductors as very relevant or purposeful, rather they preferred to portray themselves as music makers among the choir, as co-musicians. In contrast to them, I do not see the "we" as a diffuser of my specific position as the conductor.

I believe that using "we" underlines the joint effort and addresses the interactive nature of the group. As the conductor I am most certainly responsible for the direction and efficiency of our actions. Most of the time I do indeed dictate what we do and the direction we take. However, everyone in the group still has at least significant (though not quite equal) influence over what we do via what they bring with them to rehearsals, i.e. their explicit wishes and comments, their non-verbal communication, their energy levels and engagement, and their thoughts and feelings about the entire process. On the

occasions when I chose the approach of "we", positioning us as "me" and "them" would have created a juxtaposition that would not only be unnecessary, but also counterproductive. The concept of "we" allows everyone in the group to claim responsibility for their shared efforts. It also enables me to acknowledge this shared responsibility, reminding me of the nature of the team effort that I lead.

A very similar acknowledgement can be seen in Bartleet's (2009) claim about the relationships being the foundations for her musical work. Whereas my preferred usage of "we" highlights that the entire group has responsibility for and power over the joint effort, she draws parallels between her musicians becoming pro-actively involved in the music making and diminishing the "them" and "me" and "it" and encouraging an "us" instead. (Ibid., 724) Bartleet's claim and mine are both placed in the layer of situational -relational mastery in terms of control/empowerment and mentorship, and in the existential foundation in terms of presence and devotion (see Jansson's competence model, figure 2). In terms of the artistry, a strong purpose or foundational value would seem to be placed in the "we".

Of Sandberg Jurström's (2000, 48–50) conductor portraits, the conventional conductor in their all-knowing maestro position could be seen as a lobbyist for a "me" and "them", and the unconventional conductor as the process-oriented speaker for "us". Sandberg Jurström suggests that all conductors have traits from both portraits. Crafting this autoethnography further, I would argue that having both "me", "the singers" and "we" in my vocabulary serves a good purpose. It allows me to describe my experiences and viewpoint in better detail. A usage of "we" that matches this description is clearly visible throughout my fieldnotes, and it becomes more distinguished as the data collection progresses. I interpret this as a reflection of my growing awareness of myself. Going forward with the results, I will be referring to "we" or "us" in accordance with this definition.

5.3 CREATIVE COLLABORATION

Each musician in an ensemble brings their unique skill set and personal aesthetics to the shared musical table. This is the rarity of the conductor's instrument; it is a living community of musicians whose own ways of doing and expressing music needs to be connected with the musical entity (Konttinen 2007, 240). Throughout my field notes, I found myself inviting individual talent to be utilised as a shared asset for the entire choir. In this chapter, I attempt to explore this further.

◆

We are gathered as usual for our Thursday rehearsals. It's the first rehearsal after Easter break and the singers seem to greet each other with a little extra warmth. The brief holiday has clearly been appreciated. I'm enthused and a little bit nervous. We have a new arrangement to learn, and I am really looking forward to working on it. It is a clever re-arrangement with a totally new approach to an older hit song. I haven't had enough time to practise playing it on piano though, and I'm also a bit worried about our timeframe. Apart from getting going with this arrangement, we need to find time for detail work with two other songs, and the last hour of the rehearsal is devoted to another project we're working on. I look around the room and raise my voice. "OK guys, time to get started! Gather up, we'll warm up in a circle!"

◆

Half an hour later we'd built up the basic elements for the new number, established the groove[44] with its triplet-feel eight-notes and sung through the first four pages a few times. It's time to have a look at the solo section.

"First sopranos and first tenors, I'd like to go through your passage on the second page. We'll keep looping the first eight bars. Everyone else, help us out by maintaining the time feel with whatever you'd like to contribute – ghost notes, snaps, you name it." I start with a step indicating our rhythm. The singers join almost immediately, adding on improvised rhythms. "We'll start with all soloists singing together, and then one at a time, starting with Aino. All clear?" The seven soloists grin a little to each other during the joint sing-through. Two are bravely attempting to sing the part by heart and are looking at each other intensely, trying to support each other and sync their phrasing. The other five keep glancing at the sheets. "Let's take it one more time together, just to be absolutely sure about the beats," I instruct, and we continue. "And then Aino," I say.

Aino sings her round with high energy, exaggerating the consonants a smidgen for some extra groove. The other singers smile appreciatively. "Cool!" someone rushes to comment just before Lauri starts his round. Lauri sounds light and effortless, depicting a happy-go-lucky attitude to the t. Fumbling with the last words, he lets out a chuckle. "Never mind," I shout, "that was great!"

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44   The concept of groove concerns not only the rhythmic elements of a piece of music, but also the nuances in which those elements are being performed, expressed, played with and felt (Whittall 2015, para. 1–2). See also Zbikowski 2004.

Next in line is Tuomas, who sets off with his gaze locked on the floor. He must be nervous, I think, though no one would probably know just by listening to him. His tone is almost speech-like, and he does a subtle bend at the end of the last note. The singers next to him nod approvingly. Left of Tuomas, Veera seems to be caught off guard. "Gosh, that went fast. Let me just pull myself together," she says and breathes loudly. The accompanying rhythm pattern continues, and several singers give Veera encouraging looks. She tends to get very giggly with exercises like this. Looking extremely focused, she sings her eight bars with an airy tone, making the solo sound very indie and ethereal at the same time. The rest of the choir cheers spontaneously, and the round continues.

◆

We've gone with Tuomas' example and are now attempting to duplicate it within the entire section. He calls one phrase at the time, and the other six singers respond, focused on mimicking each little detail. "Let's take a moment to work with the last phrase! I think you're nailing that last bend really well. Could you be even more precise with the exact beginning and ending of the note?" I suggest. The section sounds more and more unified with each attempt.

"Tuomas, could you take the second phrase again?" Lauri asks. "Let's listen to how he phrases those first two words just behind the beat. We're hurrying a bit there." I nod, and we continue working.

◆

The musical options in terms of phrasing, timbre, subtle differences in pronunciation, attitude and time feel are numerous – all according to whom we choose to follow. Artistically, this opens up a wide range of expression to play around with. When attempting to create appealing and diverse music, I find myself strongly drawn to this approach. I prefer it to settling for the aesthetic middle ground (or, if not consciously thinking about the matter, letting that middle ground be formed by the defaults of what everyone is doing) where personality and expression seem to get lost.

It is fascinating to think that we can borrow from each other and all exude everything from Veera's ethereal approach to Aino's energetic groove! Of course, to succeed with this approach, a great amount of attention must be placed on following and mirroring each other, as well as being able to produce the subtlest nuances with the voice. When required, each singer needs to be able to abandon their personal preferences in order to blend with someone else. Not only do we utilise Veera's natural airiness as an example in selected passages – she also needs to be able to leave the air out when copying an example

of different character. In my experience, aesthetic and technical flexibility like this takes a lot of training but provides one with a wider vocabulary than one would end up using on one's own.[45]

Besides having utilised my singers' soloistic strengths, I also invited them to share their knowledge in a more traditional setting. From time to time, a singer with expert knowledge in a certain area was invited to teach the entire choir. This could happen on anyone's initiative (mostly on mine, but sometimes also on that of the guest teacher), or as an open request from the choir. Changing the educator not only allowed us to tap more explicitly into our combined pool of knowledge, but also brought fresh energy and new viewpoints to the table. For example, whilst sharing knowledge about the reaction time needed for preparing proper support for a specific passage, a subject that is predominantly about voice technique, one of the singers made me realise that my conducting gestures needed to be changed to properly prompt that. Many times, smaller bits of knowledge were spontaneously shared during rehearsals, with the singers suggesting helpful tools and ideas for everyone.

In my utilisation, this kind of creative collaboration consists of two main strands:

1.) Appreciating the individual as someone who contributes considerably with his or her musicianship.

2.) Striving for extensive blending with each other when singing, and thereby expecting the singers to operate on a wide vocal and musical range.

Conductor John Storgårds expresses a similar view regarding his interpretational work: he will not settle on any specific expression of the music before he has heard what the orchestra has to offer (Konttinen 2007, 218 & 238–240). This statement would imply a similar respect of the musicians' artistic integrity, though in my case it applies to the musical contributions of individuals, not an orchestra.

For me, both principals are familiar from the context of vocal groups, which is where I received the bulk of my musical upbringing. Bringing approaches like these to a choir is not entirely without its challenges due to the sheer size of the group. Inviting initiative from the singers of a choir requires genuine engagement in a dialogue, and practical

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45 A similar stance has been taken in the rhythmic singing curriculum at the Sibelius Academy, where singing students preparing for the D and C exam are expected to familiarise themselves with and be able to portray vocal aesthetics of several different rhythmic genres, including appropriate vocal technique, frasing, ornamentation and rhythm feel (Sibelius Academy 2018, 13–20).

strategies to facilitate that. At times I have felt exhausted by the amount of input and discussion – as if it would not be challenging enough to figure out one's own thoughts, let alone those of an entire groups! – but in the end it has paid off, and yielded results that I find musically rewarding and stand behind. As in any detailed work process, these methods can sometimes be time consuming. To balance it out, I strive to alternate them with more traditional approaches. One of my reoccurring self-reflections has been about finding the right combination of input from the group and conductor-centred action. I believe that both are important and serve a purpose.

This balancing act could be interpreted as occurring within Sandberg Jurström's (2000, 48–50) conductor portraits. On the one hand, the unconventional conductor's participatory approach is what enables the group to own a kaleidoscope of aesthetics and give the singers ownership of the music. On the other hand, the conventional conductor is called in for improved time-efficiency and a desire to provide the group with quicker progress. My preferences clearly lean towards the former as an expression of my preferred aesthetics, but I am evidently recognising the need for a balance between the two.

I regard creative collaboration as an artistic choice that adds to our combined skill set as well as range of expression. For all the individuals in the group, me included, it creates a lucrative and motivating peer-learning environment where we share the best of our knowledge with each other. It also provides an opportunity for each singer to be seen with their individual skills and get encouragement, and thereby claim even more ownership of our musical achievements. Seen from my perspective, the payoff of creative collaboration comes in the energy, engagement, respect, unity and blend it generates.

From the perspective of the conductor's competences found in Jansson's model (2018, figure 2), the wider theme of creative collaboration is rooted in the situational-relational layer in the conductor's control/empowerment and mentorship in its desire to let the best knowledge lead and give the singers ownership over the music. The quest to use an individual singer as reference and striving to assimilate their aesthetic choices is related to rehearsal interventions as a specific tool or approach. In the existential foundation, the theme ties together with the devotion and aesthetic will of the conductor.

The bottom line of my thinking seems to be that a diversity of personal aesthetics, refined and soulfully executed, is artistically more appealing than the attempt to apply the exact same aesthetic approach everywhere. This is a paradox of sorts, as choosing diversity can be seen as its own distinct choice. This approach is clearly part of my current preferences. I see my repertoire choices as mirroring that approach. From the very beginning, I decided not to build Musta lammas' music solely on my own arrangements.

I realised that my personal taste would always be audible in my work, no matter how much I tried to create diversity in my arrangements. As a conductor, I felt that digging into someone else's musical mind was refreshing and inspiring in ways that cannot be achieved within one's own work. To assure Musta lammas the best, most interesting and diverse repertoire, I applied the same thought of aesthetic diversity to the origins of our repertoire. I will delve into the specifics of repertoire choices in chapter 5.5.2.

5.4 WHAT MAKES THE BIGGEST IMPACT?

The majority of the conductor's work consists of rehearsing, and this is where the role of conductor unfolds. The conductor's task is twofold: planning the rehearsal activities and directing those activities while rehearsing. (Jansson 2018, 51) This must be done with limited time, limited amounts of energy and limited attention span. To top it all off, it must also be done with the shared task of creating music, which often requires a lot of effort. Therefore, figuring out how best to use time and what practices will have the biggest impact on the music is a top priority. Bartleet (2009, 722–723) describes this as a never-ending evaluation loop that follows her through rehearsals. A similar inner dialogue is visible throughout my field notes from week to week, both in preparations for rehearsals as well as reviews of them.

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The room is filled with voices, singing one line.

"It's a new da-awn, it's a new da-ay, it's a new li-ife, for me-e-e!"

We're working on a recurring homophonic passage of Feeling Good. It's one of the rare occasions when the entire choir is united in lyrics and rhythm, with a bold chord progression adding tension as the four-bar phrase progresses. This is the definition of powerful re-arranging. Our previous performances of the song, however, have been somewhat problematic. We tend to get flat just enough to rob our basses of their lowest notes and the tone of the song overall has been difficult to maintain. Striving for a rather hefty sound, we often get too shouty, and the rhythm feel tends to lean back just a tad too much, creating a feeling of too much traction and stickiness. This is the passage that opens the song and reoccurs as a bridge leading to the chorus. It is a great checkpoint for most of these issues, and I'm happy for the chance to address them.

"I feel that C major chord that we keep returning to gets a little crumpled by each repeat,

especially in the higher tones. Could I hear only the basses and the first sopranos once through?"

The two parts, outlining the section in octaves, sound quite alright together. I ask for another repeat in order to give the singers the possibility to nail the pitches, and now they're fully aware of how their parts match. It gets a lot better.

"Second sopranos, please join us! The first sopranos' and basses' melody represents pretty much a c-driven drone. That's a good tonal checking point. Before hitting each note, could you anticipate how it would sound when perfectly in tune? This, as opposed to thinking of the pitch after you've landed on the note. First sopranos and basses – no matter how the other parts challenge you to move from your drone, you don't budge. You're our rock here, the foundation for everything else."

Comparing the wavelike, chromatically ascending and descending parts with C produces insight.

"Erhm, I just realised that we've been awfully flat at that top G. It's clear now, without the other parts in between," a second soprano comments, more to the other second sopranos than anyone else. "We need to remember to aim almost too high, I guess, to change our muscle memory," she says. The other sopranos nod and murmur approvingly.

One of the basses raises his hand. "And our C has been wandering around – it's good to get it fixed now."

We get through the same nit-picking with the altos and the tenors and their similar parts and decide to put it all together. The pitch is in general much better, but as a whole it still sounds quite dull, even forced. And we're definitely not together on the beats. I choose to ignore that for now and tackle one issue at a time.

"Everyone, please stand up, let's take it once more! Sopranos and basses, be extra mindful with maintaining your C," I instruct, hoping that changing posture will provide the needed energy. During the phrase, I notice that many singers are straining themselves, trying to nail those freshened intervals with great effort. No wonder the choir sounds tense. The first sopranos are sounding weary. They've been singing the same, rather heavy passage all this time, I realise. Drawing this out isn't going to get us anywhere.

"Thank you. Let's see if we can solve this with a change of strategy. So, we have the lyrics that happen at the same time for everyone. Let's take advantage of that and read those once through in tempo."

◆

Working with the lyrics gives us rhythmic momentum. We do an exercise without pitches, focusing on sub-divisions and ghost notes. It adds to a solid, active time feel. "Now we'll do the same singing. The main focus is to just continue with the same rhythm feel, and to maintain the energy." We're certainly more unified rhythmically, but the chords and the energy are still not quite there. I start to feel frustrated. I have a distinct picture of how the passage should sound, but we're still miles away from it.

◆

A week later, Miina is in charge of our warm-up. She's presented a mental model that she has recently discovered for engaging the entire body when singing. As she is rounding up, I open my laptop to take a look at my planned schedule. A fresh thought cuts through my mind. Could this be the solution to Feeling Good? I decide to change my plans.

"Let's build on Miina's exercise and sing the beginning of Feeling Good! You don't need sheet music, we'll just do the first page. Just keep that feeling (I imitate Miina's example of posture) throughout. Everything else is secondary," I say. I hum the pitches and count us in.

The sounds of the opening passage reverberate in the room, effortless, powerful and free. The blend is close to flawless, both in terms of timing and timbre. If I hadn't been present at the last rehearsal, I wouldn't believe that we'd struggled with the tuning.

"That was great, what a sound and engagement! That's what we want to do with this passage, every time it occurs during the song. Thanks Miina for the inspiration, and good job everyone! Let's do it again and extend a little more energy to the last notes. As you sing the beginning of the phrase, you could think that you are sustaining the energy just a little so that you can give that little bit of extra support at the end. Also, just check the sheet music for which parts have the pickups, and which don't. That's the last thing to nail here."

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When the right focus point is found, it can be immensely effective and consolidating, solving several issues at once. In this example, approaching the song from a bodily perspective meant utilising the exercise with singing technique that we had already done during the warmup. That provided the energy needed for nailing the tuning without trying too hard and tensing up, as well as making the singers rhythmically very active and responsible, thereby solving other challenges. It is a relief not to juggle several tasks at once and focus instead on just one key thought that works magic for the piece. These

focus points then serve as cherished keys that can later be used to enter the music and quickly remember how it felt and sounded when everything was "just right".

Whether this is a primarily artistic theme could be debated. On the surface, it appears to relate strongly to the choral conductor's competence model's (Jansson 2018, 138) musical-technical mastery, to a failure to recognise the problem (error detection / aural skills) and situational-relational mastery in addressing it appropriately (rehearsal interventions). Indeed, the conductor's knowledge of the craft should provide them with the know-how needed to effectively achieve certain technical goals (Durrant 2009, 336). So is this case really a matter of anything other than the teacher looking for the right approach, and hence a matter regarding improvement of technical skills?

For me, the artistry is present in the determination and direction that it takes to solve the musical challenges. As described in the narrative above, it can sometimes be difficult to find out what makes the biggest impact. On the one hand, it requires commitment to the process itself, and on the other, a strong vision of what the goal is. In Jansson's model, the equivalent to this is called aesthetic will: "[A musical idea's] manifestation as sounding music is inextricably linked to the conductor's *will* to make it happen. A musical idea without this determination to make it sound remains only a thought, so that the notion of aesthetic will represents the enactive force of musical knowledge. Furthermore, because there is friction where there is change, and it takes energy to overcome resistance, the conductor must gather this willpower during the preparation process, systematically and relentlessly mitigating any discrepancy between the initial sound of a work and the idea for its final expression." (Jansson 2018, 84–85, emphasis in the original) In other words, shaping the musical material at hand towards the desired vision is associated with an amount of strain and effort that comes from sheer change. Durrant's portrayal of the effective conductor's craftmanship smoothly serving their musical vision (Durrant 2009, 336–337) is a beautiful ideal to strive towards, but in reality, my own experiences bear more resemblance to Jansson's account of persistence and relentlessness. The next chapter will delve deeper into a description of the forming and claiming of an artistic vision.

5.5 IN PURSUIT OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY[46]

During the analysis and interpretation, I kept running into an underlying pursuit of quality, a desire for thoroughly well-built music. I strongly experience an inner urge to somehow fulfil the music that I am creating – to develop it to its fullest, truest form. In my conscious mind, there is no certain point when I started experiencing this urge. Rather, I think that it has always been there as part of my musicianship and artistry. The previous research on the conductor's perceived roles does describe the conductor as an artist who loves music, and that love is the conductors fundamental *raison d'être*, permeating the entire work process (Karjula 2018, 50–59; Sandberg Jurström 2000, 25). In my preparation process for the rehearsals, I would allude to this endeavour as both a fundament in its own right (as a synonym for a fulfilling, meaningful musical experience) as well as a measuring stick for our efforts (as a means of navigating within the rehearsal process of a certain song). When analysing the work done specifically on our repertoire, my attention shifted towards the pursuit of this quality. Why did different pieces of music feel so different in terms of what they brought out of the choir and the work they seemed to require? When working on a piece, I could see myself progressing with the musical problem-solving with a certain goal in mind: to feel that the pieces of the song fell into place. What was that about?

I have grouped this chapter into two parts. The first part discusses the process within one song, building further on the execution of aesthetic will discussed in the previous chapter. The second part analyses why different songs suit us differently.

5.5.1 Making the Pieces of a Song Fall into Place

"Next, I'd like us to revisit the first verses of O. We'll start by singing them once through, just like we did at the Black Box performance last month."

A light murmur rises as the singers re-adjust their positions and start looking for the sheet music. I see a few concerned and thoughtful expressions.

"I guess I feel the same as many of you. The last performance of O fell short of what we've envisioned. Let's just start by assessing what we have on the table."

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46   *Laatu* in Finnish, *kvalitet* in Swedish.

This song, and particularly its beginning, has come a long way since we first performed it ten months ago. Our current version opens with an improvised maritime soundscape; breezes of air, soft waves and a few birds. In our minds we picture a vast, blue sky spreading above a seemingly endless horizon. In the middle of the unfolding landscape, four voices softly start to sing. They go through the verse and its four phrases in a flowing rubato. Between each phrase there is time to breathe and sense the space. The quartet lingers dreamily on some words and moves forward eagerly on others. Now we've come to the transition that usually either makes or breaks this performance. The quartet will switch to maintaining the soundscape, whereas the majority of the choir will switch to singing their version of the same verse, un-conducted, deciding on the rubato by just listening to and following each other.

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We are at that exact moment at the sing-through. Most of the singers are eyeing each other, their gazes sweeping from side to side. Someone is staring up absently, a few others have their eyes closed. As the feeling of suspense thickens, some of them startle a little and raise their gazes, noticing the joint anticipation. A few singers start to inhale pointedly. Many join, others are a bit slower in their reaction. The inhale is a little too prolonged. Someone is early with a whizzing "fffflo - "

...and within that same fraction of a second the bubble of concentration bursts, and the room breaks out in a fit of giggles and laughter, with a few attempts on "flock", the first word of the first phrase. I take a moment and gather myself.

"OK, let's give it another go! We ought to meet somewhere in the middle with our energies, and be both present relaxed but active at the same time. I need some soundscape to begin with (I gesture in a rotating motion with my right hand), let's have the quartets last phrase on top of that."

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When we initially started working on the un-conducted rubato (instead of me providing the impulses), we did a ton of preparatory exercises following, reacting to and mirroring each other. At some point I ended up instructing everyone that they should avoid consciously giving impulses. A few of the singers had started to habitually give huge impulses by nodding and breathing heavily. There would be no point in replacing the conductor's initiation of impulses with one of the singers doing, essentially, the same job. My vision was to make the rubato as effortless as the quartet's, just

with four times the amount of singers. It sure would not be easy, but I knew it was possible if we just become sensitive enough to each other. A question I got at that rehearsal stuck with me.

"I'm curious," one of the singers asked, "how is this supposed to work, purely from a theoretical perspective? I guess I've got something of an engineer's brain here, but I mean, if none of us is allowed to give the impulse, and we're only to anticipate and follow what everyone else does, how will anything ever happen?"

I remember rambling something about increased awareness, the combination of following and leading at the same time, and those miniscule time differences that would always occur in between the singers but that the audience wouldn't notice. I said that in the end it would come down to trusting each other, being present and remaining open to that shared momentum. The singer admitted that it didn't really make sense to him, but that he was willing to see if it would start to come together at some point. I felt simultaneously grateful for the trust he put in me, bemused by the difficulty of explain what I was after, and surprised that he bought my crappy rationale.

◆

We have switched over to a simple exercise of trying out different alternatives for the phrasing of the first verse by call and response. One at a time, a singer volunteers to suggest variations one phrase at the time, and the entire choir repeats the same phrasing in four-part harmony. We turn it into a game, seeing how differently we can do the same four phrases. It's fun, it's interesting, and it's definitely something other than the stiff anticipation that has dominated this passage for the last few months. The singers look curious and engaged and do all they can to follow each volunteer.

"We're widening our mutual understanding of the options we have out there, and that's terrific! Remember – it's not only about when to begin and end each phrase. There's movement and options within the phrases too," I summarise. "So, let's see where we stand with the rubato today."

I take a few steps back and let the singers gather their focus for a moment before I give the pitch. They are looking at each other with evident enjoyment and curiosity as they start off the first phrase in unanimous agreement. Some are still indicating the impulse strongly, others very subtly, but there is a shared level of energy and attention that seems to tie everyone together most of the time. In the last phrase, one singer manages to get ahead of the whole group, resulting in sympathetic grins and nods as they finish off.

"We're still doing the phrases pretty much the same as always," one of the altos comments straight away. "It'd be so much more interesting if we did a true rubato and have it totally different each time!"

"Hmm. I do get your point," I reply, "however, the synchronisation we achieved in the first three phrases was kind of what I was getting at. When approaching the rubato, it doesn't necessarily have to be wildly exploratory every time, even though that'd be cool too. The main point for me lies in being totally synced. I'll buy anything that you do in that perfect rhythmic unison – and so will the audience. Let's explore and give it another go!" Suddenly, as I speak, many things in my mind fall into place at the same time. Even though I've worked hard on limiting my verbal instructions to an efficient minimum (and this new attempt combines two large thoughts and pieces of feedback in practically the same breath, which is less than ideal), I can't help but have a try at communicating this realisation. "Actually – remember when I told you to avoid giving impulses? I take that back now. Instead of thinking of impulses that come from within ourselves, I think that we should consciously listen to and look for the joint impulse – the one that we've just felt. When you can feel it coming up, give it space and express it to confirm to everyone else that you feel it too."

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Looking for the joint impulse – that was the key. We nailed the intro on the following takes. I am sure that the playfulness and varied vocabulary of the phrasing exercise we did earlier also contributed hugely to us being sensitive and open to each other. With one concept, the joint impulse, we managed to nail both the timing of the rubato, as well as bring a supported, soothing tone and a light, playful and present character to the performance. This was simultaneously a display of finding what made the biggest impact (chapter 5.4) as well as a moment when I distinctively felt having the pieces of the song fall into place. Realising the musical vision I had been striving for was incredibly rewarding.

This vision was by no means clear to me a year earlier when we first started working with the song. From the beginning, the arranger presented us with the ambitious idea of a rubato opening. At our first performance, I stood in front of the choir, initiating the beginning of each phrase, sung in an attempted joint rubato. After that, I felt that the structure of the song needed to be modified. The rubato beginning felt rather short and setting the proper mood for it would require more preparation. Thus the soundscape was introduced, and then the idea of repeating the first verse, first with a quartet, and then with the entire choir. I stopped conducting the rubato, handing over responsibility to the singers. I was trying my best to convey the experience I had had of singers following each other when a vocal group is at its best. Our second performance of the song was already better, though there was a lot of stiffness and even some anxiety due to difficulties hearing each

other on stage. Attempting to fix these difficulties, the quartet was positioned closer to each other and the approach to the collective rubato reworked. Finally, we had managed to figure out the song – to make the best possible version of it. This quest to develop the outcome resembles what Jansson (2018, 84) describes as happening at each rehearsal: the conductor balances their plans with new possibilities that are discovered in the moment and parts of the original vision that might prove undoable. It is a path of exploration, one which is difficult to predict.

I am, of course, simplifying numerous details in the story in order to make the narrative easy to follow and understand. The first verses are certainly not the only parts of the song that have been revised, although they have been the most difficult! Throughout the process, many smaller steps, phases and discussions have contributed to the end result. What I would like to highlight is the distinct feeling that I keep striving towards: that of "cracking the code" and "making it". Not having achieved that feeling is one of the strongest engines driving my musical curiosity.

I believe the sense of accomplishing "it" to be a combination of both finding an artistically satisfying solution that works as a concept, and of finding the means to achieve that concept in reality; both are highly relevant to the underlying pursuit of quality. The former would point to my inner scheme of the song, and the latter to my abilities to facilitate that concept pedagogically, to transform it into something that we can bring about. Both are paths of exploration that impact one another throughout the process.

I locate the experience of making the pieces of a song fall into place distinctively to the rehearsal room. Although a lot of the preparation happens before entering that space – both with the custom-made material itself, and in me getting familiar with it and preparing for how to best introduce it to the group – those preparations never pan out with similar satisfaction and certainty. This could possibly have something to do with our material being custom-made for us. Before it is actually realised as sounding music, there is no certainty that custom-made material will be good or work out. This stands in contrast to a familiar piece of music that has been previously performed or recorded by someone else who has already set a claim on its musical potential.

The metaphor of having set the pieces in place would imply a certain order of the pieces, as if a certain selection of choices would guarantee a solved case. Even if the "solved version of a song" (described above) would somehow be perfectly captured in a recording of some sort, that would be only one manifestation of the choral artwork[47], the nature of which is to change and develop over time. As the choir moves forward, the

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47   As defined in chapter 3.2.

music does too, and similarly, the challenges that the music poses to its performer also change. Norjanen (2015, 142) describes working with the same music over a longer time span as an opportunity to seek fresh solutions and improve. Each time, something new appears, something that he did not catch previously (ibid.). Above, I described my inner scheme of the song as forming and developing throughout our rehearsal process, and I hope that it will remain in similar motion over the years, providing me with more to explore when working with the familiar numbers of our repertoire.

5.5.2 Finding Music That Flatters Us

Just as different clothes fit different people, different pieces of music fit different choirs. Looking for that perfect musical fit and discovering new genres and musical textures is an exciting part of the conducting profession. As mentioned earlier, Musta lammas' arrangements are all custom-made, which means that I have both the possibility and responsibility to tailor our repertoire so that it fits us to a T. My role as the conductor includes not only selecting the music, but also commissioning it, creating it myself or creating it together with someone else. I find myself being drawn to two kinds of music, and these form the foundation of my choices concerning the group's repertoire: original material composed for us from scratch, and re-arrangements that display the original song in a new light.[48] Bringing something new to the musical mix, whether radical or subtle, seems to be my preferred choice.

After thinking about our repertoire and why different songs fit us differently, I distilled my thoughts into five aspects that impact the selection of repertoire and planning of setlists:

> APPROPRIATENESS OF THE CHALLENGE
> AESTHETIC FAMILIARITY
> PRACTICE
> GENERAL ENGAGEMENT
> CRAFTMANSHIP OF THE ARRANGER AND SONGWRITER

These aspects are not mutually exclusive and could be utilised in multiple ways.

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48   In their description of different arranging techniques, Sharon and Bell (2012, 19–23) call this approach *transformational or "compositional" arranging.* It means *taking a piece of music and substantially changing how it sounds* (ibid.).

When considering *appropriateness of the challenge,* I think of giving the group something to bite into without it being overwhelmingly difficult. There have been occasions when we worked with material that is too challenging or not challenging enough, and both the singers and I quickly got frustrated and found it difficult to commit to the process. On the other hand, we felt motivated and dedicated to songs which were appropriately challenging. The singers of Musta lammas are highly skilled and strongly motivated to learn and progress, and therefore relatively difficult material is sometimes needed to provide them with an adequate challenge.

Experimenting with songs from different musical genres brought the aspect of *aesthetic familiarity* to light. The more familiar we were with the style of the material presented, the easier it was for us to own the music. With less familiar aesthetics, more attention needed to be paid to laying the musical groundwork in order for us to feel comfortable and sound credible in the style.[49]

To some extent, both the aforementioned aspects relate to *the amount of practice.* A lack of aesthetic familiarity could be compensated for with substantial investments in practice, and the appropriateness of the challenge correlates strongly with the amount of practice needed. However, I have also experienced practice as an independent factor, one which is especially noticeable if we have not practiced enough.

General engagement, or even excitement, is difficult to predict or consciously steer. This difficulty is probably partly related to my skills in internalising new material and making sense of familiar repertoire, both in my own preparations and in front of the choir. Whatever the case, I can feel a distinct variation between songs. Some draw everyone in rapidly, creating almost immediate musical traction, whereas others require more diligence and practice before singing them starts to become rewarding in itself.

The fundament of a fitting arrangement is of course *the quality of the craft in the arranging and songwriting* and whether the characteristics of our set-up have been considered and internalised by the arranger. If something does not work as I hoped, I tend to go back to how the arrangement is built, pondering whether the problem is rooted in the music, its execution, or perhaps both.

With the audience in mind (a perspective which was, if possible, heightened due to our participation in the competition at Aarhus Vocal Festival), I believe that nothing is as satisfying as a confident performer who is enjoying themselves on stage. Indeed, a certain

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49   Whereas chapter 5.2 was about individual aesthetics and their utilisation, here we are talking explicitly about the collective aesthetics, i.e. an average of sorts.

amount of musical voltage (or danger) can often add to the impressiveness of a performance, but the performer needs to be on top of their game, not taking too many risks. Therefore, when considering the aspects presented above in the selection of repertoire and planning of setlists, a balance between risks and playing to one's strengths is important. When considering the long term, I believe that stretching aesthetic boundaries and adapting new styles is what keeps a group interesting, both for themselves as well as for the audience. It is about finding the balance between the new and intriguing and the trusted and familiar. Learning projects which consist of stylistic leaps and new challenges can considerably add to the range and depth of a choir's musical vocabulary. The relevant question is that of how comfortable the choir ends up feeling with the chosen material.

5.6 APPRECIATING OUR GROUP FOR WHAT IT HAS BECOME

When Musta lammas was founded, I incorporated plenty of my personal values and motivation into its design: putting musical ambition first, curating a custom-made repertoire, focusing exclusively on rhythmic music, wanting to share knowledge and educate my singers, utilising individual input like in vocal ensembles, and so forth. I sincerely believe that these characteristics are part of what makes our group special, and that they also are a big contributor to what attracts our singers to the project. Whereas these building blocks were greatly needed in forming the foundation of the group, the spring term of 2017 and this research caused me to revise my approach to the group. We were not in the same situation a year later, and my facilitation in defining the preliminary groundwork of our group was no longer needed. The rudiments of our group had become the people and the history we had together, and I needed to recognise that and modify my view of us. In the following three chapters, I discuss three specific traits that I identified in my attempt to see and appreciate the group for what it had become.

5.6.1 We Are at Our Best at Performances

Prior to my work with Musta lammas, I had become accustomed to the best musical moments mostly taking place during rehearsals. Of course there had also been plain, dull and even bad rehearsal moments, but the highest peaks of the rehearsals (especially when playing cello or performing with my vocal group) had been amazing, out-of-this-world-experiences. Performing situations were always bleaker images of those magic moments, and that had been totally ok, how things are, and an aspect that just needed to be taken

into account when preparing for performances. The bar for any skill needed to be set higher than what was required for a performance so that the final product would still be acceptable after suffering the effects of performance nerves.

Musta lammas, however, has from the beginning been a group that tends to thrive on stage, pulling things off in a manner that can only be dreamt of at rehearsals. There are, of course, smaller details that might go wrong (I am sure my singers agree with this!), but in terms of the big strokes, the group becomes very focused, unified and capable when performing. The stage is the place where everyone is completely focused on the same task – communicating the music to the audience. It is a thrilling rush, a moment of immense power, to feel that collective intention when conducting a live performance.

Not only have I been astonished by this superpower (because that is what it feels like), but especially in the beginning, I have also felt guilty, even frustrated, about not being able to build up quite the same high-intensity concentration at our rehearsals. Our individual focus is often quite fractured during rehearsals. Many times, the biggest difficulty in achieving clarity within the group is simply getting everyone on the same page. When presented like this, it seems obvious that the state of attention is different at a performance than in a rehearsal setting, and that expecting them to be the same is unreasonable. This realisation presented a huge change in my approach to the rehearsal room. I needed to trust our ability to find that extra nudge of electricity and focus in the performance space and hold back on my expectations to achieve that momentum in rehearsal.

5.6.2 There Will Always Be Contradictory Opinions

In chapter 5.3, the challenges of a creative dialogue within the group were mentioned briefly. Addressing this further, one of the biggest inadequacies I have experienced as a conductor has been related to the fact that I can't address all of the multitude of arguments and wishes I encounter within the group. I do not believe it is so much about needing to please each and every person, but about striving for inner harmony and unity within the group – an aligning of motivations, if you will. In that sense, I appear to have had a significant need to bring the entire group into the same mindset, so that everyone can subscribe to the actions we take as a group. Realising that this is actually beyond my powers has been a huge relief. There will always be many opinions and viewpoints in a group of this size! Instead of seeing this variety as a problem, I decided to accept it. Without diversity in opinions, there would be less discussion and active negotiation about policies, choices and actions. And with less open discussion, we would be considerably

less aware of what we are actually pursuing. In some ways, the plethora of opinions could be reframed as a strength, as an assurance that discussion and negotiation within the group will be ongoing.

5.6.3 Commitment, Dedication and Ambition

When founding the group, musical ambition was indeed one the most important founding stones However, I had not quite fully grasped what that would mean when realised by a lineup of skilled, dedicated singers. Looking at the group that Musta lammas had grown into at the end of the spring term of 2017, I was struck by the amount of commitment, dedication and ambition. This is a group that actually enjoys doing hard work and overcoming obstacles, and takes pride in attempting to make the best music possible. Since founding the group, these values had become internalised, growing from a framework given by me into a genuine inner motivation.

6 DISCUSSION

Artistry in choral conducting is relatively uncharted territory, which makes researching it somewhat of a challenge. As the theoretical framework concluded, artistry is an elusive topic in itself, usually more visible in combination with other topics. In this study, the conductor's artistry has been approached via Dag Jansson's (2018, 38) model of the conductor's competences on one the hand, and via the different professional roles located within the main function of conducting, with the artistry being the area of focus, on the other. The aim was to examine a conductor's artistic work utilising an insider perspective, and thereby add another layer to musician-driven research.

6.1 CONCLUSION

From the semester-long field study, I concluded six themes that my artistic work circled around.

1.) I have a constant need and desire to develop, both as a group and as a conductor. Development as a group materialised as an overall rising level of ambition, whereas development as a conductor was displayed in the form of improved self-knowledge and strengthened identity.

2.) In addressing Musta lammas as "we", without distinguishing myself or the singers in particular, I wish to underline the joint effort required and address the interactive nature of the group. Becoming conscious of this definition also increased my awareness of a distinctive "me" when needed.

3.) Seeing the individual as someone with valuable input and utilising that to achieve aesthetic variety within the repertoire; a variety that is desired and valued. Executing this requires considerable musical flexibility on the part of the singers as well as a genuine interest in dialogue on everyone's part.

4.) Figuring out how to make the best use of the rehearsal time is an ever-ongoing process that requires creativity, persistence and relentlessness. The rewards in the process are the moments when the right focus point is found, the one that consolidates all audible challenges.

5.) Developing the music to its fullest form and potential, both within a specific song as well as analysing the musical fits of different songs.

6.) Seeing the group for what it actually has become, with its lived history and shared experiences as primary material rather than the initial ideas it was based upon.

Originally, the social and interpersonal aspects, while not explicitly excluded, were at least regarded as secondary for this research. However, during the research process they turned out to be very much present in the results. Three themes (2, 3 and 6) developed into final formulations that associate strongly with pedagogy and group dynamics. The theme concerning the development of objectives during the field study (1) showed a similar tendency, one in which social and interpersonal achievements emerged in the evaluation as equally important to the musical and practical merits. Connecting this to the feedback epiphany from chapter 5.1.3 and the discussion of what makes a group what it is in chapter 5.6, it all seems to boil down to becoming seen[50]. Within the setup of a choir, becoming seen not only concerns the relationship between the performers and the audience, but also the relationships within the group itself, between each and every member. Relational processes like these are clearly not only important for the artistry, they can actually add to the artistic substance and be part of the artistic expression of the group.

Most of the results of the study can be located in the rehearsal room. Whereas the theoretical framework suggested that the artistic role has particular dominance (in respect to the other roles) in preparing a new piece of music and closer to the performance, my themes emphasise the space in between: in building the instrument, figuring out principles of action, and discovering how to best form the music.

As explained in the introduction, my work with Musta lammas was chosen to be the field of study due to its high ambitions and the artistic emphasis of the entire project. Based on the results, those aspects do not rule out the need for pedagogy or leadership skills, rather they would seem to invite (and to some degree even require) a comprehensive vision that has a distinctive pedagogic view and leadership. As this is only one case study, it is impossible to deduce if the need for this comprehensive vision is stronger or weaker compared to a project with a different artistic profile. What is clear is that the primarily artistic framework revealed pedagogic and leadership aspects of considerable substance.

The further the research has delved into the topic of the conductor's artistry, the clearer it has become that this artistry cannot really be examined in isolation from the other aspects of conductorship. My findings reinforce the notion that the artistry of the conductor is highly dependent upon the conductor's other roles and is interwoven with them.

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50   In Finnish *nähdyksi tuleminen.*

6.2 RELIABILITY

In its attempt to speak to the reader, autoethnography can prompt many different reactions in its audience. The accounts presented in this study might very well correspond to some experiences in similar situations and differ wildly from others. I have attempted to acknowledge my emotional investment in the research as openly as possible – as should be expected in well-executed qualitative research (Coffey 1999, 158–159). By being vulnerable and sharing my position and research process with the reader, I hope to add to the credibility of the research.

Whereas autoethnography and artistic research provide apt tools for exploring the subjective experience of artistry, they do not lend themselves well to the traditional concept of generalisability. As with other qualitative methods, autoethnography does not seek to produce knowledge that could be broadly generalised. The question of generalisability is ultimately handed over to the reader, and will be continuously tested as they determine whether the autoethnography speaks to them and their experiences (Ellis et al. 2011, 282–283). Following the recommendation of Ellis and Bochner (2001, 751), a conductor-composer colleague of mine read through the research draft in its final stages and commented approvingly on its credibility. On the basis of their thoughts, structural adjustments were made to the text.

Not only is Musta lammas at the beginning of its journey, but so am I as a conductor. This study can be seen as an attempt to establish and declare an artistic identity. My technical conducting abilities ("the practical tools"), such as the gestural aspect of conducting, were initially placed outside the frame of this study. However, their impact on the process cannot be altogether eliminated. Orchestral conductor John Storgårds (Konttinen 2007, 240) emphasises that it takes time and experience to become an experienced conductor that can confidently convey their musical vision. "[The conductor] has to master the technical side first to be able even to talk about the personal expressivity of one's work" (Konttinen 2007, 240). I by no means consider myself to have mastered the technicalities of the conducting profession, for there is always more to learn. Following Storgårds' train of thought, I look forward to continuing to increase the depth and reach of my artistic expression in the future.

Just as I hope to continue my development as a conductor, I envision the same for Musta lammas. As I finish this study, more than two years have passed since field work was completed and it is time to move on. As much as pursuing the research has given me, I believe it is very much a picture of a certain time period in our process. If the same

research were done at another point in time, the themes might be different or they might be perceived from a completely different perspective. I believe that that is how it should be. Making art should change, transform and develop over time.

6.3 FURTHER RESEARCH

In order to keep this research manageable, many perspectives and possible lines of inquiry were set aside. An interesting topic, present as a pre-requisite and part of the context for this research setting, is that of how a choral instrument is built, and what is involved in starting a new artistic project from scratch. For many conductors, founding a group of your own is the ultimate project and utmost declaration of one's artistic agenda. What could be learned from comparing these experiences? Another lucrative research perspective has been offered by Jansson (2018, 15; 2015, 2–3 & 2014, 143) in his research into the third viewpoint through the singers' experiences. What is the choral singers' experience of the collective and individual artistries? Which kind of attitudes towards and motivations relating to the art-making in a choir could be found among the singers? One of the big conclusions in this study was how closely linked the different roles or functions of the conductor turned out to be in a predominantly artistic setting. It would be very interesting to explore how the conductor experiences artistry in a post with a primarily non-artistic emphasis, such as in a choir with beginner singers, for example, or one with a therapeutic agenda. Which aspects of the artistry would rise to the surface there?

Having completed this research, my interest towards the artistry of a conductor remains – I have in so many ways only scratched the surface. I would love to continue picking my colleagues' brains on the same topic and learn from their experiences, both via literature, research and ongoing discussions. Even though I believe that much of what this research has revealed is relatable or even common within the conducting and music-making profession, much of it is also highly personal. Therefore, I cannot complete this study without adding one specific wish. I would love to see more conductor-researchers bringing their own artistic views to the world of research and speaking more openly about their experiences!
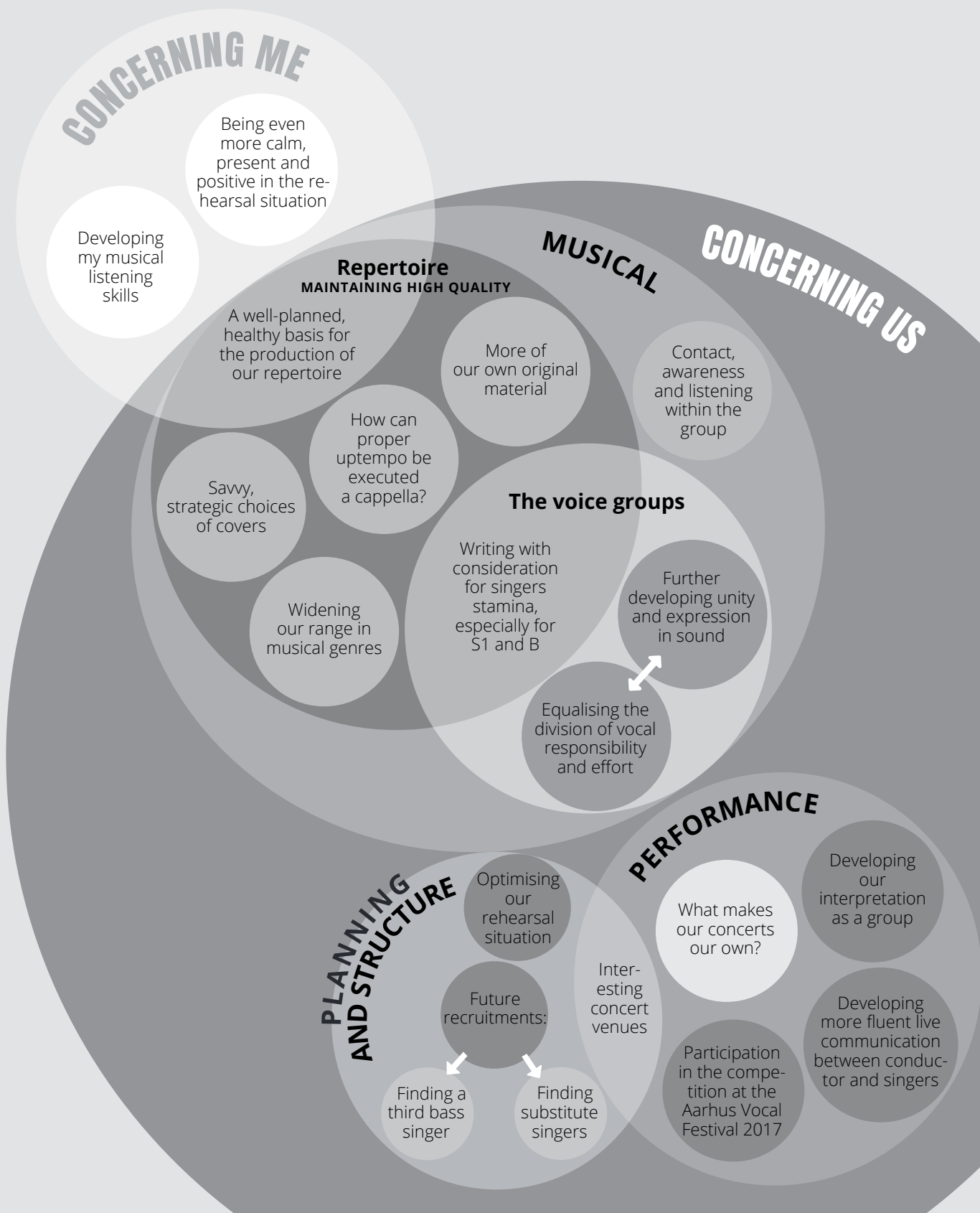
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THE MAIN OBJECTIVES FOR SPRING 2017

Based on data set 4 from 26 January 2017. The grouping and its hierarchy was created afterwards, as a part of the analysis

CONCERNING ME

Being even more calm, present and positive in the rehearsal situation

Developing my musical listening skills

MUSICAL

CONCERNING US

Repertoire
MAINTAINING HIGH QUALITY

A well-planned, healthy basis for the production of our repertoire

More of our own original material

Contact, awareness and listening within the group

How can proper uptempo be executed a cappella?

Savvy, strategic choices of covers

The voice groups

Writing with consideration for singers stamina, especially for S1 and B

Further developing unity and expression in sound

Widening our range in musical genres

Equalising the division of vocal responsibility and effort

PLANNING AND STRUCTURE

PERFORMANCE

Optimising our rehearsal situation

What makes our concerts our own?

Developing our interpretation as a group

Future recruitments:

Interesting concert venues

Finding a third bass singer

Finding substitute singers

Participation in the competition at the Aarhus Vocal Festival 2017

Developing more fluent live communication between conductor and singers

THE CONCLUSION OF OUR WORK IN SPRING 2017

Based on data sets 25–31 written in May and June 2017, as well as the overall analysis of the data. The grouping and its hierarchy was created as a part of the analysis.

AN OVERALL RISING LEVEL OF AMBITION

MUSICAL

Mastery of dynamic extremes

Big, bold and brassy ⟷ Soft and quiet

Developing advanced groove awareness

Tapping into that awareness in prestigious performance situations

Contact, awareness and listening within the group

SOCIAL AND INTERPERSONAL

A trusting, safe atmosphere

Experiencing being truly seen and appreciated as a group

The recognition at Aarhus Vocal Festival

Feeling of self-worth and pride

PLANNING AND STRUCTURE

Recruitments

Attracting good applicants has become easier

Future changes in the lineup should be timed to the beginning of each semester

Exception: still looking for that third bass singer

Balance of repertoire, time management and ambition

Rehearsal scenarios

Being well prepared ⟷ Not being prepared

What do we expect from each other?

Rehearsal schedule visible in the room

PERFORMANCE

A good concert flow

Developing the way we are in contact with the audience

Providing pitches and in-counts subtly

Finding needed (vocal) support for beginnings and endings of songs

Enjoying being on stage

Improved stage presence and energy

THE PERSONAL OUTCOMES OF MY WORK IN SPRING 2017

Based on data sets 25–31, written in May and June 2017, as well as the overall analysis of the data. The grouping and its hierarchy was created as a part of the analysis.
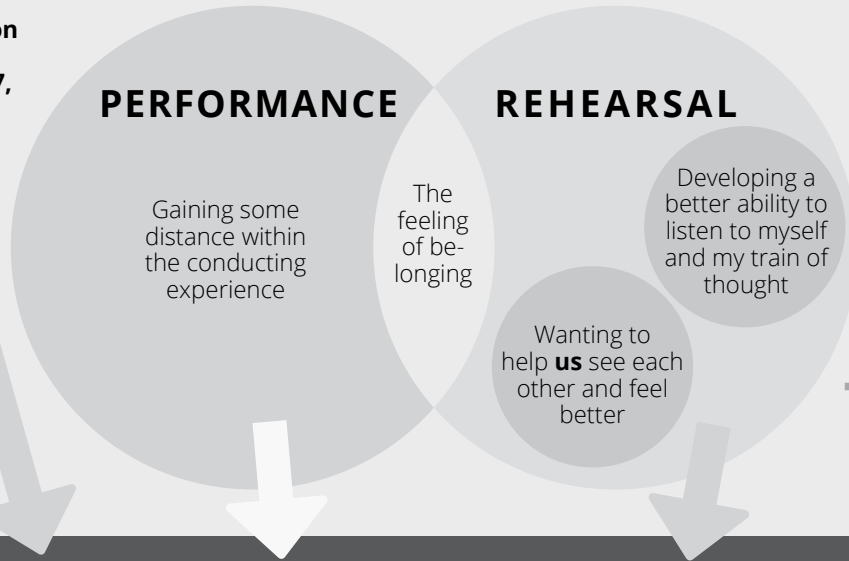
The conclusion of our work in spring 2017, diagram 2

PERFORMANCE

REHEARSAL

Gaining some distance within the conducting experience

The feeling of be-longing

Developing a better ability to listen to myself and my train of thought

Wanting to help **us** see each other and feel better

THE RESEARCH AND MY MUSICAL WORK MOULDING INTO ONE

MY GROWTH AS A CONDUCTOR

STRENGTHENED IDENTITY

IMPROVED SELF-KNOWLEDGE

High level of commitment and ambition

Balancing being proud of our work and knowing where to head next and what to explore.

Time manage-ment

Beginning to see myself primarily as a conductor

Natural tendency to go all in and also overdo it

Constantly striving forwards

Learning to listen to my own needs

Getting recognition from respected colleagues

A change in professional confidence

At its best: high level work product

At its worst; strains new ideas, creates anxiety and do not give credit where due.

Setting limits to workload

Revelation: only I can take responsibility for my well-being