



## ACADEMY OF MUSIC AND DRAMA

# Innsæi

Developing inner musicality

Ingi Bjarni Skúlason

Independent Project, 30 higher education credits

Master of Fine Arts in Improvisation

Academy of Music and Drama, University of Gothenburg

Spring semester, 2018

Author: Ingi Bjarni Skúlason

Title: Innsæi. Developing inner musicality.

Supervisors: Per Anders Nilsson and Anders Jormin

Examiner: Joel Speerstra

## **ABSTRACT**

In this thesis, the subject of inner musicality is explored, including what it is and how to develop it. My own experiences in music are reflected upon through a diary, a personal journey of sorts. Along with the diary, a questionnaire was made, and short improvisational pieces were composed. An essential theme of this paper is the psychological subject of flow. Other themes include methods for strengthening confidence and expressivity in music and how this relates to becoming more connected musically. Furthermore, the importance of becoming free in music is stressed, along with how confidence and freedom go hand in hand. Total freedom is not necessarily a good thing as clarity and presence are necessary in music. Focus can help the performer to be present in the music, present in the now. This thesis centres mainly on singing and rhythm as points of focusing.

The conclusion of this thesis is that in the absence of judgemental thoughts, music is allowed to happen in an organic way and a stronger connection to the performer's inner musicality is made. It is suggested to enhance feelings and awareness, instead of honouring decisions of the mind. In this modern age of rational thought, the power of intuition should not be forgotten, especially in music.

Key words: inner musicality, intuition, flow, focus, awareness, presence, confidence, freedom

# Table of contents

About this work.....	5
My personal artistic aesthetics.....	7
The questionnaire.....	8
Reflective diary:	
Pre-diary entries .....	9
2016 - Autumn semester (Gothenburg) .....	19
2017 - Spring semester (Copenhagen) .....	22
2017 – Summer holiday (Iceland).....	43
2017 - Autumn semester (Oslo).....	48
2018 - Spring semester (Gothenburg).....	67
The instant composing project.....	72
Summary and final reflection .....	78
List of references .....	83
Appendix A: Media list and filenames.....	85
Appendix B: The questionnaire.....	87
Appendix C: Things to practice.....	88
Appendix D: Seven things in music .....	89
Appendix E: Sheet music .....	90



## About this work

*“Innsæi”* is the Icelandic word for intuition. When *“innsæi”* is literally translated to English, it means to see within or to see from within. When I began this master’s degree, my proposed master thesis subject regarded the *development of one’s own style of playing through composing and listening*. A few months later, it changed to *accepting one’s own style*. However, last year it really became clear this thesis should be about becoming more connected to music by developing one’s inner musicality.

Becoming more connected to music means having more presence and clarity in the music. How can that connection be obtained? The answer may lie in the state of being when music just seems to come through and play by itself. This inner musicality, how it can be found and developed further, will be explored in this thesis through a personal journey.

There are two reasons why this subject was chosen. The first is that my previous education in music was one-dimensional and narrow-minded. Something was missing, perhaps the real connection and passion for music was lost. The second reason derives from an intense experience I had last year. That experience triggered a journey of sorts which lasted for several months and led to many questions. How do we increase the chances of letting go and allowing music itself to take over? What is focus and where is our focus? Do we know and control our limits? These things are discussed, why real connection to the ‘inner music’ happens and why it sometimes doesn’t happen.

Since the beginning of this master’s degree programme, I have kept a musical diary where I note my experiences in music. In its essence, this thesis is an expanded and edited version of that diary with various reflections written afterwards. This diary is very subjective and personal. In that way, readers will perhaps find this thesis to be relevant and hopefully valuable to their own lives as musicians or artists. American psychologist Carl R. Rogers supports that assumption, stating, ‘What is most personal is most general.’<sup>1</sup>

The diary entries are in chronological order. Therefore, the structure of the text might seem a bit disorganised. Below is a description of the structure, contents and primary method used for this thesis.

---

<sup>1</sup> Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist’s View of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), 26.

## **Reading instructions / Primary method**

- The diary entry
  - This includes feelings, thoughts and experiences in music with entries from an actual diary which are relevant to the thesis—a personal and subjective text.
  - Where available, recordings from certain events are included here. The recordings are accessible via the internet by clicking on the link. They are also included as audio files.
  - Where applicable, direct internet links to sheet music are included.
  - It may seem at first that some of the entries or recordings are not relevant. However, they are in the end, perhaps indirectly, related to the subject of becoming more deeply connected with music.
- Reflective part
  - Reflections about what was written in the diary entry appear here.
  - References from other material are also included here, such as quotes from books or articles.
- Questionnaire
  - Fellow musicians were asked questions related to the subject of each diary entry.

After the diary entries, which are the core of this thesis, there is a section called ‘The instant composing project’. It is description of my main artistic work from November 2017 to February 2018, when I composed and improvised at the piano with the knowledge accumulated over this 18-month period.<sup>2</sup> Sheet music from the instant composing project is included in Appendix E: Sheet Music, and also through the direct internet links.

---

<sup>2</sup> August 2016 until February 2018.

# My personal artistic aesthetics

Music is everywhere nowadays, and sometimes that can be a problem for me. Some people treat music like a bag of Doritos, almost as if music doesn't have any value. But what makes music valuable?

For me, music is a way to express myself without words. Music allows me to express feelings I want to or should share with people in my life. Furthermore, my music reflects personal observations about things in my daily life. My influences include folk music, jazz tradition, singer-songwriters and electronic music. Lately, I have also been incorporating free, improvised elements into my music. I compose and play my own kind of folk music with the freedom of expressiveness and improvisation. My melodies are often simple but effective.

Two or three years ago, I would simply have described myself as a jazz pianist who occasionally composes. This is not who I am in music now. For me, it is crucial to realise who I am as an artist. I am open to the fact that artists evolve and often redefine themselves. In a few years' time, my focus in music might be different. In general, I believe that a musician should be a composer, a performer and improviser all at the same time.

To me, a good composition needs to be memorable. I also think the ultimate purpose of my music should be to make people feel something. However, it's important that I feel a certain connection to music while performing. In my opinion, music and the practice of music should be treated with the utmost respect. Music can definitely be looked upon as more than just entertainment. Furthermore, I do believe music is a channel, a form of communication through something that is beyond us. Music can be seen as a spiritual practice. In this modern age of technology and information, I believe that many people are not grounded within themselves. In other words, their connection to the Earth is missing. I will reflect upon music and spirituality later in this text.

I am from Iceland. But what does that really mean to my practice as an artist? Does it really matter where I'm from? I have lived in Iceland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Norway. I would say that each country has a different mentality. Although Iceland has much in common with the Scandinavian countries, its mentality is still quite different. It is important to remember my Icelandic heritage, culture and background. I am of course flavoured and shaped by all those things, but I am also shaped by the countries I have lived in and by the internet. Even if I had just lived in Iceland my whole life, I would still think it important to think internationally, especially during these times. Therefore, I would like to think of myself as an international artist from Iceland.

I am finishing a master's programme called Nordic Master: The Composing Musician which I have pursued in Gothenburg, Copenhagen and Oslo. During this period, I feel I have grown as an artist and become freer as a piano player. In general, my connection to music has become stronger.

## The questionnaire

As previously mentioned, a questionnaire was made and sent to fellow musicians to get external input about these subjects. The questions are derived from experiences written and reflected upon in the personal diary. While most of the questions were directly related to diary subjects, some of them were about music in a broader sense. In this thesis, these questions and answers to them are integrated into the reflective diary.

Later, it became evident that the questions were too numerous and repetitive. Some of the questions asked are not included in the results of this thesis. The complete list of the questions asked, including questions that were discarded, can be found in Appendix B: The questionnaire.

The intention of the questionnaire was not to provide data for a massive research project with a high number of participants. It simply seemed interesting to hear answers from fellow artists and musicians. However, the questionnaire received 42 responses in total, which was more than enough. The respondents were involved in different things: jazz and improvisation musicians, classical musicians, composers, teachers and more. The age group was quite wide, ranging from 20 to 60 years old. Most of the responses were from friends and colleagues in their 20s or early 30s.

When answers from the questionnaire are quoted, the respondents are referred to anonymously as Responder 1, Responder 2, and so on. The responder's identity isn't relevant for the purpose of this thesis. Furthermore, some of the questions were in fact quite personal. However, a list of all the responders can be requested from the author. Many of the answers were beautiful and inspiring. In general, the results of the questionnaire were satisfactory. The responses provided good insights into the themes of discussion and gave a better perspective. The answers included in this text are an essential part of this thesis.



# Reflective diary

Throughout this thesis, references will often be made to *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi.<sup>3</sup> Concepts and ideas from *Flow* are presented and discussed in relation to my own reflections and findings.

A book which is often quoted in this text is *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art* by Stephen Nachmanovitch.<sup>4</sup> It is a beautifully written book that touches upon several subjects related to playing and improvising. The book itself is a work of art. It can be viewed as a source of inspiration rather than a book that presents clear concepts applicable to this thesis.

## Pre-diary entries

This chapter includes an autobiography about my life as a musician before my master's education. The autobiography is written in the form of a diary with entries that I believe are relevant to this thesis. These pre-diary entries were never a part of my actual diary.

As with most of the entries in this thesis, I include a reflection on the diary entry. These reflections help clarify what was learned from the experience described in each entry. Often in the process of writing the reflections, I generated ideas that I would otherwise not have been able to.

### **Sometime during 1996–1998 in Iceland** **(What is improvisation? // Childlike attitude towards improvisation)**

In my first memory of improvising, I was probably around 8 or 9 years old, and I had taken some piano and flute lessons for beginners. But the first instrument I improvised on was an old melodica my mother owned. I remember it quite clearly; I was running around the apartment with this melodica—dancing, jumping and improvising melodies, my playing full of emotion. I was playing simple melodies of course, and I did not have any technique. I was improvising, though, and I just really enjoyed playing music and making melodies on the spot. I enjoyed creating, uninhibited and free! This was, of course, long before I started to study jazz music and I didn't even know what jazz or improvisation was at the time. I am very fond of this memory, and for me it's very important to remember.

---

<sup>3</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), Epub edition.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Nachmanovitch, *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art* (New York: Jeremy Tarcher/Penguin, 1990).

## Reflection:

Since melodica was not my usual instrument at the time, perhaps it was liberating to play an instrument so similar but yet different. In my opinion, it is important to have a grain of childish joy whenever playing. We must remember the rewarding feelings of discovery, curiosity, freedom, and joy. We must remember what improvisation is and can be!

Improvising is not confined to music. For as long as I can remember, me and my brother have been creating nonsense stories. First, we told them to each other and then later to our younger sister. These improvised stories, the process of them were in, essence, the same as in improvising on an instrument. When improvising, an open, playful and non-judgemental mind is needed - in other words, the sense of being free. It is also necessary to be articulate, have a sense of form, structure, meaning - and that's where the connection comes in. Once a feeling for the story has been established, it starts to flow. In improvised storytelling and improvised music!

In *Free Play*, Stephen Nachmanovitch writes about how the creative impulses we experience as children get easily buried when we grow up. These impulses get buried by education, criticism, and judgement among other things.

## Questionnaire:

'If you are an improvising musician, what is your first memory of improvising? And how did it feel?'

When asking this question, I was curious if the respondents would also describe the same feeling of freedom and joy. By asking how they felt during that experience, I was encouraging them to make their descriptions personal. Most of the answers did indeed describe similar experiences like the one I had. A feeling of joy, liberation, and discovering.

I was not shy at all, I just did it. Later I became shy. –Responder 10

A young teacher showed me how to play the blues scale when I was 14 years old. He said; now you can play whatever and it will sound good. I was hooked instantly. I couldn't stop. There was an incredible sense of freedom. –Responder 15

It was always very "freeing" for me. I remember those moments being the spare ones in my life. I didn't think about what anyone else would think. It was always closely connected to my feelings/heart and I got annoyed when someone interrupted me in such a session with myself. –Responder 41

I felt proud, a bit like if I had made a drawing that I was really happy with, but it was in real-time. At the same time, I didn't understand what I or we were doing. I remember I got asked of a radio-interviewer that was there: "What is improvising?" I think I answered something that hasn't anything to do with music at all. –Responder 4

### **Circa 2000–2003 in Iceland** **(Uninspired classical piano education)**

After 2-3 years of not playing at all, I began taking piano lessons again. But these lessons didn't resonate strongly with me. I rarely practised the piano, and when I practised, it was usually just for half an hour before each lesson. My lessons were usually late on Friday afternoons at around 18:00. I remember once telling my teacher that I had to leave early because of a dentist appointment. His response was: 'Dentist at 19:00 on a Friday evening?' - He apparently saw through this bad lie of mine.

This perhaps describes, in essence, my relationship with practising music then and how low my motivation was. I had no interest in playing the piano and I just went to these lessons as a contrast to my normal school. I was not interested in sports at all, so I had to do something else.

Those were years of aimless and uninspired classical piano education. My skills in classical piano playing are still rather limited up to this day.

#### **Reflection:**

I am not sure this explains anything, but my first instrument was a keyboard. It did not have all the octaves, and it did not have weighted keys. Then later I got a keyboard with weighted keys and full octaves. Keyboards are what they are. It wasn't until relatively late (2005-2006) that my parents bought a real upright piano to have at home. I have been fortunate to have access to good grand pianos the last few years.

### **Circa 2006–2011 in Iceland** **(Discovering jazz // Deciding to become a musician)**

I had another 2-3-year break from piano lessons until I discovered jazz. That is when my real interest in playing the piano began. I discovered jazz through the internet. Particularly, it was seeing and hearing the music of Herbie Hancock and Keith Jarrett that ignited the spark for playing the piano.

As a result, I went to FÍH School of Music in Reykjavík, a private school that was then the only school where it was possible to study jazz music in Iceland. When there, I started to play in all kinds of bands - not only jazz and I also began composing. There I studied part-time while I was finishing high school and working various jobs.

At the time, I also began studying mathematics at the University of Iceland. On a rainy November morning, I parked in front of the university. A lecture about mathematical analysis was about to start. There I sat and thought: 'What am I doing with my life? I am not a mathematician, I am a musician!' I just drove

home and started playing the piano. I am happy it only took me three months - and not a lifetime - to fully realise that I wanted to be a musician.

### **Reflection:**

This on and off relationship to the piano during my childhood and teenage years is maybe unusual and has influenced me in some way.

### **2012–2016 in Den Haag, The Netherlands** **(Problems with style-specific jazz-education // Losing connection to music)**

The population in Iceland is small, and opportunities for jazz students like myself were not many. I felt I needed to expand my horizons and seek further knowledge abroad in jazz piano playing. I ended up in Koninklijk Conservatorium in Den Haag, The Netherlands where I finished my bachelor's degree.

I used to look very negatively upon my time in Den Haag. The reason why I felt negative towards it was that the education was somewhat one-dimensional and narrow-minded. The primary focus was bebop and traditional jazz. I was not exposed to the styles of music I was most interested in.

I am after all a creative person, and that is something I realised already in Iceland. I wanted to focus on my compositions as well as Nordic/ECM/experimental repertoire, but there was not much space for developing own compositions. Sometimes I had the feeling that bringing own composed material was not really appreciated. It was quite hard for me to digest.

I am sure that some of my teachers in Koninklijk Conservatorium did understand my creative needs. In particular one of my jazz piano teachers and my teacher in harmony at the piano. But the purpose of that jazz department is to train competent jazz performers, not jazz composers. So even though they understood what kind of musician I was, they had to follow the structure of the study programme. I did, however, bring my own music to lessons from time to time since I was always composing something.

Now afterwards I have gained a better perspective. My time in Den Haag did definitely shape who I am as an artist, it is part of me, and I don't regret the time I spent there. I became good friends with people from around the world. And while my time in Den Haag did perhaps not guide me in the artistic direction I was seeking, I did benefit from my stay there in the crafts of being a jazz pianist.

I also realise that there is no such thing as a perfect school. It is not possible to meet the demands of every student, and schools need to decide how they structure their education. Having said that I am still doubtful about style-specific jazz education. In my experience, there are many problems with it. Maybe that

kind of education is even dangerous for the creativity if not approached with caution. Music is such a personal thing, and in music education, it is crucial to find the right material or style for the student to study. In that way, he can blossom and grow into the musician and artist he perhaps already is. When some educational material is forced upon the student, chances are he will not learn with passion and authentic joy of playing music. In my view, everything has to happen organically, and teachers should be there to support in that process. Something that is not organic is not authentic.

Now after having spent time in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway during this master's degree education, I have a broad sense of what music education is and what it can be. My experience is deep since I have so much comparison to the cities within this master, as well as my time in the Netherlands. If I would have stayed in the same place for those six years, would I have the same comparison? The same strong experience?

### **Reflection:**

Why did I include this lengthy entry about my time in Den Haag? I believe it is important in relation to this text. I didn't really enjoy myself there as much as I would have wanted. In my experience, that environment was the opposite of who I was and am, an opposition against myself as an artist. This affected my connection to music, and I seldom experienced flow. Perhaps my real connection to music was lost.

I was not expressive in the music I was playing because I was not emotionally involved. Since all I was practising and playing was swing, bebop and traditional music, which I already had played much of in Iceland, I was bored in a way. I didn't feel challenged and inspired by this material. It was indeed a challenge to play bebop, and still is, but it was not the right challenge for me.

Studying tradition is essential and beneficial. The danger lies in how tradition is treated. In the book *Free Play*, Stephen Nachmanovitch writes: 'It's great to sit on the shoulders of giants, but don't let the giants sit on your shoulders!'<sup>5</sup> It is a strong metaphor and a smart way to look upon tradition. Tradition can be respected and embraced, but we should not be crushed by it.

Above I wrote, 'Something that is not organic is not authentic.' Below are quotes that support that statement. They also refer to the importance of being true to ourselves. If we try to be something that we are not, we are not organic. We can learn from others and perhaps imitate others for some time, but in the end, we have to be ourselves.

The student had to find out for himself, from his own being. Any knowledge he gets from someone else is not his own. The knowledge, the art, has to ripen of its own accord, from his own heart.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Nachmanovitch, *Free Play*, 136.

<sup>6</sup> Nachmanovitch, *Free Play*, 174.

The joy of the moment can be experienced at any stage of learning. We need only to recognize when we are guided away from ourselves by standards of performance based on comparison with others, or by the need of approval and recognition for accomplishment. Too often these motivations dominate the learning environment.<sup>7</sup>

Everybody wanted to sound like Coltrane at a time.  
Coltrane would have wished that they learned to be themselves.<sup>8</sup>

Once I was working for Reykjavík Jazz Festival. One of my tasks was to pick up a musician from the airport and drive him to the city. While driving, we talked about music and eventually about jazz education. I mentioned my education in Den Haag and my problems with it. He agreed with me. He had given some masterclasses in the Netherlands a while ago and he said: 'Music there is based on fear, it's only by the book.' It was interesting to hear this from an internationally acclaimed and admired musician like that.

### **Questionnaire:**

'Were there any turning points, certain situations that changed something, in your life as a musician? If so, feel free to tell about them.'

This question has many possible answers, and it does perhaps not belong here. But I believe two of the answers it produced are relevant to this section:

The last turning point wasn't necessarily positive. The atmosphere at my school's jazz department wasn't good. It's far from the open-minded school I now study in. During the four years I studied there my technique got better, but my confidence got worse. The actual turning point happened during my exam concert. I tried to be brave and play the way I heard the music. There was a huge risk in doing that as the school is a really a traditional jazz school. The result wasn't good. The jury would not let me pass and used about an hour to insult me in the feedback session I had after the concert. I didn't play for almost two months after that. It took a lot of time to come back and stand straight. This didn't only make me hate the school and the teachers, but also the traditional jazz music that the school stands for. I still feel like I lost someone that day. It was the music that I had loved to listen to, even though I would myself want to approach it differently. –Responder 13

A turning point for me during my saxophone studies was when I realized I didn't need to follow the path of all saxophonists before me, or even jazz musicians in general, to succeed. It was ok to have my own style and realizing that the rules are just guidelines. –Responder 30

---

<sup>7</sup> Mildred Portney Chase, *Just Being at the Piano* (Camarillo: DeVorss Publications, 2017), Kindle edition, Chap. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Keith Jarrett - Interview + Speech at NEA Jazz Masters Awards 2014, [online video], 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDbOKHOuy9M> (accessed 17th of April 2017).

## **13th of November 2015 in Brussels, Belgium** **(Being judgemental as an artist)**

I took a train to Brussels to see Keith Jarrett, my long-time hero, play a solo concert. It was a great concert! I enjoyed it a lot. He played short improvised pieces. Some of them were atonal, some were ballads, while others were lyrical pieces or groovy vamps. It was a beautiful experience to watch him play, and he seemed to have access to an endless source of ideas. It was remarkable how he seemingly didn't take time to think or prepare before he began performing, he just put his fingers on the keyboard and started. In one of the pieces, he suddenly stopped, and he told that he didn't like what he was playing. Then he excused himself and began playing again. It was a peculiar moment.

### **Reflection:**

I am familiar with the life and work of Keith Jarrett. At the time, I didn't think much of this incident where he stopped playing. But when reflecting afterwards, I realised what an interesting moment this was.

Here, one of the greatest improvisers in the world, publicly admits that he is judgemental about his creative output. Keith has described how he simply puts his hands on the piano and starts playing. He also expresses the need to be consciously aware of the music, and at the same time, surrender to it. This he tries to do without allowing the rational mind to control the music (see quotes below).

I just put my hand there – and [...] <sup>9</sup>

I don't know, my hands just do it and it comes out. <sup>10</sup>

[My music reflects] a state of surrender to an ongoing harmony in the universe that exists with or without us. <sup>11</sup>

Music should not remind us of the control we seem to have over our lives. It should remind us of the necessity of surrender, the capacity in man for understanding the reason for this surrender, the conditions that are necessary for it, the Being necessary for it. <sup>12</sup>

Perhaps he did not succeed in doing what he describes during this incident in Brussels. Keith Jarrett, even though he has come very far in his efforts to become one with the music, is still human.

---

<sup>9</sup> Keith Jarrett, Interview and Improvisations (at Jarrett's home) for a Swedish TV... (Very rare!), [online video], 2012 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-kznTN66Ho> (accessed 17th of April 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Keith Jarrett: *The Art of Improvisation*, dir. Michael Dibb, USA/Germany, EuroArts, 2005, [DVD].

<sup>11</sup> Keith Jarrett. (1993). [Liner notes]. *Bridge of Light* [CD]. ECM New Series.

<sup>12</sup> Ian Carr, *Keith Jarrett: The Man and His Music* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1992), 154.

## Questionnaire:

'How judgemental are you about your performing/composing?'

The question above is indeed quite personal. Aren't we all judgmental? In general, people answered that they were quite judgemental and hard on themselves. Especially when they were students. But they often expressed that over time they had become less judgemental. Also, some mention how emotionally attached to the performing process they are - and in reality, the performance is usually better than it may have seemed at first.

I always try to keep my ego as small as possible. I try to stay modest about the things I do, whether it's playing or teaching. If a concert didn't go well, there will be a next concert coming up later where you can try again. Don't be too hard on yourself: If you always try to give it your best, that's the most you can do. You have to deal with your physical and emotional life as well. Sometimes we can even use this as a source of inspiration. Everything to serve the music. –Responder 3

I'm much less judgemental than I used to be. I hope for it to be great all the time, but I'm confident now that on my "worst" days, my music is still good, at least. I found that being too judgemental only interferes with progress - criticism is good, but it's important to be a bit emotionally detached as well. –Responder 16

I can be very judgemental about my performance. I have often felt crappy after a solo but when had the opportunity to listen to live recordings I've been pleasantly surprised. I think the mind tricks you into thinking the worst sometimes. It gets better with time, when you start accepting your individuality more. I'm less judgemental regarding compositions. But always nervous to let people hear them for the first time. Maybe it's because in general there are less "rules" in writing than in performing. –Responder 30

It was interesting how one of the respondents put it. If we change the word judgemental to evaluating, the possible negative meaning of the word 'judgemental' becomes more positive:

While performing I'm not. When evaluating - after the creative process - yes, I look at every detail and ask myself if it has it's right to be there or not, which I guess you can call judging. –Responder 32

### **14th of August in Reykjavík, Iceland** **(Confidence // Our emotional attachment to music)**

At Reykjavík Jazz Festival 2016 I was playing with a quartet I had formed while studying in the Netherlands. Conditions were excellent. The grand piano was fantastic, and the sound on stage was perfect. There was a good amount of audience in the room. However, when playing, I felt really uncomfortable and afterwards I thought it was the worst concert I had ever played. I disliked everything I played, and I felt unworthy. Was it the pressure of playing in front of some of the foremost jazz enthusiasts in Iceland? That could be the answer. Just a few days later I played another concert. It was at a bar which had a lousy piano. This was a much less serious concert situation. During that concert, I had more fun, and I didn't feel bad at all.



## Reflection:

After these two concerts, I thought about the importance of being confident and present as a performer. Why can't I approach every concert situation in the same way? Certainly, every moment is different. What matters is how each moment is treated. Living in the present moment is very important.

When I listen to recordings I have of this concert, my playing is not as bad as I thought. It's perfectly acceptable. For a long time, I was emotionally attached to this concert. But now, 18 months later, my emotional connection to the moments of this performance has vanished.

At the festival concert, I was playing very 'safe' and not taking many risks. Today I am a different player. Later in this thesis, I will compare two piano solos over the same song. One version is from the abovementioned concert (14th of August 2016), while the other version is from a rehearsal in Oslo (6th of December 2017).

## Questionnaire:

'How emotionally attached are you to the music you are performing?'

This question can be interpreted in two ways. First is that emotional attachment can be beneficial for the music to be performed. The second is the negative effect which can bring up unhelpful self-criticising and judging. I wanted to know whether the respondents considered this emotional attachment to be beneficial or disadvantageous. Most of the respondents considered this attachment to be valuable, but that the level of attachment depended on the music and the situation. Some expressed the negative aspect of it when attachment becomes too high.

The music we play is not ours. But you can hear a clear difference between Keith Jarrett and Brad Mehldau. They both get their music from the same source, they are both very recognisable, but still they play very differently. I guess that everybody who knows how to play correctly, is emotionally connected with his or her music. That's what makes you unique. You are a product of your taste, experience, teachings by others, etc. etc... But the level of attachment is a different question. Any form of attachment is basically feeding the wrong things in our ego. Things which make you feel better. And the more you need to make you feel better, the more you will start looking for something you don't possess yet. Or you want more of the same you already had. With this attitude, you are blocking the process and you are closing doors. If you want to play the same beautiful ballad you played the week before and you don't succeed, you might be very disappointed. But maybe, that day it was not the time for a beautiful ballad, but for something else. Always stay open for new things to come, don't get attached but instead, let music surprise you. –Responder 3

If it is music I connect to I am very attached to it. –Responder 12

I try to be totally detached from it. Practically, I am attached to the quality of performance (I want things to be "good," to go "well"), but I try to be detached even from the performances I'm very pleased with. I feel like being too emotionally attached can be damaging - if you are in love with your own playing, you'll never feel the necessity to develop; if you can't stand how you sound, then music won't be enjoyable anymore! –Responder 16

I try to connect emotions to everything I play. If not, what is the purpose of all this and how could we play with conviction? Sometimes those are emotions connected to you personally but sometimes we have to become actors to form this connection. –Responder 36

About becoming an actor while playing music. This is interesting and could be discussed further. But in short, acting can be a way to explore different expressions in the music. How would I sound if I am angry? How would I sound if am wild? How would I sound if I am madly in love?

## 2016 - Autumn semester (Gothenburg)

### Getting used to artistic freedom

Above is a detailed description of the environment I was in before I started the master. When I had arrived in Gothenburg, it took me quite some time to get used to the different way of thinking and teaching. There was a freedom of expressiveness which I was not used to. I was encouraged to be myself and to be the artist I was. I had the freedom to do whatever I wanted. In a way, it can be scary to be free.

### **8th of November** **(Listening and leaving the tricks behind)**

During a rehearsal, I was having trouble improvising over one of the songs. I didn't know how to approach soloing over it. I was so stuck in my structured way of working with songs (see below). When talking about this with the band, guitarist Merje Kägu said a sentence I won't forget: 'I just try to hear melodies.'<sup>13</sup>

### **Reflection:**

It's important and effective to always be listening. The melodies are already there! We just have to find them. Mildred Chase, in her book *Just Being at The Piano*, describes beautifully how music is already present:

The sculpture is already in the stone and you need only to remove the excess rock to reveal it. In playing, all that you have learned intellectually, physically, emotionally is now there with you, and by removing concerns with the outcome of the playing, removing any interfering tension, you will be able to release the music that is within you.<sup>14</sup>

Keith Jarrett sums up the importance of listening:

If you can't listen then you can't connect, and if can't listen then you can't be sensitive.<sup>15</sup>

While studying in the Netherlands, I made a list of things to practice over songs. The list is included in 'Appendix C: Things to practice'. On the list, there were scales, rhythms, different voicings etc. This was a structured and systematic way of practising. I must say that this list was useful. It is important to spend time on the things listed there. But on the other hand, it is dangerous to look at this list as a holy thing and be stuck in it. That happened to me in some way. I had put, just a few concepts of improvising, into a very defined box. I became a prisoner of that box. We must learn to become free in music.

Stephen Nachmanovitch gives advice on how the tools (technique etc.) used in practising and playing can be thought of:

---

<sup>13</sup> Conversation with Merje Kägu on 8th of November 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Chase, *Just Being at the Piano*, Kindle edition, Chap. 4

<sup>15</sup> Doug Watson interviews pianist Keith Jarrett in 1999, [online video], 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSdc9iyZxCJ> (accessed 17th of April 2017).

You certainly use your training; you refer to it, understand it, ground yourself in it, but you don't allow your training to blind you to the actual person who is sitting in front of you. In this way you pass competence to presence. To do anything artistically you have to acquire technique, but you create through the technique, not with it.<sup>16</sup>

But the technique can get too solid — we can become so used to knowing how it should be done that we become distanced from the freshness of today's situation.<sup>17</sup>

In an interview with Gary Peacock, he heavily criticised how people study music. He suggests that we should at some point forget what we have learned. The knowledge is still within us, but we don't need to constantly remember how we learned. He says:

Please remember to forget it [scales, modes, chords etc.] The theoretical aspects. The slick things. Let all that shit go. Surrender!! .....<sup>18</sup>

Can you remember when you learned how to speak the language? No. We forget the process of that learning. We haven't lost the ability to play music. We don't have to try to remember it - in music it's a similar thing.<sup>19</sup>

There is an old Italian saying: "*Impara l'arte, e mettilla da parte*". It translates to 'Learn the craft, and then set it aside'. Regarding jazz education, one could perhaps say: Learn the tricks, then forget the tricks and take some risks.

### **15th of December 2016** **(Surreal head-licking experience // No mind)**

In Gothenburg, there is a jazz club specialising in free-jazz (it's a great club by the way). Once per month, there is a jam-session where all imaginable forms of artistic expression are allowed. Those who want to participate in the session put their names in a hat, and for each round, three names from the hat are drawn. This December evening, I participated and ended up in a trio with a singer and some kind of an actor. Let's call him that. So there I was, playing some free-improv at the piano. At one point while I was playing, this actor comes to me and starts to repeatedly LICK one place on the back of my head for quite some time! Somehow, I couldn't do anything except to keep on playing. Hard to explain. This was very uncomfortable and probably the weirdest thing that has ever happened to me.

During this incident, I felt that I disconnected from what I was doing. The only thing that I was thinking was: 'What on earth is going on and what should I do?' Friends and people in the audience (who were unaware of the licking because of the angle) said afterwards that I played great and that the music was happening.

---

<sup>16</sup> Nachmanovitch, *Free Play*, 21.

<sup>17</sup> Nachmanovitch, *Free Play*, 67.

<sup>18</sup> Jason Heath interviews Gary Peacock, "Gary Peacock on Zen, self, and the muse" *Contrabass conversations*, 8th of September 2017, accessed on 17th of April 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7KOWGOY3bM>

<sup>19</sup> Heath, "Gary Peacock on Zen, self, and the muse"

**Reflection:**

It is a shame I don't have any recordings of this event. I have asked around, but no luck. It would be really interesting to hear them.

Did I experience Flow? (A detailed description of Flow can be found on pages 25-28) Categorising this experience under the elements of Flow is hard. I was heavily distracted, and I had no goals. My sense and feeling for the music I was producing was almost none. My challenge at that moment had nothing to do with music.

On the other hand, there was no worry of failure, just total awareness of this surreal moment. My self-consciousness towards the playing did indeed disappear. To further explain: While this happened, I was likely 'connecting' to the spirit of music by disconnecting from my mind. The mind had certain thoughts and intentions for the music, but these thoughts had left. With the mind absent, music was allowed to happen organically.

The difference between an organic response versus conscious decision making is the mind. A tree is an organic living thing. But it does not think. It can only sense. It does not know music or what music should be. But could a tree react to music? Or in other words, does it have an organic response to music?

## 2017 - Spring semester (Copenhagen 2017)

### Becoming free and flowing in music

In this chapter, the entries are from my stay at Rytmisk Musikkonservatorium in Copenhagen. During that period, I became more confident, and I dared to be free in my playing. Also, through personal experiences, I gained a better understanding of what flow in music is.

#### **16th of March**

#### **(Lean into the stream // Instructions to remove self-consciousness)**

In a lesson with Simon Toldam, I was playing a sketch for a song of mine. As a suggestion, Simon told the following he had heard from American pianist Butch Lacy:

The music is a stream and it's always there, also when we are not playing. The only thing we have to do when we are playing is to lean into the stream. It's nice to remove the artistic input from you and put it into the sound itself. You have lots of time.<sup>20</sup>

These words had a great effect on me, and I played this piece of music in a fresh and inspired way. This is similar to the head-licking incident, the artistic input from me (the mind) was removed.

#### **Reflection:**

This relates directly to the Flow concept (pages 25-28.) One of the prerequisites for Flow is when the self-conscious disappears. The suggestion above can be seen as instructions to remove self-consciousness from the artistic process.

Another description where music is seen as a continuous stream:

To some extent it is the stream of consciousness, a river of memories, fragments of melodies, emotions, fragrances, angers, old loves, fantasies. .... we can find ourselves unwillingly opened up to it or unwillingly cut off from it. But it's always there.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Conversation with Simon Toldam on 16th of March 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Nachmanovitch, *Free Play*, 32.

## **27th of March** **(First solo concert // Enjoying the activity itself)**

Everybody in my class played a 15-20-minute solo concert. Afterwards, there were discussions among the teachers and students about the performances. I learned a lot from that experience. By playing myself and being there for the other concerts and discussions.

My concert went fine. I was focused and in control. But I did not feel entirely free in the music. In general, the teachers and students commenting suggested that I could be more expressive and confident in my music. One of the teachers, Kasper Tranberg, gave a strange comment which I didn't fully understand:

I heard some music in Japan that was not supposed to be listened to by other people. It's only for the one guy playing it. What do we do when we perform? Especially I got a little feeling from that from your music. You are cool with your own music, I don't need to be there.<sup>22</sup>

**Audio 1:**  
[27.03.2017 - Skinn.mp3](#)  
[Sheet music](#)

### **Reflection:**

First, I would like to mention that through this solo concert project, I found my own way of playing solo piano. Or as I would like to call it, I found my confidence in performing solo and my connection to it.

Above I wrote that it was a controlled performance. Being in control - is that always desirable in music? I believe it's necessary to be in control of the material, the sound, and the expression. But I don't think we always need to be in control of the improvisation. We can let go, in other words, surrender.

Surrender means cultivating a comfortable attitude toward not-knowing, being nurtured by the mystery of moments that are dependably surprising, ever fresh.<sup>23</sup>

Here is how I interpret the comment Kasper gave: As long as I feel connected to the material and this music, that is enough. I am playing music for music sake, not for the sake of the audience. I am just purely enjoying the process of making music without having to depend on external elements.

This relates to flow and the joy of simply being engaged in an activity. Next chapter is dedicated to flow. Below are quotes that emphasise the enjoyment of the activity itself:

---

<sup>22</sup> Conversation with Kasper Tranberg on 27th of March 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Nachmanovitch, *Free Play*, 21-22.

Try to imagine the first musician. He was not playing for an audience, or a market, or working on his next recording, or touring with his show, or working on his image. He was playing out of need, out of his need for the music. Every year the number of musicians who remember why they play music in the first place gets smaller, and the greatest loss from this handful was Miles Davis, who died last year.<sup>24</sup>

The whole difference between construction and creation is this: that a thing constructed can only be loved after it is constructed, but a thing created is loved before it exists.<sup>25</sup>

I love my work more than I love what it produces. I am dedicated to the work more than I love what it produces. I am dedicated to the work regardless of its consequences.<sup>26</sup>

## **28th of March** **(A life-changing flow experience)**

After a long day of listening to solo concerts by my fellow students, I had this irresistible longing to play the piano. I was very tired, and I had not slept well the night before, but I just had to find a piano and play. I really wanted to express myself on the piano. Earlier that day, I had played at an entrance exam for a student that was applying for the school. Somehow, in my mind I had forgotten about that, and it felt like I hadn't PLAYED the piano for a long time.

I went to a practice room and played, mostly just free-improvised stuff. It was amazing! I really enjoyed playing so much. Everything I played sounded so amazing (in my ears at least), and everything felt so easy. I didn't think about anything. I was totally 'in the zone'. I noticed that sometimes I sang or groaned with the music. At some point I had to stop playing, but it was so hard to stop. I loved music. I loved the piano. I loved to improvise. I loved to play.

As I mentioned above, I was very tired in many ways, and I was also hungry. I actually forgot that I was hungry. I had this unexplainable energy for playing music. If I compare this practice session to my solo concert the day before, the concert had 15% of the practice session's energy. At the concert, I was able to let go to some extent, but this practice session experience was 120%. During concerts, I usually get some extra energy in the form of concentration. I have never experienced this kind of strong energy at concerts. Practice sessions have never been as intense as the one that particular Tuesday.

After this, I wanted to experience moments like these more often—real connection to music, really letting go! This is something I wanted to research and make my main goal for the next few months.

---

<sup>24</sup> Keith Jarrett, *Categories Aplenty, but Where's the Music?* (New York Times, 16th of August 1992), p. 2:19 cited in Kenny Werner, *Effortless Mastery: Liberating the Master Musician Within* (New Albany: Jamey Aebersold Jazz, 1996), 31.

<sup>25</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1911), p. 15 cited in Nachmanovitch, *Free Play*, 166.

<sup>26</sup> Naguib Mahfouz interviewed in, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 107.



## Audio 2

(A small excerpt from when I happened to record a little bit)

[28.03.2017 - Intense flow excerpt.mp3](#)

### Reflection:

What caused this real connection to music? Is it possible to control this connection somehow? Was it because I had finished my solo concert the day before and I felt relaxed? Was it because I was tired? Or was I inspired by my fellow students I had heard playing solo concerts that day? Did some inner censor turn off?

What I believe happened was that I really felt inspired! I had seen great music performances that day, and now it was my time to express myself. It didn't matter whether there was going to be an audience. I just needed to express myself. Maybe due to my tiredness, self-censorship turned off, and I played freely, connected to the spirit of music. Music was playing me.

I feared nothing; I was totally careless. Yet I was fully aware and constantly amazed by myself because I was playing beyond my boundaries. The mind is limited, but music is unlimited! In other words, we don't know our limits really.

Now that I have experienced what a total connection to music feels like, I want to remember this feeling.

Stephen Nachmanovitch in his book *Free Play* describes exactly what I experienced:

A moment comes when we realize that we have fallen in love with our instrument.... We are in love with music, art, literature.... We feel love of beauty, love of the craft well done, love of the material, of the instruments. We feel the sensuality of playing, and of listening, reading, seeing and learning.<sup>27</sup>

At the time, I didn't realise that this is an experience which often goes by the name of "flow." I knew the concept (see private lesson about flow below), but I had not yet experienced flow strongly.

### Reflection continued (The flow concept):

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is often credited as the inventor of the term "flow" in this understanding of it. In *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*,<sup>28</sup> he describes what flow is and the prerequisites for flow. Concepts from the book are summarised in this section.

In short, flow occurs when you don't see yourself as separate from what you are doing, you are completely immersed in the activity. You enjoy the experience itself, not the possible outcome. There is a high concentration in the task at hand.

He mentions that having clear goals is necessary to be able to experience flow. The most important and efficient goals are the internal goals that we set for ourselves,

---

<sup>27</sup> Nachmanovitch, *Free Play*, 165.

<sup>28</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, EPub edition, Chap. 9 Cheating Chaos, The Autotelic Self: A summary.

not the external goals coming from school or work. Furthermore, it is important to develop the skill to reward yourself instead of depending on rewards and recognition from the society.

In *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, Csikszentmihalyi conducts interviews with hundreds of creative individuals from the arts and sciences. He identified nine main elements that describe how it feels when an experience is enjoyable.<sup>29</sup> Throughout this thesis, I refer to these elements and connect them to my own findings and experiences when relevant. The elements of flow are presented below:

1. There are clear goals every step of the way.

- We know what has to be done and we recognize the challenges. In music, we know what note to play next or what to focus on. There is no doubt.
- In my case, playing the solo concert the day before was a challenge, and I knew what I wanted to do. In my flow experience, I had a feeling of achievement from the previous day. My goal was simple and clear—to express myself through music.

2. There is immediate feedback to one's actions.

- We know, or even better, we feel how we are doing. In music, we sense immediately whether the note being played feels right at the moment.
- I certainly experienced this feeling at my session. I was in the moment.

3. There is a balance between challenges and skills.

- Enjoyment occurs between the points of boredom and anxiety. If an activity is too easy, it becomes boring. If an activity is too difficult, it causes anxiety. A too-difficult piece of music can make the musician frustrated and disappointed, while a too-easy one leads to boredom and routine. This balance is illustrated in Figure 1.

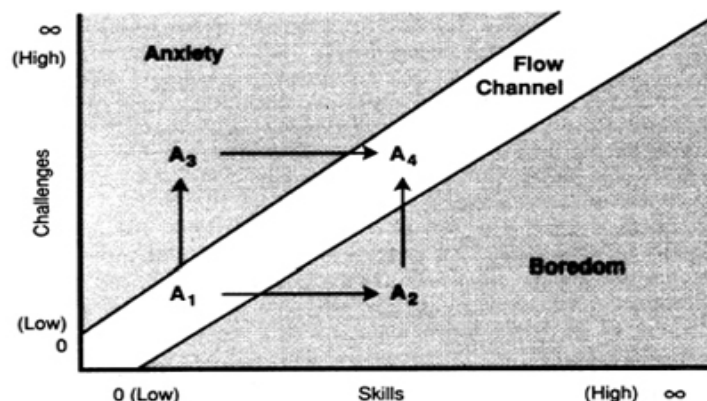


Figure 1 (The Flow Channel).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity*, 111-113.

<sup>30</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, Epub edition, Chap. 4 The Conditions of Flow.

- While in Copenhagen, I was exposed to free improvised music quite often. I was myself becoming more experienced in playing free. During this session, I built upon my skills in traditional jazz while experimenting with free improvising. I was to a certain amount stepping away from the structured and traditional jazz way of playing. This challenge to play free was the right challenge for me since I was genuinely interested in it. I was exactly between the points of boredom and anxiety; therefore, I was in the flow channel.
4. Action and awareness are merged.
    - Concentration is focused on the activity, and possible problems of daily life are not present. Musicians while performing do not feel separated from their actions; they are one with their performance and instrument.
    - As stated above, I forgot everything. I was hungry, but I did not think about it. My whole being, mind and body, was involved in the activity of playing.
  5. Distractions are excluded from consciousness.
    - This point is related to the previous point. Flow is the result of intense concentration on the present which relieves us of the usual fears that cause depression and anxiety in everyday life.
  6. There is no worry of failure.
    - In flow, we are too involved with the activity to be fearful. Confidence is strong, goals are clear (point 1) and we are not worried about lack of skills (point 3).
    - In the experience I described above, I was totally fearless. I didn't care about anything or the possible outcome of anything. I was just there playing. The fact that I was alone during this activity has to be taken into consideration. I didn't worry about possible judgement by other people.
  7. Self-consciousness disappears.
    - The awareness of the self, our ego, can in some situations do more harm than good. The judgemental mind of our ego can stand in the way. In flow, we don't care about the ego. We are not thinking. We have perhaps become part of something else than ourselves.
    - I have experienced this, where I am not thinking, I am just feeling! I will come back to this notion later in this thesis.
  8. The sense of time becomes distorted.
    - Time passes quickly, and we can experience hours as minutes.
  9. The activity becomes autotelic.
    - Autotelic is Greek for something that is an end in itself. Music is autotelic, we do it for the process itself and not the results. Not only is the goal of an activity rewarding, but the activity itself is fulfilling. Flow is therefore an immediate return on investment.

- It is clear that in my case above, I was not aiming at creating award-winning compositions or practicing so that I could make money later at a concert.

Below, I have included answers from my questionnaire where respondents describe their flow experiences. Those descriptions can also be placed under one or all of the points above.

### **Questionnaire:**

'Have you ever experienced becoming one with the instrument while playing? Or in other words, forgetting yourself, completely immersed in the music.'

With this question, I asked whether the respondents had experienced flow without using the word 'flow', since then they might have answered differently.

Yes, that happens. Most often in so called free improvisations, when you get completely absorbed in the music. In such a case, chronometrical time passes fast, but for yourself, it is like the time stands still in a prolonged now. –Responder 1

Yes, often and it is the only state of making music and/or expressing that makes sense to me. I could lose myself like that even in a conversation talking to you. I believe it also occurs in practicing. However, with the introduction of rational thought and knowledge into music—such as was heavily stressed in many of the music courses I followed—I may have led myself astray a bit, and in recent experiences it has occurred less often. –Responder 15

I guess I did. But this happened when I had less work and less theoretical knowledge. Now it happens during my gigs from time to time. –Responder 31

The cello is a part of my body, and my life would be incomplete without it –Responder 36

'In your own words, can you describe the strongest experience you have had when this has happened? Why do you think it happens? What were the contributing factors?'

The purpose of this question was to make the respondents reflect deeper about such experiences. I was looking for different descriptions of flow experiences. Many of the answers were intriguing to read.

When the ego stops telling you who you are, you emerge fully formed. There is total oneness in everything, there is only flow and our fast-changing existence is interwoven with tones and harmonies –Responder 10

For me it is important that I can close my eyes. I need to know the frame of what I am working with. Then I try to expand that frame as much as possible. I almost try to go beyond myself to open up a creative approach to the situation. This is a meditation of some sorts. –Responder 11

It happens when I am playing music I connect to and know well. Also, when everyone playing are comfortable with making mistakes and are listening to each other. –Responder 12

I firmly believe now that the same feeling is still and always there in fact, naturally, every time we play or write. And the only thing we do is obstruct it - with our own thoughts - judgements -

hopes - need for control. Being close to your core values - why you play music - and remembering this and reminding yourself of it - this has been suggested to me once to facilitate the arising of this feeling and I found it really does help. –Responder 15

About contributing factors: it helps if the audience and the other musicians create a space for it. A loud distracted audience makes it harder. A fearful non-listening-band member also makes it harder. However, ultimately, I have the feeling and experience so far, that I am always responsible for myself to be in this state. In worst case, being surrounded by ignorant band members and audience, I might play in the state of "flow" but no-one else might notice. –Responder 32

To me it feels like my gestures go straight to the instrument. What I hear, what I play, and my instrument are connected in the fastest way possible and I accept everything I hear. I don't judge before I play, and I don't judge after. Everything is part of the performance and is equally beautiful. –Responder 34

Some answers were in contrast to the others:

Never, I always feel a separation between myself and the instrument. –Responder 2

‘Are you familiar with the term “flow”?’

At the end of the questionnaire, I asked this question. Most of the participants answered yes.

In the way that I assume you mean it, yes. I like the term that Hindustani musicians use for this state: Moksha –Responder 32

### **Further notes regarding flow (27th of January 2015 - Private lesson in flow)**

At the Koninklijk Conservatorium, I attended a short elective course on flow. A visiting teacher from Australia, violinist Rachael Beesley, gave all students enrolled in the course a private lesson on flow. Here are some of the notes I took from that lesson:

It is good to sense the surface of the instrument before practicing or playing. Feel the piano, feel the parts of the body that contact the instrument. Feel the weight of the keys, the texture of them. Feel the vibration of the keys and the vibration of the sound.

Get to know the instrument. This should be done without any correlation to the music to be played because that is what the mind wants to play. Try to disconnect yourself from the tasks of the mind for a while.

Think about your posture by the instrument. Try to activate the muscles in the thighs with the hands hanging in front and feet a little bit apart. Try to play like this for a while but then find a more convenient posture that achieves the same emotion of effortlessness. This can improve sound and depth at the piano.

It is also efficient to sing phrases along with the lines you play at the piano out loud! Really resonate your voice and don't sing half-heartedly. Another option is to sing inside your head while playing but singing out loud is more effective.

Singing correctly can help you to breathe correctly and to find the breathing that is the most natural for you.

Focusing on singing can shut down unnecessary judging by the brain. It also brings a different kind of focus to the music. There are different ways of maintaining focus and you have to find it for yourself which ways work for you.

Make practicing more engaging. Make practice a performance that you are doing for yourself. Load the practice session with meaning so you feel like you have done something clearly and with focus.

When playing, think of releasing a note instead of hitting a note. Those notes are already in the air and you just need to activate them. Look for the sound jumping from the string rather from the hammer. Explore the intervals and bathe in the sound.

With pieces you like playing, it is much easier to get into the flow state! It should be interesting and the right amount of challenge for you to play. If the music is not interesting enough for you, try to find ways to make it more interesting. Make the music yours!

These are all very valid points. It is interesting to see that I was introduced to these concepts three years ago. At the time, I just didn't give myself enough time to dwell on this subject. I was so preoccupied with other demands of the school. To play bebop lines like Bud Powell? Why? I never managed to play like Bud Powell. I didn't really want to then and I definitely don't want to now. Also, that type of music was irrelevant to me. I should have been focusing more on music that I genuinely liked. As Beesley said, 'With pieces you like playing, it is much easier to get into the flow state!'

### **12th of April** **(Forcing is bad)**

I went to a jam session. While playing, I noticed I was forcing certain things into my playing. I was trying to sound hip and cool. But why? Of course, it doesn't work like that. Things have to happen organically.

## **20th of April**

### **(Period of experiments // Inspired by conversation)**

During one of my lessons with Simon Toldam, I mentioned this life-changing practice session I had. He suggested doing my own research on flow. Find out when I have flow experiences and why. In the lesson we came up with a list of things to try:

- (/) Push myself for 1-2 hours more when feeling exhausted.
- (x) Walk around in the city.
- (-) Walk in the woods.
- (/) Leave my smartphone at home for a day.
- (x) Bike somewhere else than school.
- (x) Extreme day of only playing music with others.
- (x) Take one whole day off music and then play just for 30 minutes in the evening.
- (x) Wake up very early and play music.
- (-) Spend a long time on technical exercises, 2-3 hours and then play.
- (-) Timer for 15 minutes- play, 15 minutes something else (break).
- (x) Go to a concert and then straight to play after the concert.
- (x) Spend some time on the drums or the voice, then play the piano.

(x) = I did that. (/) = I partly did that. (-) = I haven't done it yet.

After the lesson with Simon, I went straight to practice the piano. Just talking about flow in the lesson resulted in an effective and inspired flow state. It is fruitful to be inspired!

## **22th of April**

### **(Period of experiments // Mental or physical preparations)**

I went for a long walk in Copenhagen and afterwards to play at school. (Nota bene: I went there with the mindset to play, not practice!) To start with, I felt fresh and 'in the zone,' But then this feeling of freshness diminished.

I was thinking about when I saw Keith Jarrett play in Brussels. Later in the practice session, I tried to do the same. I just threw my hands at the piano and started to play whatever. I remember it being quite effective and interesting, but not what I thought it would be. An opposite approach would be to think of some mental instructions before playing.

I didn't have my backpack that day. Perhaps when I have the backpack, I have 'tasks' so to say. Maybe it affects the brain and how I approach the piano. This brought up the question, what should be the difference between practising and playing the piano? I will discuss that later in this text.

## Reflection:

Above I wrote:

'I just threw my hands at the piano and started to play whatever. I remember it being quite effective and interesting, but not what I thought it would be.'

I can already see the issue when reading this afterwards. I was having preconceived thoughts about what I wanted the music to be. I was in fact affected by the mind and my hands were therefore not free. I was not allowing the music to play through me.

## Questionnaire:

'Do you prepare yourself mentally or physically before a performance? And how? Does that affect the performance?'

Many of the respondents said they do some meditation or physical exercises before playing. Here are some interesting answers:

Running and racing ultramarathons takes a lot of time and dedication. I don't have so much time to spend playing my instrument if I'm running for 20 hours a week. However, I believe they are still strongly connected. Running makes me less judgemental about my playing, and also less judgemental about myself overall. My goal as a musician is not to become as good as possible, but rather to enjoy playing as much as possible! It's a trade I have to do, especially if I play straight or soon after running. I'm not in the best technical shape, but my mind is calm and silent. It's easier for me to observe myself and others without either critique or praise from myself. Running helps me to experience more and think less. –Responder 13

I like to meditate. I am after all a Zen Buddhist priest and I have practiced meditation for over 20 years. It results in more clear playing and more honest. –Responder 10

Physically I do breathing and vocal warm-up exercises. Mentally I stretch and sometimes yawn a lot to make my brain believe that I am at total ease. –Responder 14

Not really, I usually find it best to just do it. –Responder 24

Not usually, but sometimes, especially before an important occasion (exam or a big concert) I try to relax and meditate a bit. Sometimes I listen to a metronome for a while to get into the flow. Or I listen to bits of the pieces I'm going to play on my headphones. –Responder 33

I personally used to have difficulties separating myself from the perceived judgement and feelings of others, so I used to need to go through a sort of mantra. I don't recommend that though because it is better to learn not to be afraid of any feeling! It was something like 'there is something natural in every human to enjoy the process of music, and once you enjoy the process instead of the outcome there is no right and wrong, so I will just go ahead and enjoy the process. –Responder 35

Yes. I try to take a little time for myself. Wash my hands. I don't know if it affects the performance, but it gives something to me. –Responder 40

My father always tells me: Kos deg med musikken! Which means to enjoy the music or have a good time with the music. –Responder 4

I think my mental instructions would be to not think about anything. Especially about daily problems. –Responder 18



## **23rd of April** **(Period of experiments // Awareness of the moment)**

I tried to sharpen my senses before practising. The goal was to be fully aware of the surroundings. That is, I tried to notice everything in the room, listen attentively and sense everything. This is definitely a healthy way to start the practice session, but I didn't give myself enough time for this.

Later that day when practising again, I played jazz standards. I noticed all the clichés in my playing, and I was very aware of my playing.

Sometimes I think I am a victim of technology. I forget to enjoy reading, walking, and even to enjoy music in a deep way. The reason is endless disturbances from smartphones and computers. I need to present in the moment, enjoy each moment more!

### **Reflection:**

Mildred Chase presents in her book, *Just Being at the Piano*, various methods of becoming more aware of the surroundings, the body and the sound while playing. She also expresses the necessity of being in the moment, the now, while playing. Here are some inspiring quotes from the introduction of her book:

Nowhere is it more important to be in the here and now than in playing the piano.<sup>31</sup>

It is impossible to be self-conscious and totally involved in the music at the same time. Consciousness of the self is a barrier between the player and the instrument. As I forget my own presence, I attain a state of oneness with the activity and become absorbed in a way that defies the passage of time.<sup>32</sup>

Just being—at the piano—egoless—is to each time seek to reach that place in which the only thing that exists is the sound and moving toward the sound. The music on the page that was outside of you is now within you, and moves through you; you are a channel for the music, and play from the center of your being.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Chase, *Just Being at the Piano*, Kindle edition, Introduction

<sup>32</sup> Chase, *Just Being at the Piano*, Kindle edition, Introduction

<sup>33</sup> Chase, *Just Being at the Piano*, Kindle edition, Introduction

## 25th of April (Playing versus practising)

I had a conversation with a drummer about flow. He said that we need to accept who we are as players and artists. Sometimes we don't sound good, and that's just it. We can't do anything about it. I agree with him. In general, playing has to be an organic thing. Once you start to force something, judge or fix it - it becomes inorganic. It is important to believe in yourself. If you don't believe, chances are that others, be it players or audience, won't believe you.

After that discussion, I wrote the following down:

Piano player - the one who plays the piano  
Piano practiser - the one who practices the piano

### **Reflection:**

I want to be a piano player, not piano practiser. Lately I have tried to always approach the instrument in the same way. Playing/practising as if it was a performance at Carnegie Hall. A universal method to the activity of making sounds.

Our stereotypical formula, "practice makes perfect", carries with it some subtle and serious problems. We think of practice as an activity done in a special context to prepare for performance on the "real thing". But if we split practice from the real thing, neither one of them will be very real.<sup>34</sup>

What is practising? What is playing? I believe it is helpful to define what is practising where we are analysing. When focusing on technique for example. But that analytical focus is not suitable while performing. Once I heard somebody say the following:

When I practice, I am my dad. When I play, I am just a child playing - Unknown

Can we practice in the flow state? I believe flow is more likely to happen while playing than while practising. But I believe it is possible to practice in a flow state. The environment needs to be comfortable and judgement free. The goals for the practising session need to be clear and the challenge of the thing to be practised should be suitable.

---

<sup>34</sup> Nachmanovitch, *Free Play*, 67.

## Questionnaire:

'Do you make a distinction between practising and performing? How?'

A good deal of the respondents were experienced performers. Did they have similar speculations as I was having? Many made a clear distinction between the two. But some mentioned treating practising as if it was a performance.

I don't practice. Practicing makes us better in practicing, not in playing. –Responder 13

Yes! For me it is two different activities. Practicing is about "designing" what you may perform later, to prepare, to experiment. Performing is to be in the now, to engage in whatever is going on. –Responder 1

When I'm practicing I am usually more self-conscious and analytic about my playing. When I'm performing I try to rather focus on the situation, the room and the ensemble as a whole instead of me as an individual. With this approach I find it easier not to focus on "right and wrong", and instead just be present with the audience and the ensemble. –Responder 9

A good teacher of mine said that If sounded good while practicing - I was in fact not practicing. He also said that a part of the practice session should be approached as a performance. –Responder 10

I only practice the things I can't play. On concerts I only try to play things I hear. –Responder 11

When I practice, I focus on the elements of my playing that I'm unhappy with; when I'm performing, I focus on the elements that I'm happy with. –Responder 16

Practise fulfils technical goals, performance fulfils aesthetic goals. –Responder 39

## **25th of April - continued** **(Same state of consciousness)**

In the evening, I went to a concert led by American pianist Butch Lacy in a church in Christianshavn. The band played really well. They performed some kind of melodic free jazz. At one point during the concert, Butch asked the audience to participate in a piece together with the band. The band scattered around the church with their instruments and Butch started by singing a note while he sat by the piano. The audience was supposed to participate by singing notes only if they felt compelled to do so. Every note had to be produced organically, and nothing should be forced. He called this 'zooting'. He explained that the most important rule of 'zooting' was to do nothing. After a while, the band and the audience were improvising together using either their voices or instruments. We were just a bunch of people making music together in this church. This was such a beautiful moment, and it felt so good to be part of it! Magical!

I was thinking, isn't this a more valuable experience than watching a crappy smartphone recording of some concert on a smartphone? Let's not forget the value (and power) of live music. And let's not treat music like crap - because then it becomes crap perhaps?

After the concert, I felt inspired and just had to play the piano! I had a delightful practice session where I played free, and I was experiencing flow. I had six ideas for new compositions only during this short practice session. Then towards the end of the session, I became tired of constantly creating so I just jammed to a recording of a reggae beat.

I know I am repeating myself, but the most honest music, the music from within, has to be let out in an organic way! You can't force things to happen! This was a matter of discussion earlier today with the drummer. And again, at the concert, the explanation Butch had for 'zooting' describes the same thing.

#### **Audio 3 and Audio 4**

[25.04.2017 - Song idea A.mp3](#)

[25.04.2017 - Song idea B.mp3](#)

#### **Reflection:**

Performance is all about state of mind. The public is like a dog. They can feel insecurity, they can feel fear, they can feel you are not there. So the idea is how you can bring performer and the audience in the same state of consciousness, here and now.<sup>35</sup>

As far as I can tell, Butch managed to do just that. He brought the audience and the performers into the same state of consciousness.

#### **27th of April**

#### **(Being inspired by a lecture)**

I went to a lecture by pianist/composer Søren Kjærgaard where he presented his research project. What an inspiring lecture! The way he gave it and his being somehow. Just hearing him talk about all the sonic possibilities of the piano was an injection of inspiration. With an inspired mind, I went to rehearse with a trio. I was in an inspired flow state of mind, and I put a lot of energy into my playing.

#### **Audio 5:**

[27.04.2017 - Inspired rehearsal.mp3](#)

---

<sup>35</sup> *Marina Abramovic: The Artist Is Present*, dir. Matthew Akers, USA, Show of force, 2012, [DVD]

## **10th of May**

### **(Things to be aware of // Seven things in music)**

In a group lesson with Hanne Boel, I played a song of mine. It didn't go well, and I wasn't treating it like a performance. I have to give each moment in music the respect it deserves. I have to make the connection!

--

For the last two weeks, I have been investigating my playing and tried to be really aware of it. It seems to me that I am going through a transformative period in my life. There is new knowledge to digest about music and myself. While going through my discoveries, I made the list below. It is a list to keep in mind while playing music:

- Be yourself and believe in yourself. Don't be afraid!
- Listen to everything you play, and/or play what you hear.
- Rediscover everything in music as it was new - so that it sounds fresh
- Be in and experience the present moment. Just play!
- Lean into the stream of music. Music is easy!
- Give yourself time! You often have more time than you think
- Don't force anything into your playing. Music sounds best organic.

'Appendix D: Seven things in music' presents the same list with detailed explanations.

#### **Audio 6:**

[10.05.2017 - Improv.mp3](#)

#### **Reflection:**

How does this list relate to the flow concept as described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi? Below is the list again with explanations on how it refers to the flow concept. See previous description of flow on pages 25-28.

- Be yourself and believe in yourself. Don't be afraid!
  - In flow there is no worry of failure.
- Listen to everything you play or play what you hear.
  - In flow there is total awareness of the activity and immediate feedback to one's actions.
- Rediscover everything in music as it was new - so that it sounds fresh
  - Not directly related, but in flow there are clear goals every step of the way.
- Be in and experience the present moment. Just play!
  - In flow there is total immersion in the present moment, and the activity becomes autotelic - an end in itself.
- Lean into the stream of music. Music is easy!

- This means in other words, to move the artistic decisions, or even burden, from the self-conscious (the ego) to something else. In flow self-consciousness disappears.
- Give yourself time! You often have more time than you think
  - We don't need to remind ourselves of the time passing. In flow, the sense of time becomes distorted.
- Don't force anything into your playing. Music sounds best organic.
  - When we are forcing something, we are not using skills that are internalised. In flow, there is a balance between challenges and skills and self-consciousness (the mind) disappears.

Thinking too much about getting into 'the zone' is dangerous. It should be treated with caution. If we have the clear intention to get into the flow state, we are forcing it (the last point on my list). Forcing is not a good thing. Considering the 'life-changing practice session' I had, I was not forcing anything. I was just being, and everything happened organically. It's fine to research this subject for a while, but I also realise that I need to stop at some point. This is merely a learning process about playing. But playing is another thing.

The flow state has nothing to do with thinking - or in other words, the mind. Being aware of this is necessary. Sometimes flow happens and sometimes not. And we have to accept when it doesn't happen.

The poet Gyorgy Faludy usually does not start writing until a "voice" tells him, often in the middle of the night, "Gyorgy, it's time to start writing." He adds ruefully: "That voice has my number, but I don't have his. The ancients called that voice the Muse."<sup>36</sup>

## **24th of May** **(Being free in music)**

In the evening, I went to a jam-session in Christiania. I joined in two of the songs. One was a free improvised number, and the second one was Solar, a jazz standard. I could let go and be connected in the free piece. But when playing Solar, I was stuck in the mindset of the traditional way of playing jazz. In other words, I wasn't free in my playing. I was too confined to the form, the scales and the chords of that standard and I didn't really allow myself to play.

At the same session, I saw a fellow piano student play. He was very energetic that evening and played wonderfully! He was really PLAYING and having fun. He was completely free in his playing, and he loved every note he played. I thought: 'I want to be free in my playing!' I know I can because I have experienced it. But this also depends on the musicians I play with. When playing standards with players who are free and open in their playing, it is easier for me to do that as well.

---

<sup>36</sup> Gyorgy Faludy interviewed in, Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity*, 114-115.

## **Reflection:**

Embrace tradition but don't be enslaved by it! When playing Solar that evening, I was maybe enslaved by the tradition of that type of jazz. I had the need to sound good, to follow in the footsteps of all the greats who have interpreted that tune instead of just playing it in my own way.

I was really aware of my playing – and that is a positive thing. And I realised that I don't want to rely on 'tools' in my playing. Trying to be something that I am not doesn't work and is not what I want.

## **31st of May** **(Emotions and awareness)**

My phone stopped working, and it irritated me. Why am I mentioning this? Well, later in the day I had a jam/rehearsal with a trio. During playing, I had some extra energy because I was irritated. Despite the annoyances with the phone, I was there to play and have fun.

While playing I noticed that my mouth was often open, and it felt like the jaw was relaxed. I connected very well with the piano and the players. They are also lovely persons which helps. I was really in the moment, and I took some bold choices. I was experiencing flow and a strong connection to my inner musicality!

## **Reflection:**

Emotions evoke inspiration, and here irritation evoked this energy. I became totally absorbed into the playing. I mentioned that my mouth was open. This could mean that I was letting go and allowing the music take over.

Keith Jarrett wasn't happy with the piano on the famous Köln Concert. He describes how he forgot his troubles:

You always want to make it as good as it can be but when you have problems that you can't do anything about, one after another, you start to forgetting actually what you are doing - till it's time. And that's one of the secrets.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Keith Jarrett on doing the Cologne Concert - Köln Concert, [online video], 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9rTZLjBOfI> (accessed 17th of April 2017).

## **4th of June** **(Confidence through singing)**

I performed new songs at Jazzhouse in Copenhagen with a great trio! João Hasselberg on bass and Simon Olderskog Albertsen on drums. That evening I fulfilled a musical and personal goal which was to sing publicly in front of an audience. I have never done that before. I sang in the first two songs, and the rest were instrumental songs. It was not perfect; of course, and my voice can be developed more. But I am so happy I dared to do this. If I have the confidence to sing, having confidence in my piano playing should be no problem. I don't know whether I will continue singing publicly and compose songs with lyrics, but my voice is my second instrument now, and I feel good about it. I experience this evening as a certain turning point that made me stronger as a musician and person!

**Audio 7:**  
[04.06.2017 - Mother Tongue at Jazzhouse.mp3](#)  
[Sheet music](#)

### **Reflection:**

Why was I singing? Many of my previous compositions are piano flavoured. So, at the beginning of that semester, I made it a goal to experiment with my voice as a tool for composing. The idea was that by using my voice, the result would be melodies that are clear and lyrical. These experiments then evolved into being something more.

For me, exposing and developing my voice was a method to strengthen my confidence. The voice is the most personal instrument there is. By bringing confidence out through the voice, I believe that I became more confident in general. Hopefully, as a by-product, I became more confident in my piano playing. It is my conclusion that it worked for me.

While singing, I am connected to my own limitations. In a way, my instrument is not the piano; the instrument is me. Singing is an excellent way to discover and develop this inner instrument. And the piano is simply an extension of that.

At this concert, I was singing and playing the piano. Then I looked at it as two separate activities. I was a piano player who was also singing. But when bringing those activities together, that's where the real connection happens.

Singing is an important and useful tool in music, and in my opinion, spending some time with singing can make instrument playing stronger. Earlier in this thesis, there was noted 'singing can shut down unnecessary judging of the brain.'<sup>38</sup> So when singing, self-consciousness disappears. That relates directly to the prerequisites of flow.

---

<sup>38</sup> Private lesson about flow (pages 29-30)



Later in this work, I will mention private lessons I had with pianists Mikhail Alperin and Aaron Parks. They both describe how they connect to the piano by singing.

### **Questionnaire:**

'Have you used your voice to compose music? If it's not your usual way of composing, what are your thoughts on that?'

I believe the voice has much potential for composing. I was interested in hearing if these heavily educated musicians ever used this fundamental instrument for composing. The answers were mixed. While the voice was perhaps not their primary method of composing, most of the instrumentalist had experimented with it in one way or another. The singers mentioned the voice as their primary method.

Yes, sometimes it's easier to first sing a melody (or even harmony) before finding it on an instrument. I also believe that it then really comes from within. –Responder 17

I might have used my voice sometimes to find melodies, but I usually just listen to my mind's ear instead. I think using your voice can be a great way to compose music as it is so directly linked to your mind's ear that it's easy to sing out what you hear in your head or at least something close to it. –Responder 22

### **9th of June**

#### **(Physical pain and its effect on creativity)**

Friday the 9th of June 2017 is probably one of the most difficult and painful days I have experienced. I had not slept at all the night before because of stomach pain. Still, I cycled to school and spent half a day recording new material with a quartet. I was in terrible pain the whole day. I should have stopped and cancelled this recording session.

When I was home in the evening, the pain was still there. I finally decided to visit the hospital. I remember walking/staggering like an old person, lost in the hallways of the hospital in Hvidovre, trying to find my way to the right ward. Apparently, I had appendicitis, and my appendix was successfully removed the following night.

Looking back, I wonder how I endured this. Somehow, I managed to hold it through, not admitting that there was something wrong with me. Typical Icelandic stubbornness I guess. On one of the recordings made that day, “*Tólf*”, there is a piano solo which is very interesting to me. This solo is totally improvised while having a strong and clear melody. For me it doesn't sound like a typical solo, it is rather a song by itself.

### **Audio 8**

[09.06.2017 - Tólf.mp3](#)

[Sheet music](#)

## Reflection:

While enduring the most pain I have ever had, my mind completely turned off, and one could say that my subconscious is playing totally undisturbed. This piano solo in “*Tólf*” is the best example of my music/playing that is not interfered by the brain.

Suffering is terrible, and most of us would be glad to live without any pain. But suffering, be it physical or psychological, can be a source of inspiration:

I had a friend, a poet called Radnóty, who wrote poems I considered atrocious. And then after suffering in the concentration camps it changed him totally and he wrote wonderful verse. Suffering is not bad: It helps you very much. Do you know a novel about happiness? Or a film about happy people? We are a perverse race, only suffering interests us.<sup>39</sup>

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes dangerous and painful activities as extreme examples of flow:

..what kept them motivated was the quality of experience they felt when they were involved in the activity. This feeling didn't come when they were relaxing, when they were taking drugs or alcohol, or when they were consuming the expensive privileges of wealth. Rather, it often involved painful, risky, difficult activities that stretched the person's capacity and involved an element of novelty and discovery. This optimal experience is what I have called flow, because many of the respondents described the feeling when things were going well as an almost automatic, effortless, yet highly focused state of consciousness.<sup>40</sup>

## Questionnaire:

‘Have you ever played your instrument while enduring physical pain? If so, did that have any effect on the music? In what way?’

Yes, I played concerts while having a fever. A few of them, funny enough, came out as good ones since I didn't have any problems with focusing. I felt too bad to do anything else than just play. –Responder 3

When in sorrow, I compose the best. When I'm happy, I play the best. –Responder 8

Yes, that has sometimes enhanced my focus. –Responder 6

Yes. It can help me to stay less critical about my playing as there is something else to concentrate on. I don't think it's a bad thing. –Responder 13

Generally, sickness, fever, etc tends to give me more adrenaline, more awareness and more presence in my experience. It pushes certain "buttons" that I don't normally use. –Responder 17

It has taken my focus to the pain sometimes, resulting in less flow. –Responder 7

---

<sup>39</sup> Gyorgy Faludy interviewed in, Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity*, 84.

<sup>40</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity*, 110.

## 2017 – Summer holiday (Iceland)

### Digestive period

After this fruitful and explorative period in Copenhagen, I had become somewhat free and flowing in my playing. But did I use the free-ness in a good way? Was I honouring the spirit of music?

### **22nd of June**

#### **(Comfortable in the situation)**

I played four concerts in the Faroe Islands, and this fourth concert was the best one. I did experience flow while playing this concert. Also, I was playing some surprisingly free and open intros.

After the concert, I asked my friend and drummer Magnús Trygvason Eliassen what his thoughts were on flow in music. He said the following:

I always try to play in the flow. I try to play the minimum to give space so that flow and other magic can happen.<sup>41</sup>

### **Audio 9**

#### **[22.06.2017 - Improvised intro.mp3](#)**

### **Reflection:**

It does matter with whom you are playing. If the players are not open to the idea of allowing unexpected things happen, it will be more difficult to experience flow. Having a supportive and open-minded drummer like Magnús does help.

The same applies to the material. If the material is not very well known, chances are that flow will not happen. When something is not internalised, it is harder to be free and flowing. Possibly it is because learning is an activity of the brain. The brain is useful for learning - but should it be the driving force when it comes to playing?

---

<sup>41</sup> Conversation with Magnús Trygvason Eliassen on 22nd of June 2017.

## Questionnaire:

'Do you experience this (flow) feeling more often with a certain type of music or style? What type of music/style?'

As described earlier, the flow state is easier to attain when the performer finds enjoyment in playing the music. Many answers stated that this happens mostly in free-improvised music. But some said the style didn't really matter.

Only in jazz. All kinds of jazz. There has to be an unknown factor for it to be surprising enough to immerse me, and that only happens in jazz. –Responder 5

As long as I like the music I'm playing I think this can always happen. –Responder 6

No, that is pretty universal for me. –Responder 9

This experience is my practice every day. Not only through music, but through everything I do in my life. –Responder 10

It happens more when I play alone. But sometimes in a trio setting as well. –Responder 11

Not connected to a style. It usually happens in an improvisational environment where everybody can make mistakes. –Responder 12

As a listener, I feel that music made to purely entertain or generate money is the least likely to have this feeling. Besides that, I think every music can have that feeling. I have felt it in jazz, metal, dubstep, IDM, traditional music and so on ... I think the highest percentage of that feeling is in bands that are truly dedicated with all their heart to exactly the music they are playing. Whatever style that might be. –Responder 32

## **19th of July** **(Is music spiritual?)**

When reading the first few chapters of *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art* by Stephen Nachmanovitch, I became very inspired. When playing the piano afterwards, I completely fell into a flow/trance state of mind. I remember singing along with what I was playing. I realised that I am the music, I am the instrument, and I need to hear myself.

I thought, maybe playing music can be seen as a 'holy moment' both when practising and performing.

## **Audio 10 and Audio 11**

[19.07.2017 - Song idea A.mp3](#)

[19.07.2017 - Song idea B.mp3](#)

## Reflection:

I have already quoted sentences and paragraphs from *Free Play* in this thesis. It is an exceptionally well-written book which covers numerous aspects of improvising and playing. For me, *Free Play* is a work of art that can inspire. And apparently, I became very inspired when reading it on this day.

While reading the last thing in the diary entry, I can't help to wonder: Is music spiritual? And what does it mean to be spiritual? It is, in fact, an ambiguous word. Perhaps a definition could be; when you step out of the ordinary mind and you make a psychological connection to something other than yourself. The English Oxford Dictionary defines spiritual as follows: 'Relating to or affecting the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things.'<sup>42</sup>

### Quotes about spirituality and music:

The creative process is a spiritual path. This adventure is about us, about the deep self, the composer in all of us, about originality, meaning not what is all new, but that which is fully and originally ourselves.<sup>43</sup>

Music is the mediator between the spiritual and the sensual life.<sup>44</sup>

My answer to the question whether music is spiritual or not would be: Yes, but it depends on how music is treated and what meaning is given to it. The perception of music is an individual experience. For example, a song by Kraftwerk can be spiritual for a specific person but not for me. It just depends on how the moment of the activity is treated. Therefore, even washing dishes can be spiritual. And in music, it can be listening, performing, practising, and composing.

I was very religious as a child. Later I went away from it, and I wasn't religious at all. During this recent journey in music, my thoughts on spirituality and religion have changed somewhat. It is indeed a beautiful thing to believe in something.

When I would be asked the question if I were religious, I would answer: Yes! I believe in music. In music, something else than me takes control and I am in the best possible connection to my soul. A higher state of consciousness. And when I believe in music, I can make others believe in my performance of the music. For me, music is already the spiritual practice. What is the power of music? Is music really ours? Are we in control?

---

<sup>42</sup> *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*, s.v. "spiritual," accessed 17th of April 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/spiritual>

<sup>43</sup> Nachmanovitch, *Free Play*, 13.

<sup>44</sup> *Ludwig van Beethoven quoted by Frank Fitzpatrick*, "Why Music, Part 9: Music and Spirituality" *Huffington Post*, 3rd of May 2013, accessed on 17th of April 2018, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/frank-fitzpatrick/music-spirituality\\_b\\_3203309.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/frank-fitzpatrick/music-spirituality_b_3203309.html)

## Questionnaire:

'Do you think music is spiritual? In what way?'

This is a big question that gave insightful answers. Many respondents had strong opinions on the subject, and they liked to reflect upon it. I believe this question is not often asked in general, especially in school environments.

The answers were quite mixed. Some answered with absolute certainty either yes or no, while others said that music can be spiritual if that is the intention. Here are some of the answers:

Yes, but it depends on what we mean with spiritual. For sure music can unify people, both musicians and listeners. And you can have spiritual experiences of music. Music has the power to transcend, to move people into a certain mood. –Responder 1

Yes, but I think it is hard to explain with words. Maybe like someone said: music is an energy you tune into. –Responder 4

No, not really. I believe it is highly emotional and that it can elevate the mind to strange places. But I guess I just don't believe in this word spiritual overall. –Responder 5

To play music which you try to fetch from your own being (or some kind of universal mind) in real time must be a spiritual practice. Then there is the connection to the audience. They are participants in this spiritual practice. –Responder 11

Yes, there can be something transcendent about playing/listening to certain music. Try playing the same phrase, note or anything for an hour and see what happens. I do not know exactly what it is. Maybe that it can gather a very large group of people into the same state of feeling. –Responder 12

I think of music as spiritual but not less or more spiritual than anything else in life. That makes sense to me. I like to think of it as spiritual because I think in music we're finding a voice to express ourselves with, and it's a lifelong path and discovery into the depths of our self. Hence – spiritual. –Responder 15

Nope! At least, not any more spiritual than eating breakfast with my roommate, spending the night with a lover, or having a conversation with the barista at a coffee shop down the road. Human connection is divine (in a sense), and all these examples are beautiful expressions of collective creation, along with music making, and are equal in my mind. –Responder 16

Yes, I think it can be, but it isn't for everyone. I think it can express something bigger than we can grasp or put into words or understand with our logical minds. –Responder 21

I guess it is - but I'm not sure what music is and if I am able to define it in an inspirational way. –Responder 29

Yes, because of the way spirits connect and the way it is connected to both the focus and the energy of your own spirit. –Responder 41

Yes. I think it is a gift and responsibility. I also think it is bigger than us and has the capacity to move inner mountains if we let it be bigger than our egos. –Responder 42

I think music CAN BE spiritual, but in itself, isn't. Music can be noise, or even torture, as well - as sadly happened in Guantanamo Bay. In what I feel are the best performances, or best instances of art in general, the art piece lifts the veil to offer a glance at what is at the core of this life, this universe. The artist transcends - he/she is in the "flow" and takes everyone willing to really listen out of the confines we are trapped in daily life, therefore transcending (literally

over-stepping, or stepping up) to a different state of consciousness. I think you can call that spiritual, but I don't like the term "spiritual" too much because it puts a limit, a dogma, a belief-system on this experience. I believe it is best to experience it yourself and define it for yourself, and not try to cage it in. I think certain things in life should remain ambiguous, mysterious. –Responder 32

## **26th of July** **(Too free?)**

I played a concert with a bass player and saxophone player. In one of the songs, I had a nice moment of flow. But was I too free in my playing? Do I need to find a better balance in my playing? Perhaps.

Below is a recording of that song. I believe my 'solo' in it does not fit the mood of this song.

### **Audio 12**

**[26.07.2017 - Upphaf sem aldrei hófst.mp3](#)**

**[Sheet music](#)**

## 2017 - Autumn semester (Oslo)

### Becoming more deeply connected to music

In this chapter, I will discuss my efforts in becoming more deeply connected to my musicality. Simultaneously, it is about my attempts to have a more focused direction in my free improvisations. When I was playing free, it had more purpose and meaning.

Themes of discussion are: Focus on sound and rhythm, silence, meditation, love versus fear, inspiration, and how feelings affect music.

### **31st of August** **(Quality time at the instrument)**

I have arrived in Oslo to start my semester at Norges Musikkhøgskole. I have been busy the past days, so I haven't played the piano for quite some time. Today I played, just for an hour, and it felt so good! I wholeheartedly enjoyed making sounds at the piano, and I didn't judge anything. I could finally play the piano in solitude. No disturbances. I definitely experienced flow!

As is often the case with holidays such as Christmas and summer holidays, there is not much time for the piano. It can be hard to focus on practising, composing etc. There are so many disturbances and moments of solitude are rare. The moments I have for myself with the instrument are usually rewarding. They are a way for me to disconnect from the surroundings for a while. Perhaps those moments are a meditation of sorts.

### **Reflection:**

From my perspective, there is nothing wrong with taking a healthy break from practising and playing music, be it a few hours or a few days. That only makes the music and the feeling when playing it stronger.

Everybody needs to have time for himself/herself - also at the instrument. Solitude is essential to music. But so is togetherness and exposure to the world. There has to be a balance between the two.

If you're a musician, you should know a lot about music, that is, you have heard music, you remember music, you could repeat a song if you have to. In other words, if you were born on a desert island and never heard music, you're not likely to be a Beethoven. You might but it's not likely. You may imitate birds but you are not going to write the Fifth Symphony. So you're brought up in an atmosphere where you store a lot of information.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Jacob Rabinow interviewed in, Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity*, 48.



## **1st of October** **(Meditation through music)**

I went to a concert where fellow Icelander, Hilmar Jensson, was playing. I particularly liked his sound. He was completely absorbed in the music and seemed very focused on the sound. He gave each note the energy and beauty it deserved. This focus made him very present in the moment.

In meditation, there is often an awareness of the environment and focus on the breath. Focusing on sound, isn't that meditation in a way? When focusing on sound, it can make self-consciousness disappear. That is a key for flow to happen.

I believe focusing on sound is meditation in music. This applies to rhythm as well.

### **Reflection:**

Music is the easiest method of meditation. Whoever can let himself dissolve into music has no need to seek anything else to dissolve into.<sup>46</sup>

In a lecture given by Swedish flautist and saxophonist Anders Hagberg, he introduced an ancient Japanese Zen practice called suizen. Suizen monks used shakuhachi flutes as a tool for meditation. On his website, musician and suizen specialist Daniel Schnee gives ten suggestions that can be used as a way to meditate with the instrument while practising:<sup>47</sup>

- Listen to how the note begins and finishes.
- Consider any/all silence before or after as music, as a "note."
- Listen to the texture of the note and the dynamic shape.
- Listen to what happens to the sound.
- Follow the breath as you begin/end the sound.
- Listen to the quality/"shape" of the silence before/after sounding.
- Listen to what arises out of any and all silence.
- Breathe as if the breathing is part of the sound/note.
- Let your breath slowly become the music.
- Follow the note into your ears and try to find the place in your mind where you hear it.

Double bassist Gary Peacock has been a practitioner of Zen for years. In an interview he describes what Zen is to him:

---

<sup>46</sup> Osho quoted by Frank Fitzpatrick, "Why Music, Part 9: Music and Spirituality" *Huffington Post*, 3rd of May 2013, accessed on 17th of April 2018, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/frank-fitzpatrick/music-spirituality\\_b\\_3203309.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/frank-fitzpatrick/music-spirituality_b_3203309.html)

<sup>47</sup> "Suizen" Daniel Schnee, accessed 17th of April 2018, <https://danielpaulschnee.wordpress.com/5349-2/>

Zen is a spiritual practice that quiets the mind down. Zen isn't considered making you a better player.<sup>48</sup>

Filmmaker David Lynch is a dedicated spokesman for meditation and practices a meditation technique called Transcendental Meditation. In his book *Catching the Big Fish*<sup>49</sup> he describes what can be gained from meditation:

Personally, I think intuition can be sharpened and expanded through meditation, diving into the Self. There's an ocean of consciousness inside each of us, and it's an ocean of solutions. When you dive into that ocean, that consciousness, you enliven it.<sup>50</sup>

### **Questionnaire:**

'Do you meditate?'

- 17 answered no
- 15 answered yes
- 9 answered sometimes

Some of the other answers:

Not in that sense. For me playing music and improvising is meditation. –Responder 34

I do long-distance running, which is very meditative at best. –Responder 13

### **10th - 12th of October** **(Tiredness and the need to play)**

I boarded a flight to Iceland and went straight to a rehearsal with my trio. During the rehearsal, I was exhausted. But I was still having a lot of fun and really managed to let go, surrender to the music. I did experience flow!

Two days later the same trio played in Ísafjörður in the Westfjords. It was a challenge to get there - six-hour drive from Reykjavík to the concert place. But despite the effort to get there, the concert was the best one we had. We really allowed ourselves to play and discover new things.

---

<sup>48</sup> Heath, "Gary Peacock on Zen, self, and the muse"

<sup>49</sup> David Lynch, *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity: 10th Anniversary Edition* (New York: TarcherPerigee, 2007).

<sup>50</sup> Lynch, *Catching the Big Fish*, 45.

## Reflection:

I am certain that physical tiredness and sometimes exhaustion, can cause the mind to disappear. I have often experienced the feeling of playing well when I am tired. But not always.

I believe flow can happen when we have the need or hunger to play and express ourselves at the instrument. In the examples above, it was the feeling of being finally able to just play after long travelling periods. The excitement of expressing feelings. Feelings experienced over the day, expressed in relation to the instrument and music!

## 14th of October (Don't force anything)

I recorded a trio album in the suburbs of Reykjavík. We recorded nine songs in eight hours, all in one day. It was hard to grasp how I felt during these recordings. But my general feeling is that I didn't really 'fly' in my playing.

Next time I record something, I will reserve at least two days for it. One day is too intense.

## Audio 13

(This song is by the way composed using my voice as a method)

[14.10.2017 - Fundur studio recording.mp3](#)

[Sheet music](#)

## Reflection:

While listening to these recordings a few months later, I still agree with myself from a few months ago - it is not my optimal playing. But it is perhaps not as bad as I had thought. For some reason, I wanted to sound 'hip' on these recordings, and I wanted to show that I had some 'chops' (I am not sure I even have those chops). But as I have mentioned before, everything has to happen organically. And I was perhaps forcing some elements into my playing for this recording. That never works as intended.

True musical depth is not about better playing, but about more "organic" playing.<sup>51</sup>

I realized that the goal is letting go of my ego and being kind to myself, playing only what wants to come out effortlessly.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Werner, *Effortless Mastery*, 11.

<sup>52</sup> Werner, *Effortless Mastery*, 26.

## **16th of October**

### **(Relaxed // Nothing to gain and nothing to lose)**

I arrived back in Oslo yesterday. Today I had a rehearsal/jam in school, and it felt much nicer than this recording session in Iceland. During the CD recording, I was stressed, and I had a lot on my mind as a musician, bandleader, composer, organiser, driver, and manager.

At this rehearsal, I was relaxed. My role was just to play music, nothing else. I didn't think about any possible result of my playing. I allowed myself just to play. I had nothing to gain and nothing to lose.

### **Reflection:**

Free Play by Stephen Nachmanovitch starts with a Japanese story about a flute student who struggles to become a master at his instrument. Something was always lacking his teacher said. At the end of the story, after many years, the student has a concert. There he realises that he has nothing to gain and nothing to lose. He had abandoned all hope and fear, and his surrendering to the music was genuine and wholehearted.

During my trio recording on the 14th of October, I could not surrender. I had certain hopes for the success of this recording, and I had a fear of not playing well. Just two days later during this session in Oslo, I had no hopes for what I was playing, and I had no intention of wanting to sound good. I could let go in the music.

## **18th of October**

### **(Song and dance/rhythm)**

Today I had my first lesson with Mikhail (Misha) Alperin. He said after observing my playing that the basic was missing in my performance. I was not singing or dancing in the music. He said that those two are the most important to get in touch with music. According to him, singing and dancing need to be practised literally and then incorporated directly or indirectly into the process of piano playing.

He said that by literally developing my physical voice, I would develop my personal voice and sound as a musician. I should approach the music not as a piano player, but as a singer of my own voice.

He said that mastering rhythm is not about being able to play with a metronome. It is about keeping a steady pulse with emotion. And that is a dance. When the rhythm is flowing, energy is flowing. In that way, we can get the music to flow! As long as the rhythm is stable, it doesn't matter what we are playing. Let the rhythm carry the music!

I really had to digest after the lesson, I couldn't think about music or anything. So much new information and different approach to music. Even though I liked

the things Misha was teaching me, I reminded myself that no teacher speaks the absolute truth. The most important thing is to find my own truth and be my own teacher. Listen and believe in myself.

This whole year I have been thinking about music and flow, it's possible spiritual relation and inner musicality on a higher level than the mind. In the lessons that followed with Misha, he explained these things in his way and brought new revelations to me about these subjects.

---

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 2018, Misha left this world. I will remember him as one of the most inspiring and influential teachers I have ever had. He will be missed.

### **Reflection:**

Rhythm can facilitate a trance state of mind or in other words, flow. When the rhythm carries music, self-consciousness disappears, and sense of time becomes distorted. Focusing on rhythm gives a presence in the music. Connection to music!

The Sufis also speak of a related experience, sama, which means dancing yourself into ecstasy. In this state, body and mind are so intensely occupied with activity, the brain waves are thoroughly entrained by the compelling and powerful rhythms, that ordinary self is left behind and a form of heightened awareness arises.<sup>53</sup>

It is interesting to think about the relation to dance in music. The daily lives of some African tribes are still very connected to rhythm and dance. On YouTube there is a video clip: 'FOLI (There is no movement without rhythm.)'<sup>54</sup> In it, we see snippets from the life of an African tribe. Rhythm is in their work, chores, dancing, talking, and walking. Everything they do is connected to rhythm, a rhythm that is emotionally and physically associated with their lives. Have we in the Western world lost this connection to rhythm/dance in our lives?

Improvising musicians have often made associations with dance in their music. Thelonious Monk is perhaps the clearest example:

His "dance" consisted of a peculiar spinning move, elbow pumping up and down on each turn, with an occasional stutter step allowing him to glide left and right. It was a deliberate embodiment of the rhythm of each tune: Every drummer interviewed who played with Monk said that he liked to get up and dance in order to set the rhythm; it was a form of conduction that required complete attention from the drummer. Was it also a sacred expression? Perhaps. At the very least, what Monk witnessed on the road with the evangelist reinforced the essential relationship between music and dance - music is supposed to move the body and touch the soul.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Nachmanovitch, *Free Play*, 52-53.

<sup>54</sup> FOLI (there is no movement without rhythm) original version by Thomas Roebers and Floris Leeuwenberg, [online video], 2010 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVPLIuBy9CY> (accessed 30th of April 2017).

<sup>55</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, *Thelonious Monk: The Life and Times of an American Original* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 46.

Jazz composer Maria Schneider describes her method of dancing when she composes:

I can't almost write a piece without dancing. It helps me figure out, when I was talking about timing, it helps me figure out the timing of the piece, because your body tells you. It's hard for my mind to tell me what's too long or what's too short, but if I start dancing and moving around my piano or, you know, I'll play it into a recorder and put on headphones and then I start moving, I say, "Oh, no, I need more time to do what I want to do!" or "No, that's hanging on too long, I can't come up with anything else."<sup>56</sup>

Here she relies on the intuition of the body instead of the knowledge of the mind. She feels the music rather than thinking about it. This notion will be discussed later in the text.

In folk music from around the world, the sense of rhythm is usually powerful. Modern jazz is often rhythmically complex and played with masterful precision in timing. But does it contain the same energetic, emotional rhythm? I believe there is a lot to be learned from folk music.

### **More on song and dance (25th of October 2014 - Private lesson with Aaron Parks):**

In 2014 I visited New York. While there I had a private lesson with pianist Aaron Parks. Here are some notes I took from that lesson. He introduced me to his basic concepts about music:

In his view, the most important building blocks of music are: Rhythm, melody, and harmony. They are connected to the body, the heart, and the mind. Rhythm is the body, melody is the heart, and harmony is the mind. When playing music, we need to wake up those three things so that they are working together.

When working with rhythm, we need to make it physical, more like a dance. Get the body involved and make the rhythm come more alive.

While in the lesson, I noticed that Aaron sings with almost all he plays. This brought up the subject of how he warms up before playing the piano. He warms up by singing short melodies while playing a pedal/drone fifth in the left hand. The melodies he sings are improvised, and they go through different modes - Lydian, Ionian, Mixolydian and Dorian, for example. After singing each melody, he plays them on the piano with the exact same feeling. He does this to get a feeling of connection happening at the instrument.

This exercise takes the playing away from the realm of information (the mind) and turns it into an experience. The notes feel more lived in! He said this creates an opening to music for him. This prepares him to get into any piece of music.

---

<sup>56</sup> Maria Schneider, *Finding a Rhythm, in Body and Mind* (2009, December) [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://bigthink.com/videos/finding-a-rhythm-in-body-and-mind>

The singing exercise was excellent advice. It was my favourite thing to practice for a long time. It helped me open up musically, and it trained my ears as well. I wish I had developed this exercise more and incorporated it into my playing. But the school in Den Haag had its demands which I described earlier.

Aaron was describing what needs to be done with music. We need to connect to it! While the things Aaron mentioned are obvious and true to me now, they were not necessarily at the time. The most effective way to learn is to discover independently. So again, that is the purpose of this text. My personal journey of finding the connection to inner music.

### **25th of October** **(‘Be brave to love everything’)**

In my second lesson with Misha, style-specific jazz music education came into discussion. I told him about my experiences with it, and he agreed with me. He said that many students play with fear instead of love. He summed it up on the table:

Fear means you are not in love. If you want to be in love; be brave to love everything.<sup>57</sup>

You have to be in love with yourself first of course. In that way, you can believe in yourself and accept who you are as an artist.

### **Reflection:**

Love is the most important quality to bring to any task. Love draws all that we have within us to the action in which we are involved. It brings trust and acceptance; it heightens the senses; it allows us to be completely immersed in our work. Love does not bring forth censorship and defensiveness, conditions that adversely affect our learning ability. It allows self-acceptance and total involvement.<sup>58</sup>

In the documentary film ‘Jim & Andy: The Great Beyond’, actor Jim Carrey describes how his father, Percy Carrey, compromised his career as a jazz saxophonist and became an accountant to support his family. His job as an accountant wore him down, and he lost his job when he was only 51. He had failed his career. But what really broke him was that he had failed at something he didn’t love - since he had decided to compromise. This was an example for his son Jim:

I learned that you can fail at doing what you don’t love. So you might as well do what you love. There is really no choice to be made.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Conversation with Mikhail Alperin on 25th of October 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Chase, *Just Being at the Piano*, Kindle edition, Chap. 1

<sup>59</sup> *Jim & Andy: The Great Beyond*, dir. Chris Smith, USA, Vice Films, 2017, [online video - Netflix].

## Questionnaire:

'Do you have fears in your life as a musician?'

Since this question is quite personal, I was sceptical about including it in the questionnaire. I am also doubtful of its relevance to this work. But some of the answers it produced were interesting, and I believe they are relevant.

Many expressed fear of acceptance, fear of rejection, fear of failure and fear caused by financial problems. Some said they didn't have fears or that they had overcome their fears.

Not anymore. In the past, I went through hell when doctors told me that I never could play anymore. What they didn't know, is that I still hear the most beautiful music inside. It keeps playing to me and it now nurtures me in my teaching profession. I try to inspire young musicians around me and show them my love for music. We should count our blessings. There is nothing more killing for music than fears and negative thoughts. Any thought in that matter already is killing music since it disconnects immediately from the source of music which is silence. That's what I believe where music comes from. –Responder 3

Of course. Playing with people I have looked up to since I was a youngster is always a very hard thing for me because of acceptance issues I guess. Then there is always the fear of never being able to play what I hear and feel. –Responder 12

Certainly but it seems to me that the really big fears I have are not due to the profession as a musician but lie much deeper. They are still there in my life as a non-musician! –Responder 35

No, not really. To be an artist is in a way such an innocent activity. What is the worst that can happen? I can't think of anything. –Responder 36

One of the respondents had an interesting take on fear:

My biggest motivation is my fear of failure. –Responder 9

### **29th of October** **(Inner musicality improvising)**

Today when practicing, I was in deep connection with my inner musicality. Below is a recording of a free improvisation.

#### **Audio 14** **[29.10.2017 - Free improvising.mp3](#)**

### **30th of October** **(Having belief in yourself)**

I travelled to the Netherlands to start a 5-day tour of Netherlands and Belgium. The first stop was Den Haag, the city I lived in for four years.

While talking to friends and current students there, I sensed there was much negativity in the air. Some people were quite unhappy with the school and the



whole environment. Fear-based education. I was feeling sorry for these people. Since I would play a concert in the evening, I made it my goal to filter out the negativity of the people and make them happy. To make them feel loved in a way. Perhaps an overambitious and bombastic goal.

My trio played in the evening for a small crowd, and the concert went exceptionally well. It was a lot of fun! Did the goal for the evening have something to do with it? I don't know. But I was very open and free in my playing. Others noticed it as well.

I tried to remember my lessons with Misha while I played, especially his emphasis on song and dance. I also tried to rediscover everything as it was new and interesting while I was playing.

This was a liberating experience for me. I had overcome near depressive feelings about music associated with this place. I was playing my music with love and freedom of expressiveness in a city that I sometimes think of as the mecca of narrow-mindedness. This evening was a turning point, and it felt as if I had finally closed a chapter in my life.

I can be myself - anywhere. I know myself and believe in myself - everywhere. And I just let go in music.

### **Reflection:**

The first thing on the list I made for myself in Copenhagen (*Seven things in music*) is 'Be yourself and believe in yourself. Don't be afraid!' That notion was indeed put to work that evening. And as previously stated, in flow there is no worry of failure.

### **31st of October** **(Feeling!)**

After the second concert of our tour, there was a jam session. At the jam, there was a saxophone player who was really having fun with her instrument. Her playing was full of emotion and spirit, but she lacked proper technique.

### **Reflection:**

Emotions in music are powerful. For me, it was uplifting to see this saxophone player, even though she had terrible technique. Having technique is important, but feelings are even more important. It doesn't matter what you play, what matters is how you play!

Saxophone player John Coltrane and pianist Randy Weston describe in interviews how Thelonious Monk emphasised the importance of feeling:

Without saying a word, Monk taught me: "Play what you feel although it may not be the way it's supposed to be".<sup>60</sup>

One thing above all that Monk has taught me is not to be afraid to try anything so long as I feel it.<sup>61</sup>

We can and should expand our knowledge of music by studying various technical and theoretical aspects of it. The process of studying these aspects is an activity that requires thinking. Pianist and educator Mildred Chase mentions in her book, *Just Being at the Piano*, that in the end, what matters is feeling:

Even within the highly disciplined demands of the study of music, the tight net of knowledge and expectation can be loosened. That which we have consciously learned can be intuitively released in our playing: Thinking becomes Feeling.<sup>62</sup>

#### **4th of November** **(Emotions and their effect)**

Today was the last gig of this mini-tour. We had to play three sets with breaks in between so the concert was unusually long. During the first set we only played standards. Nothing interesting happened, everything was by the book. We were not free, and everything was boring and non-expressive. Here we were terribly tired - and in this case, being tired was not inspiring for the music.

Because of reasons I will not disclose here in this text, I became very sad and somewhat hurt in the break between the first and second set. The second set began, and I played with real sadness in my heart. What made matters worse was the loud audience. In my view, all music needs to begin with silence - but that was just not possible during this concert. The people there were so loud, so rude, so disrespectful.

Then came the third set. People were almost screaming at each other, and just a few people were listening. I stopped announcing the songs. There was no point in doing that. I have never experienced such disrespect at a live performance; it was totally hopeless. I was sad, angry, and hurt. I played carelessly at the piano in the end. Some of it was probably free and quite good. But it was not with the heart of joyfulness of playing. It was with the heart of feeling disrespected and sad. The music was not given justice at all under these circumstances. And I wasn't enjoying this at all.

---

<sup>60</sup> Ira Gitler, "Randy Weston", *Down Beat*, February 27, 1964, p. 16 cited in Kelley, *Thelonious Monk*, 119.

<sup>61</sup> John Coltrane quoted by Nat Hentoff, "The Private World of Thelonious Monk," *Esquire*, April 1960, p. 133 cited in Kelley, *Thelonious Monk*, 231.

<sup>62</sup> Chase, *Just Being at the Piano*, Kindle edition, Chap. 1.

## Reflection:

It's a pity I didn't record this last concert since it would have been interesting to hear how I played. To hear how these strong emotions affected my playing.

In general, I felt that this tour as a whole was good. I really needed to be out there for a while and play in different circumstances. And about this last gig, now I have probably experienced the worst audience that I will ever have. It is an experience to learn from.

## Questionnaire:

'How do emotions affect your practice as a musician?'

This question originated because of the experience described above. I believe emotions are strongly connected to music. We write music about emotions, and we perform music while expressing emotions. It is my assumption that when experiencing strong feelings, the music becomes more expressive – and perhaps sometimes less expressive. I wanted to know whether the respondents had similar conceptions about emotions in music. The answers to my question were mixed, and often the answers were simply yes or no.

Afterwards, I see that I should have phrased the question differently. A more suitable version of it would have been: 'Can you describe a certain performance where you experienced strong emotions. How did that affect the performance?' Here are some of the more detailed answers:

I am not sure, but I feel I play in a different way when I feel strong emotions, if I am angry or sad etc. It is like what I play matters more, not the tones, but the sound or energy. But even though the playing can feel like a form of therapy for me in these situations, I don't necessarily think the quality of the music I make is any better. An emotion that affects my practice in a negative way is restlessness. Therefore, I think meditation is a very good tool. –Responder 4

A lot! I think it's a good thing. That's what it's all about, so I need to stay connected with my emotions. –Responder 13

I think emotions enrich my creativity. It doesn't even matter if the emotions are negative or positive. –Responder 18

They do in unpredictable ways. Sometimes being very tired makes me more musical. Usually being sad makes me not wanting to practice while sometimes it makes me feel like performing. –Responder 34

No. I manage to put emotions aside when I practice. –Responder 36

It made sense to ask the same question, but the other way around:

'How does music affect your emotions?'

Music can create a big scale of emotions within me that I don't often stumble upon in daily life –Responder 7

Music lets the beauty inside come to the surface and also hope, love and my beliefs. There is a purpose to life and everything. –Responder 8

It acts as a distraction from other things in life, and as an overall improver of my life quality. – Responder 9

Music sneaks past the rational mind and goes straight to the heart. In that way, music has a tremendous effect and the possibility to heal –Responder 10

Yes, if I want to feel relaxed I listen to relaxed music, if I want to feel hyped up I listen to upbeat music and if I'm feeling down I might listen to sad music. Music seems to steer your emotional state to a certain place and even when you are feeling sad, listening to sad music can make you feel better. –Responder 22

## **8th of November** **(Emotions continued, and what evokes inspiration)**

Today I was thinking, when are we inspired? Inspired so that we flow in the music? Can it be when we experience good and bad emotions? Love, appreciation, rejection, pain, need, joy, confidence, hopelessness, curiousness, communication, new meetings, the hunger to express oneself?

### **Reflection:**

Living life to the fullest is important. Nothing really artistically interesting will happen when locked in a practice room for months. We need emotions in music. It's hard to imagine a world without music and other art forms. But art also needs the world with all its activity, negative and positive. Music is life.

Inspiration comes and goes, but why wait for inspiration to come? Why not start to work and inspiration will happen organically. Like the following quote often attributed to painter Pablo Picasso states: 'Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working.'

Inspiration is not directly connected to the thoughts of the mind - not necessarily at least. Inspiration is driven by intuition and feelings. This intuition is on another level than our everyday mind:

Inspiration may be a form of super-consciousness, or perhaps of subconsciousness. I wouldn't know. But I am sure that it is the antithesis of self-consciousness.<sup>63</sup>

### **Questionnaire:**

'When are you the most inspired? And what inspires you?'

Many of the answers contained the classic themes: Nature, people, emotions and art. But some of the responses were not typical:

No particular time. But nothing is as inspirational as a deadline. –Responder 9

I don't know. Working alone and with other people, and not being interrupted is the most important thing for me. –Responder 29

---

<sup>63</sup> Aaron Copeland, *Music and Imagination*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 42-43 cited in Werner, *Effortless Mastery*, 81.

‘Do you long to be inspired when composing/performing?’

Wanting to be inspired. I don't consider that to be a good thing. Already with that thought, we are forcing something into our creative process. And in my opinion, then it is not organic. Maybe some of the respondents had other beliefs. Here are some insightful answers:

Yes, but sometimes I force myself to create even when not inspired. It sometimes leads to better results, in fact. –Responder 2

No I don't. I don't like the idea of being in a special state to compose or perform. I like the idea of music being a natural part of your life. I don't have to feel inspired to run or to shower, so why should I have to feel inspired to play music? In the end I know that both of them will make me feel better and more balanced. –Responder 13

I don't really believe in inspiration in the magical ‘come and go’ sense. I think inspiration is a product of focus. When I am focused and not judging myself while playing, inspiration comes by itself. It is always there; the difficulty is not to block it. –Responder 34

### **10th of November** **(The effect of having an audience)**

I rehearsed in duo with guitarist Merje Kägu. We were to have a concert in the evening. The rehearsal was very uninspiring and no magical moments in music were happening. I felt that we were both not connected to the music.

The concert itself took place in Majorstuen Kirke in Oslo. The grand piano was good, and the acoustics were suitable for the music we were to perform. I felt the concert went exceptionally well! We were really playing music, and connection to the inner musicality was strong.

Sometimes we are simply not up for playing music. And that's fine. Perhaps in the evening, we were feeling more up for it. Also, a situation with an audience brings a different kind of focus to the performance of music.

**Audio 15**  
[10.11.2017 - Á sunnudegi.mp3](#)  
[Sheet music](#)

#### **Reflection:**

Sometimes, the presence of certain persons in the audience can affect how I play. Their presence makes it harder for me to play. Should I let that bother me? This is a matter of confidence. But I have also experienced playing better when I know a certain person is in the audience. In those cases, I am perhaps trying to communicate something to that person through music, not necessarily on purpose.

## Questionnaire:

'Do you perform music differently when in front of an audience? If so, why is it different and how?'

An audience changes the energy a lot and forces you to tell a story and communicate something. That is of course possible without audience if you have the imagination for it. – Responder 7

I am not so sure about that. Sometimes my ego disturbs me and tells me that I should play differently. It takes a lot of time to work with the ego and be the player you are for real. – Responder 10

The extra anxiety that comes with performing for an audience gives me a little edge - which often makes me a better performer - if it is too safe I sometimes feel I don't make "the extra mile" to really perform with all my heart. –Responder 21

I think performing in front of an audience provides the necessary urgency and emotional duty required for performance. I might answer your question with a question of my own: if no audience is present, is it still a performance? –Responder 16

To answer this question: Yes, I would say so! It is certainly good to have an audience. But shouldn't we try to enjoy the music ourselves? Play for ourselves? Play for the sake of music? See previously in this thesis where I mention my solo concert in Copenhagen.

### **16th of November** **(Communication in and out of music)**

I had a jam with Bárður Reinert Poulsen on bass and Hanna Paulsberg on saxophone. I had played with Bárður before but never with Hanna. I knew who she was, and I was excited to play with her. During the first half of the rehearsal, I was not connected to the music. But after a coffee break where I got to know Hanna better as a person, I was more connected to the music.

I was nervous and perhaps not entirely confident before the break. In the break, we communicated in another way than just through music. In my experience, this is crucial when playing music. Sometimes music is not only about playing music, but it is also about communication as humans.

### **17th of November** **(Connecting to the instrument with the voice // Communication)**

I have been busy with composing assignments, touring and more. Today I finally had some quality time with the piano.

While practising, I felt that I was very musical. I noticed that thinking about song and dance, these two words/concepts from my lessons with Misha, is an effective way for me to connect with the spirit of music. Singing with what I'm playing is beneficial. Both when I do it on purpose, and when it's not on

purpose. I really think it opens up my musicality when I do that. I allow myself, and my body, to be free for the music to come out through me.

See recordings from a session like this in the chapter about my instant composing project.

--

In the evening, I went to a great concert with Ola Kvernberg and Joshua Redman. Their last song, a blues, really made me feel something. Their communication of the music was especially strong in that piece, and their message shone through.

### **Reflection:**

As has been mentioned earlier in this work, focusing on singing can shut down unnecessary judging of the brain. That directly relates to flow and the disappearance of the self-conscious. Also, while singing, there is a higher awareness of the moment which makes the presence in the music stronger.

### **Questionnaire:**

'If you are an instrumentalist, do you use your voice when performing? For example, when singing along with improvised melodies. If so, do you do it on purpose or it just happens? What are your thoughts on that?'

In my perspective, instrumentalists are divided into two groups. Either they accept the idea of singing along with what they play, or they don't. Perhaps there are even those who don't admit that they sing along or even don't know that they sing along. I wanted to see whether this division was evident in my questionnaire, and it was indeed. Here are some answers that support the idea of singing along:

I do a lot of mumbling. It's a way to feel my entire body as I play. It really activates something deep inside. Mumbling helps me to keep a connection between my body and instrument. – Responder 13

I sing very often while playing drums and I do it on purpose in order to become more focused. I have ADHD so this seems to be one way to focus my attention! –Responder 35

I use it to connect to the music –Responder 20

### **25th of November** **(Tenging - connection)**

Recently, I composed a piece called *Tenging*. It is a very suitable title for this period in my life because “*tenging*” is the Icelandic word for connection. I made two versions, a solo piano version thoroughly written out, and a version for my quintet.

The evening began with music from jazz composers at Norges Musikkhøgskole. My piece *Tenging*, the solo version, was performed there by another pianist. What is my connection to that performance? I have never been in the situation where my music is performed, and I am not taking part in the performance. It was interesting to see how the pianist treated my piece. But I still felt it was my composition - the soul of the piece was still there.

Later in the evening, I played a concert with my quintet. The concert itself took place in the canteen at NMH. It was not the optimal concert location, and in many ways, it was an uninspired performance experience. I didn't feel connected. But after the concert, a man in the audience expressed how he experienced *Tenging*. He said, 'I forgot that I was human.' Apparently, he really connected to the music - even though I didn't feel connected myself. It seems like one of my goals in music became fulfilled; to make people feel something.<sup>64</sup>

### **Audio 18 and Audio 17**

[25.11.2017 - Tenging solo piano.mp3](#)

[25.11.2017 - Tenging quintet.mp3](#)

[Sheet music - solo piano](#)

[Sheet music - band](#)

### **29th of November** **(Silence in music and life)**

I was thinking about the importance of silence in music. It's also important to take a break from music, and not listen to music all the time.

#### **Reflection:**

Earlier in this thesis, I have discussed solitude. The subject of silence relates to solitude as well.

This quote by Keith Jarrett is well put and describes the necessity for silence in music:

Whatever clothes Miles wore, it was always Miles in those clothes. Whatever noise was around him, Miles still played from that need, his sound coming from that silence, the vast liquid, edgeless silence that existed before the first musician played the first note. We need this silence, because that's where the music is."<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> See 'Me and my aesthetics as an artist' page 7.

<sup>65</sup> Keith Jarrett, *Categories Aplenty, but Where's the Music?* (New York Times, 16th of August 1992), p. 2:19 cited in Werner, *Effortless Mastery*, 83.



## Questionnaire:

'What are your thoughts on silence in music and life?'

Many said that silence was music and that it was equally important as music.

Silence in music can be very strong and used in different ways. It can capture the listener or trigger the listener's imagination. I find silence in life also very meaningful; meditation, spending time in nature etc. –Responder 4

There needs to be silence. I probably need a bit more silence than others. I think it varies from person to person. It's easy to forget about it in this hectic and noisy world. But to stay healthy and balanced there needs to be silence in life. Only in silence we truly meet and reflect upon ourselves. –Responder 13

Silence is like sleep - I need it to recover and find new energy for the next session, playing or listening. Silence can be very effective in music, you're holding your breath and wondering what's going to come. –Responder 37

## **6th of December** **(Safe versus daring - a reflection)**

Today I had a fantastic rehearsal with Hanna Paulsberg on saxophone, Tore Ljøkelsøy on drums and Bárður Reinert Poulsen on bass. I had so much fun! It is the most fun I have had playing music for a long time. We all played very energetically. Their spirit and energy affected me. What a great session!

### **Audio 18 and Audio 19 (piano solos only)**

[06.12.2017 - Sama farið at concert 2016.mp3](#)

[06.12.2017 - Sama farið at rehearsal 2017.mp3](#) (beware, very bad audio)

[Sheet music](#)

## Reflection:

I have some recordings from that rehearsal, but the quality of the recorded audio is poor. Among the songs we played was *Sama farið*, which I also played in August 2016, at Reykjavík Jazz Festival (see earlier in this text). The following is a comparison between the piano solos in those versions:

My piano solo from 2016 was okay. There is nothing wrong with it, and it is perfectly acceptable. I was playing clearly and with good technique. The harmony of the song is quite tricky and unusual. But I thread perfectly fine through the chord changes with a well-rehearsed and balanced band. But there is a lack of energy in my playing. I am not taking any chances, and my playing is smooth. I don't go outside the harmony at all, and there is a lack of colour in my playing. Lack of expressiveness. Some of the lines I play over my solo seem automatic and almost as if they were rehearsed.

It is interesting to hear the differences in my soloing. The version from December 2017 is more aggressive, wild, energetic, and playful. It almost seems as if I am

overwhelmed. In the recording, I dare to play whatever I want, for example by going outside the harmony now and then. I'm more expressive and confident in what I am doing. In general, I am more connected to my playing and less automatic.

### **29th December** **(Early rehearsal)**

This morning was the final rehearsal with a cellist I'm playing with tomorrow. The rehearsal was early in the morning, so I didn't get good sleep (but I ate a good breakfast).

Why is this of relevance? For me it is interesting when music is one of the first tasks of the morning. I didn't warm-up or anything at the piano. But it was an excellent rehearsal!

Here is a song idea I had just before the cellist arrived at the rehearsal.

### **Audio 20** **[29.12.2017 - Song idea.mp3](#)**

### **30th of December** **(Reap what one sows)**

I played a duo concert with the cellist. The piano was excellent, and the concert itself went really well. I connected to the music, and almost everything I played was clear and played with purpose.

Perhaps now at the end of 2017, my goal to be clear and present in music has been reached. Am I connected to music? Has my connection become stronger? I assume it has. At least more than it was before.

### **Audio 21** **[31.12.2017 - Becoming free.mp3](#)** **Sheet music**

### **Reflection:**

By reading this reflective diary up until here, it is evident that my approach to music has changed. It has mostly been about the mental and philosophical aspects of playing music. So not the technical and theoretical elements (scales, harmony etc.) of music. Also, experiences in playing free improvised music have opened up more possibilities for colouring.

## 2018 - Spring semester (Gothenburg)

Reflecting, researching and writing

The subtitle describes it all. During this period, I was putting it all together.

### **16th of January** **(Don't think, just feel!)**

Today I was playing a piece which I composed one year ago. I had almost forgotten this piece. I found so much joy in playing it at the piano. It was a deep feeling, and I could feel that for me, this was a strong composition. I plan to play it at a solo concert in February.

#### **Video 1**

From the solo concert a month later:

[16.01.2018 - Má.mov](#)

[Sheet music](#)

#### **Reflection:**

As written above, I knew the composition was strong because of the effect it had on me. I felt something. Here I follow the wisdom of my intuition but not the knowledge of my mind. These are two different things and important to distinguish.

In music; don't think, just feel! And that statement is essentially the conclusion of this work. It relates well to the elements of Flow:

- While not thinking, self-consciousness disappears. There is no judging.
- While not thinking, distractions are excluded from consciousness.
- While not thinking, there is no worry of failure.
- When feeling, there is immediate feedback to one's actions.
- When feeling, action and awareness are merged.

How to not think while playing music? How to develop more feeling in music? And what is thinking? What is feeling? This will be discussed further in the final reflection.

Keith Jarrett, when explaining his approach to music, mentions that he tries to turn off the thought process while also being fully conscious and aware of what he perceives. That awareness is feeling:

I try to turn off the thought process, I'd like to forget that I even have hands. I'd like to sit down as if I'd never played the piano before.<sup>66</sup>

My job over the years has been not to make great music but to become ever more conscious of what it is I'm doing and what I'm perceiving.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> James Lincoln Collier, "Jazz in the Jarrett Mode," *New York Times*, 7th of January 1979, accessed 17th of April 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/01/07/archives/jazz-in-the-jarrett-mode-jarrett.html>

When I'm out there and there is just a piano, it's like my body knows exactly what to do. It's like my left hand knows what to play. And if I tell it what to play, I'm stopping it. Not only am I stopping it, but I'm stopping from playing something better than I can think of.<sup>68</sup>

In his book, *Power of Now*, Eckhart Tolle emphasises the importance of being in the present moment, the now. According to him, the key to being present in the moment is to avoid thoughts. Particularly thoughts of the past or future:

The mind is a superb instrument if used rightly. Used wrongly, however, it becomes very destructive. To put it more accurately, it is not so much that you use your mind wrongly — you usually don't use it at all. It uses you. This is the disease. You believe that you are the mind. This is the delusion. The instrument has taken you over.<sup>69</sup>

So the single most vital step on your journey toward enlightenment is this: learn to disidentify from your mind. Every time you create a gap in the stream of the mind, the light of your consciousness grows stronger.<sup>70</sup>

No-mind is consciousness without thought. Only in that way is it possible to think creatively, because only in that way does thought have any real power.<sup>71</sup>

### Questionnaire:

'How do you value the quality of a performance? When is it good? While others play or when you are playing.'

The question of quality in music is hard to answer. We all have different conceptions about it. But is there a common thread to be found? While this is not a definite answer, I believe quality is when something in the music makes us feel something. Words that many of the responders included were 'to be touched'. Aren't these words, in fact, synonymous to 'feel something'?

When it feels good is probably the best answer I can give. Music cannot be described in words. That's what makes music so unique. At least I want to be touched by it with all its emotions, whether happy or sad or anything in between, what I want is to be touched. — Responder 3

When the music resonates as real, when it comes from an authentic place and you as a listener can clearly experience that. —Responder 7

If you can feel the performers are being honest and confident about what they are doing it is a very good start. —Responder 12

A well-prepared performance is key. If you can sense that the player is really unprepared it will not leave you satisfied. Although a good performance does not have to be flashy or overworked. —Responder 30

---

<sup>67</sup> Andrew Solomon, "The Jazz Martyr," *New York Times*, 9th of February 1997, accessed 17th of April 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/02/09/magazine/the-jazz-martyr.html>

<sup>68</sup> Keith Jarrett - Interview + Speech at NEA Jazz Masters Awards 2014, [online video], 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDbOKHOuy9M> (accessed 17th of April 2017).

<sup>69</sup> Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Novato/Vancouver: New World Library and Namaste publishing, 1999), 16.

<sup>70</sup> Tolle, *The Power of Now*, 21.

<sup>71</sup> Tolle, *The Power of Now*, 24.

## **29th of January** **(Executing vs playing)**

I like to say that people are 'executing music' when music is not played with feeling. It is so obvious to me now when I am merely executing music. Also when I attend concerts, I notice if the performers are executing the music or really playing it.

The difference between playing music and executing music is connection! Connection to feelings and intuition, connection to the inner musicality.

## **5th of February** **(Notice how you feel!)**

I have an upcoming solo concert in Iceland. I practised the material today. The first run-through was not good, and I was not connected to the music. I was just executing it.

I decided to take a small break, so I left the room and had tea. When I came back, I took off my shoes because they were causing some discomfort. I played through all the pieces again, and now it sounded great! It was MUCH better than the first run-through. The connection had been made!

## **Audio 22** **[05.02.2018 - My sleepless nights in June.mp3](#)** **[Sheet music](#)**

### **Reflection:**

I recorded the two run-throughs and listened to them a month later. Here is a summary of my remarks, before and after the break:

#### **Before the five-minute break:**

- I am searching for the right notes.
- Not really colourful.
- Aimless.
- The expression is very straightforward.
- I could have developed ideas in a better way.
- I don't treat 'mistakes' in a musical way.
- It's okay, nothing more than that.

#### **After the five-minute break:**

- It has more attitude and dynamics.
- Even though there are 'mistakes', I treat them musically.
- Some places my voice can be heard, and I live myself into the rhythm with my body.
- I have more sensitivity to the sound, and I am listening more.
- The music has more suspense.

- I am playing more precise and to the point - in a good way.
- My sense of rhythm is stronger.
- Sometimes my playing is more technically adventurous.
- There is a feeling of freedom in my playing.
- The melody can really be heard.
- It is a pleasure to listen to this.
- I am connected to my inner musicality!

What can be learned from this? It is important to notice how you feel!  
In this case, I just really needed a break, a short change of surroundings. Even if it was just for five minutes.

### **20th of February** **(Organic playing)**

I played with a band in Iceland. The circumstances of the concert were difficult. It seemed as if this wasn't going to work out. But there was one moment at the concert which was fantastic! The bass player and guitar player were playing duo in a free improvisation, and suddenly I had this urge to join them. It happened very organically. It was seemingly not my decision to join them.

### **Audio 23** **[20.02.2018 - Angurvært.mp3](#)**

### **1st of March** **(Focus. Where is the focus? // The Now)**

In a lesson with Anders Jormin, we were discussing improvisation over one of my pieces. He noticed that in this piece I was focusing on playing the left hand correctly, while the right-hand was somewhat automatic in its playing. I didn't notice that actually. How would the improvised melodies in the right-hand change if I really focused on them? I didn't realise where my focus was while playing or if I had any focus at all. Focusing on the right-hand was effective and it resulted in an expressive improvisation with more meaning.

Focusing is not the same as thinking and being judgemental. Focus is being aware of yourself and the music in a specific way. Focusing is feeling.

In my experience, focusing on rhythm and focusing on sound is especially fruitful. As mentioned earlier, rhythm can carry the music and let it flow. And while focusing on sound, the artistic burden can be removed from the player to the sound itself. I have also found out that concentrating on the body, technique, and other physical aspects can be beneficial.

What should be focused on each time? What is the focal point for a particular piece of music or a particular situation? Being aware of what to focus on is a key to connect and become emotionally involved with the music. Having focus can help to be present in the music, present in the now.

## Reflection:

It seems like throughout this reflective diary the importance of being in the now has often surfaced. Each moment in life is precious, and we should enjoy it. There is no use in waiting for the happiness of tomorrow or the happiness of next year. Life is now! Also, when performing music, we are performing in the now!

Always say 'yes' to the present moment. What could be more futile, more insane, than to create inner resistance to something that already is?<sup>72</sup>

Accept — then act. Whatever the present moment contains, accept it as if you had chosen it. Always work with it, not against it. Make it your friend and ally, not your enemy.<sup>73</sup>

In his book, *Open Secret*, Tony Parsons describes how what we seek is already with us. We just have to be more present:

We seem not to see that, as we march towards the next anticipated "spiritual" high, the treasure that we seek is to be discovered not in where we are going, but within the simple nature of the very footsteps that we take. In our rush to find a better situation in time, we trample over the flower of beingness that presents itself in every moment.<sup>74</sup>

Presence is a quality of welcoming, open awareness which is dedicated to simply what is.<sup>75</sup>

## Questionnaire:

'Do you focus on something while performing? What do you focus on?'

Indeed, many of the respondents answered that they focus on being in the 'now' of their performance. Also, some answers were about trusting their inner ear. Here are other focus points mentioned in the questionnaire:

I try to focus on telling something with the music rather than just playing the music correctly. – Responder 25

I focus on the quality of tone, melodic improvisation and rhythm. –Responder 30

Timing, always timing. My own and others. –Responder 39

---

<sup>72</sup> Tolle, *The Power of Now*, 35.

<sup>73</sup> Tolle, *The Power of Now*, 35-36.

<sup>74</sup> Tony Parsons, *The Open Secret* (Cranborne: Open Secret Publishing, 1998), 17.

<sup>75</sup> Parsons, *The Open Secret*, 24.

## The instant composing project

The preceding diary explains my process and thoughts on becoming connected to music during the past 18 months. I have integrated many of those into my practice as a musician. From November 2017 to February 2018, I was engaged in a process which I call the instant composing project.

This project was a way for me to put things into perspective and combine how I compose and improvise at the piano with the experience I have accumulated over this 18-month period. The music was composed at the piano and recorded either on my smartphone or Zoom device. I tried to not spend much time on each compositional idea, a maximum of 15 to 20 minutes perhaps. I did my best to be 'connected' to music while doing this and kept a practice logbook about my method for each composition/improvisation. The most important thing was to be in the moment and be myself.

As a point of departure for this project, I tried to look at myself as the 'creator' who creates intuitively. Then if I chose to do so, I expanded on the ideas with my theoretical/compositional knowledge as the 'editor'. Four of these ideas have indeed been developed further, and concert recordings of those are included as well. Sheet music for the more developed ideas can be found in the Appendix E: Sheet music.

The three main methods I used for coming up with these ideas were the following:

- I sang with whatever I played at the piano. Made it feel lived-in. I accepted whatever came out. I didn't give myself any more instructions except sometimes I decided if it was to be a slow, medium or fast composition.
- I freed my mind of any thoughts and then put my hands on the piano with absolutely no preparation at all and played.
- I improvised with a certain concept/limitation in mind and explored it for a while. After I had explored the idea, I made a clear instant composition based on it.

I would describe the music produced using these methods as combining my background as a jazz pianist with my new-found ideas about being free and non-judgemental in music. In some of the examples, I was definitely experiencing flow, while in others the inspiration was not so high. If I was not in an inspired state I completely accepted that.

As is the case with the diary, these examples are very personal and reveal my weaknesses as an artist, in particular when I am singing since it is not the instrument I perform with in public.

During this four-month period, I produced over 50 recordings of song ideas. Although it was quite a task to select which ideas to feature in this thesis, I narrowed them down to the 19 ideas presented below. The original recordings often included vamp-based improvisations. In most of the examples, these improvisations have been cut since they are not directly relevant to this chapter about composition.



The recordings are included as audio files, but they are also accessible through the links. The recordings are numbered and are more or less ordered by date of creation.

### **Recording 1 - 'Ekki þjóðlag, ekki jazz'**

- Method: Singing
- Audio 24 // [1.mp3](#)
- Audio 43 // [Ekki.mp3](#) (from concert)
- Sheet: [Ekki þjóðlag, ekki jazz](#)

The piece is somewhat rubato and sounds almost like a Norwegian or Swedish folk song. I gave it a title that translates to 'Not folk song, not jazz'. The idea for the title was that the performer should not treat the performance according to these styles, jazz and folk music.

### **Recording 2 - 'Angurvært'**

- Method: Singing
- Audio 25 // [2.mp3](#)
- Audio 44 // [Angurvaert.mp3](#) (from concert)
- Sheet: [Angurvært](#)

It has a strong bass line which already outlines certain harmony. I gave it the name Angurvært, which is Icelandic for bittersweet, since the atmosphere of this composition is bittersweet and melancholic.

### **Recording 3**

- Method: Singing
- Audio 26 // [3.mp3](#)

It sounds like a folk song as well, perhaps Eastern European. Note that this is obviously not a good key for my voice as I am really struggling while singing it. This means my voice is limited and not developed in this key range. I know I can train my voice to be able to sing this and see what possibilities open up when my voice becomes more developed.

### **Recording 4**

- Method: Singing
- Audio 27 // [4.mp3](#)

I counted very rhythmically into the piece, giving the melody a strong sense of rhythm and energy. While focusing on the rhythm, I am giving the music life and a stronger sense of expressiveness.

The improvisation that follows is strong but is not always stable in the rhythm. When I am not focusing on the rhythm, I am pushing things in my playing. In those spots I am, to some extent, going beyond what the music is asking for.

## Recordings 5 and 6 - The same 'Icelandic' song!

- Method: Singing
- Audio 28 // [5.mp3](#) and Audio 29 // [6.mp3](#)

### 5.mp3:

This was recorded on the 23rd of November 2017. When I heard the recording for the first time, I immediately thought it sounded Icelandic somehow. I don't think this is a strong idea/composition. But the reason I included this here is its relevance to next recording, (6).

### 6. wav

This was recorded on the 8th of February 2018, roughly two months after (5). The melody is almost exactly the same as in (5). It's in the exact same tempo and in the same key. It also sounds Icelandic to me (whatever that means).

This version has a functional chord progression composed on the spot, and it is, in general, a much more concrete and developed version of (5). This was not on purpose, it just happened. At the time, I had not listened to the recording of (5) at all. I only heard the striking similarity when I was preparing this chapter about the instant composing project.

This is very interesting. How can this be possible? Somehow the melody of (5) seems to have stayed in my subconscious where it was 'worked on' without me knowing. In the meantime, I had been composing and working on different music. (5) and (6) - What an interesting set of recordings!

--

While I did not actively have the need to 'solve' or work more on this piece of music, this activity of the brain resembles what scientist Frank Offner describes.

I will tell you one thing that I found in both science and technology: If you have a problem, don't sit down and try to solve it. Because I will never solve it if I am just sitting down and thinking about it. It will hit my maybe in the middle of the night, while I am driving my car or taking a shower, or something like that.<sup>76</sup>

I have experienced the same when solving puzzles.

## Recording 7

- Method: Singing + limitation
- Audio 30 // [7.mp3](#)

If I remember correctly, I decided 7/8 to be the limitation for composing this.

Here I also include the vamp-based improvisation that followed. My solo is not always stable, and I know what I need to practice - my sense of dance in the

---

<sup>76</sup> Frank Offner interviewed in, Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity*, 99.

music. Thinking of the solo as a dance is an effective way when working with odd time signatures. When I move the body, as it was a dance in the music, it makes the rhythm stronger, and my awareness becomes stronger.

### **Recording 8**

- Method: Singing
- Audio 31 // [8.mp3](#)

When counting in, I was very rhythmical which resulted in this melody. Maybe (8) and (4) belong together in one composition because they are both very strong rhythmically.

### **Recording 9 - 'Falin laglína'**

- Method: Singing
- Audio 32 // [9.mp3](#)
- Audio 45 // [Falin.mp3](#) (from concert)
- Sheet: [Falin laglína](#)

While this performance is not as expressive as in (8), I feel that this melody is strong. I like how the melody shifts from minor to major. That gives it a certain folk music flavour.

### **Recording 10**

- Method: Singing + chords
- Audio 33 // [10.mp3](#)

In my opinion, this melody sounds Asian. Since I am decidedly playing chords with it from the beginning, I am sure that my choice of notes was also based on my knowledge of harmony.

It is worth noticing that I was singing along with everything I played in the solo. I don't believe that was on purpose.

### **Recording 11**

- Method: Singing + chords
- Audio 34 // [11.mp3](#)

I like the dissonance of this melody. As in (10), I was playing chords from the very start which influenced the melody.

### **Recording 12**

- Method: Limitations
- Audio 35 // [12.mp3](#)

The limitation was to always play two notes in the left hand while the right hand could improvise freely.

### Recording 13

- Method: My hands just played this
- Audio 36 // [13.mp3](#)

This is just something I was playing. It is essentially a bass line, and then later the same bass line with voicings added. There are many possibilities to develop this more, for example by adding a melody to the bass line etc.

### Recording 14

- Method: Limitation and surroundings
- Audio 37 // [14.mp3](#)

While practising, I looked out the window. I noticed a vehicle parked outside with the following advertisement written on it: "*Vi jobbar med insidan*". It's Swedish for: We work with the inside. I thought it was a nice sentence. I decided that this sentence would be my limitation.

I tried to come up with a pattern that started on the 'inside' of a given cluster chord. Then I would expand it somehow in both directions, up and down. The idea and execution of it was vague. I did not stay true to the concept throughout the piece. But I am happy with the result. It sounds like a short solo piano piece.

### Recording 15

- Method: Chords + limitations
- Audio 38 // [15.mp3](#)

My limitation for this was to compose a slow 'reluctant dance'. While listening to this, it is clear what the main melody is. In between, there are improvisations that are not clear. Are they supposed to be a part of the melody or are they merely fills?

### Recording 16

- Method: Limitations
- Audio 39 // [16.mp3](#)

With a clear mind, I approached the piano. My intention was to improvise using a wide range of the keyboard.

### Recording 17 - 'Ballad for my fearless friend'

- Method: Limitations
- Audio 40 // [17.mp3](#)
- Audio 46 // [Ballad.mp3](#) (from concert)
- Sheet: [Ballad for my fearless friend](#)

This had something to do with playing sixths in the left hand.

I don't like my performance in this recording. Very often I am searching for the right notes to play and my mind is very active in the process. Still, there is something in this idea that I like so I have developed it further.

## Recording 18

- Method: Feeling inspired
- Audio 41 // [18.mp3](#)

Before finishing practicing, I decided to play one totally improvised piece and then call it a day. While feeling very connected musically, I composed this short piece. It just came to me with no preparation or limitations at all.

I did not plan to use my voice, but I am using it here. Does this mean that my voice is now an integrated part of my creative process?

## Recording 19

- Method: Feeling inspired
- Audio 42 // [19.mp3](#)

While freely improvising, I thought, 'Yes! This speaks to me and I should record this'.

When listening to this, Keith Jarrett and his solo concerts come to mind. Those concerts are definitely an inspiration to me. However, in this improvisation, I was not trying to imitate Keith Jarrett. I was just me.

---

After listening to the numerous recordings, I noticed that my method of singing was very fruitful. While these ideas are often simple (since my voice is a limiting factor), they are at the same time clear and effective. Many of those ideas resemble folk songs. Why is that? Am I a folk musician? While it is true that I generally like folk music from all over the world, I don't have the intention to write folk music. I am just a musician that plays the piano. It is not up to me to label the music I produce—the music that I make can be whatever it is.

I really think my practice with singing and dancing has met me in the music. It is an integrated part of how I approach music. By using my voice, my own personal instrument, I am perhaps touching the roots of who I am, perhaps revealing my voice and my identity through music.

The distinction between improvised and 'composed' melodic ideas is not always clear in these examples. Composition can be seen as improvisation slowed down. Isn't instant composing another way of expressing improvisation?

At the beginning of this thesis, I wrote, 'In general, I believe that a musician should be a composer, a performer and improviser—all at the same time.' In the examples above, these three roles certainly merge together.

## Summary and final reflection

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate and identify methods to develop inner musicality. The ultimate goal is to investigate the state of being when the music just seems to come through and play itself. This thesis describes incidents where controlling thoughts became absent and what remained was just the music playing. In the absence of these thoughts, music is allowed to happen in an organic way. A certain connection is made, and the resulting music is played with presence and clarity.

People in the modern age depend more on the rational mind than on their intuition. This became more dominant in the 17th century when philosopher René Descartes declared, 'I think, therefore I am'. Reason became the source for knowledge instead of experience. Intellectual knowledge is certainly useful. But knowledge and intuition are two different things and are important to distinguish.

As mentioned earlier, the conclusion of this thesis is simply this: In music, don't think, just feel! Perhaps one of the most important, and at the same time, most difficult aspects of playing is to not think. It is indeed helpful to suppress the judgemental mind, especially when improvising. Instead of thinking, we should enhance the overall feeling, to feel and be aware of the sound, the music, the body and emotions that might be present. Listening to music is primarily a sensory experience. In short, really feel everything that the senses are able to grasp. This can be summed up as follow the wisdom of your intuition, and only play what you feel like rather than following decisions of the mind.

As was explained in the very beginning, the title of this thesis is 'Innsæi', which is the Icelandic word for intuition. When literally translated from Icelandic to English, innsæi means:

- To see within // Looking into ourselves? Developing and reflecting upon ourselves?
- To see from within // Seeing with our intuition? Trusting our intuition/feelings?

Icelandic has many words for sea. Sær is one of them. When looking at the word innsæi, it could also mean:

- Inner sea // The inner sea of consciousness?

It is relevant to not forget the power of intuition, particularly in music. These English translations of the word innsæi apply very well to the process of developing and trusting inner musicality.

Not thinking while playing music and becoming more acquainted with the feeling of intuition is easier said than done. Below are suggestions that may contain some answers.

An abstract and perhaps somewhat obscure answer would be work on yourself as a person!

If you hear something and it changes you it's because what you heard was someone who became an innovator. And they became an innovator by hard work on themselves. Not so much work on the instrument.<sup>77</sup>

When a piano student asked on how to develop his touch on the instrument [Herbie] Hancock replied: Develop your life!<sup>78</sup>

...for the open secret is not about our effort to change the way we live. It is about the rediscovery of who it is that lives.<sup>79</sup>

A suggested method for working on oneself, and simultaneously inner musicality, would be to follow the same process as done in this thesis. Keep a reflective diary about music. Reflecting about music for some period of time can lead to personal truths on how to play or approach music. For the reader, preserve experiences by writing them down in your own words. Write how they felt, and also what you were thinking. You may have an inspiring playing experience soon. Be ready for it to happen and take notice of it in every detail. The experience itself can change you and the gates to playing from the subconscious can open. After that, it's your job to keep the gates open and perhaps open them more.

Work on confidence and presence in the now. Here these subjects will be discussed mostly in connection to focus and the psychological subject of flow. In my experience, flow has nothing to do with thinking. Flow can, for example, happen when feeling inspired, and inspiration can be from any source: nature, music, books, conversations, or hunger to play music. Inspiration is different from person to person. What is inspiring for one person may not be inspiring for another person. It is also worth mentioning the importance of silence in music and life.

It requires strong confidence to not think. It is preferable to be confident and comfortable while playing. Getting rid of any self-judgement and having belief in the performance helps in that process. Forget about everything and accept whatever comes out with love. To develop confidence, go outside the natural comfort zone, at least for some period of time, or dare to do something which is out of the ordinary. For me, exposing and developing my voice was a way for me to develop my confidence. The voice is the most personal instrument there is. By bringing the confidence out through my voice, I became more confident in general. Hopefully as a by-product, I have become more confident in my piano playing.

It is not desirable to feel locked in by the music or to let the music restrict artistic expression. Therefore, it is worth pursuing becoming free in music. And in the freedom, there is confidence to be gained. But how does one become free in music? The most obvious answer would be to simply dare to play free. Many people express

---

<sup>77</sup> Keith Jarrett - Interview + Speech at NEA Jazz Masters Awards 2014, [online video], 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDbOKHOuy9M> (accessed 17th of April 2017).

<sup>78</sup> Vijay Iyer when introducing Herbie Hancock, "Herbie Hancock: Buddhism and Creativity" *Mahindra Humanities Center*. Harvard University, March 2014, accessed on 17th of April 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSFMkJQKigk>

<sup>79</sup> Parsons, *The Open Secret*, 49.

that in free improvised music, they are really able to let go and flow with the music. I believe that the attitude of becoming free in music can be learned by spending time with free improvisation. The freedom achieved there can be applied into other styles of music.

Learn the tricks, then forget the tricks and take some risks. The mind is certainly useful when learning and practicing. But when the mind is used too much while playing, it's possible to get stuck in the 'practicing mode'. The danger is that musicians end up playing like an eternal student. I have found out that it is important to distinguish between playing and practicing. We want to play like musicians, don't we? For the reader, define what aspects of practicing should be analytical and what aspects of playing/practicing should be without thought. Furthermore, for flow to happen, it is essential that you like the type of music or songs that you are playing. It has to be music which is close to your heart. Likewise, if the material is not very well known, chances are that flow will not happen. When something is not internalized, it is hard to be free and flowing.

Regarding performing, the process of playing a solo concert can be an important learning experience. Some things regarding performing are best learned by playing solo. That requires practicing and spending time alone at the instrument. Connect to the instrument under your own terms and circumstances. Find the reason why you love playing, not why people in general love playing. Find out what it is for you. Reach such a connection to the instrument that you enjoy standing alone, so that you don't need other players, and you don't even need an audience. Don't depend on the opinions or expectations of others. You are playing music for yourself and for the sake of music.

It is important to enjoy the process of playing and don't wait for a possible product or other achievements in the future. There is no use in waiting for the happiness of tomorrow or the happiness of next year. In other words, be in the now. Focus can help you to be present in the music, present in the now. Focus can therefore help to reach the ultimate connection to music where creativity flows effortlessly. Focus is not thinking, focus is awareness.

Examples of strong focus points when playing music include a focus on:

- Sound/singing
- Pulse/rhythm/dance
- The body
- Technique (in a purposeful way)

With focus comes presence and clarity in the music. What is the focus point for a particular piece of music or a particular situation? Being aware of what to focus on is a key to become emotionally involved with the music. One of the answers from the questionnaire was as follows:

When I learned to meditate, I felt a new power of choosing where to place my focus when performing, so that changed a lot for my life as a musician. I could decide to be in the moment even though I felt increased heartbeat etc. and therefore it was easier to be in the flow.

–Responder 7



This answer is very profound and intriguing. It is clear that meditation can be an extremely useful tool. But in a way, isn't music already meditation? For example, when focusing on rhythm, we can let the rhythm carry the music and forget ourselves in the flow. While focusing on sound, the artistic burden can be moved from the player to the sound itself. In other words, the constant decision-making of the brain is shut down. That is meditation in itself.

Special attention should be given to two of the focus points, singing (sound) and dancing (rhythm). Their importance has surfaced earlier in this thesis. For me, focusing on these two has helped me to connect to my inner musicality. As a performer and as a composer. I have experienced the benefit of singing along with what I am playing, both intentionally and spontaneously. When dancing, I do not know the rhythm of the music, but I am feeling the rhythm. I allow the mind and the body to be free in order for the music to come out through me.

How can these things mentioned be trained? Creating a short list of meaningful things in music can be helpful. An example of such a list can be found in Appendix D: Seven things in music. Musicians can remind themselves of such a list before playing. It's important to only do that for a certain period of time. In the end, things on such a list should become integrated into the playing and not thought of.

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between thinking and feeling as they relate to inner musicality. In the green area, which represents feeling, the subjects are directly related to inner musicality and help to cultivate it. In the red area, which represents thinking, a dotted line means that the subject is still relevant to develop inner musicality, but it is not as important as the subjects in the green area. The subjects at the bottom of the red area don't relate at all to the development of inner musicality.

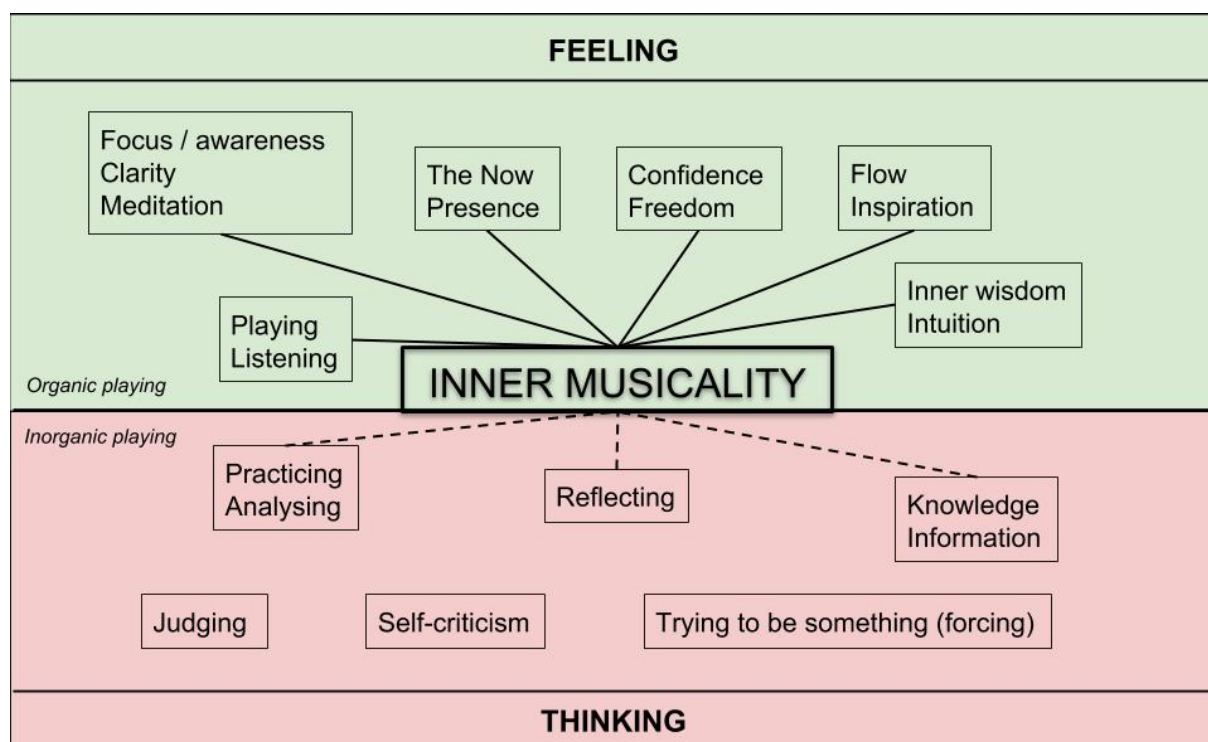


Figure 2 (Inner musicality, thinking vs. feeling)

However, thinking is not always bad. This thesis is a result of thinking and reflecting. But isn't it already a research in itself to be a practicing artist?

I am either going to be in there - inside the process of improvising. Or I am going to be on the outside, wondering what it is and coming up with a theory and an answer.<sup>80</sup>

If I were to describe my first thoughts on artistic writing, I would say that it is written material that is helpful or, more fittingly, inspiring to others. Since art is a very sensual subject, artistic writing can be seen as a source of inspiration rather than facts. That has been the aim of this thesis.

This subject of connectivity and intuition is perhaps much deeper than just about music. The world is seemingly becoming more connected. People are connected to the internet at all times, connected to the latest news and information. But aren't we in fact losing our primal connection to the Earth, losing connections to our own intuition and to other people? Perhaps some of us in the Western world forget to enjoy life, to really enjoy music, to really enjoy nature, to really enjoy books. We spend time in the virtual world of Facebook and Instagram instead of enjoying conversations with real people. Everything happens so fast and some people experience the fear of missing out. We are bombarded with information about everything, but not true wisdom which we could find out for ourselves. Do we really know ourselves? Do we know our limits and what we are capable of in life and music? Also, we usually want music to do something for us. But have we thought what music wants from us?

According to Sobonfu Somé, of the West African country Burkina Faso, there is a tribe in Africa in which music lies at the very essence of an individual's identity — both to him/herself and to the community around them [1]. When a woman there decides she wants to have a child, she goes off and meditates until she hears the song of the child she will conceive. She then teaches that song to the father-to-be and, together, they share the song as they make love. Once pregnant, they teach the song to their community to sing as the mother is giving birth, welcoming the child in to the world with its own song. Later in life, if the child ever goes astray, the community sings the song to help the child remember who he/she really is, as a guide to a deeper connection of inner or higher self. When a couple is married, they sing their songs and, finally, when it comes time for a member of the tribe to transition from this life, the village sings their song for them.<sup>81</sup>

Does connection to music and the feeling of unity get any deeper than this?

I would like to stress the point that this thesis has been my personal journey about connection to music. I believe the journey for each person is—and should be—different. I hope you have found some meaning in this thesis and perhaps you have become motivated yourself to experiment with your connection to music.

---

<sup>80</sup> Keith Jarrett, Interview and Improvisations (at Jarrett's home) for a Swedish TV... (Very rare!), [online video], 2012 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-kznTN66Ho> (accessed 17th of April 2017).

<sup>81</sup> Frank Fitzpatrick, "WHY Music? Defining Who We Are Through Music," *Huffington Post*, 8th of July 2013, accessed on 16th of April 2018, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/frank-fitzpatrick/why-music-defining-who-we\\_b\\_3543504.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/frank-fitzpatrick/why-music-defining-who-we_b_3543504.html).

# List of references

## Books:

Carr, Ian. *Keith Jarrett: The Man and His Music*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1992.

Chase, Mildred Portney. *Just Being at the Piano*. Camarillo: DeVorss Publications, 2017. Kindle edition.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008. EPub edition.

Kelley, D.G. Kelley. *Thelonious Monk: The Life and Times of an American Original*. New York: Free Press, 2009.

Nachmanovitch, Stephen. *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art*. New York: Jeremy Tarcher/Penguin, 1990.

Parsons, Tony. *The Open Secret*. New Albany: Open Secret Publishing, 1998.

Tolle, Eckhart. *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*. Novato/Vancouver: New World Library and Namaste publishing, 1999.

Werner, Kenny. *Effortless Mastery: Liberating the Master Musician Within*. New Albany: Jamey Aebersold Jazz, 1996.

## Documentaries:

*Jim & Andy: The Great Beyond*, dir. Smith, Chris, USA, Vice Films, 2017, [online video - Netflix].

*Keith Jarrett: The Art of Improvisation*, dir. Dibb, Michael, USA/Germany, EuroArts, 2005, [DVD].

*Marina Abramovic: The Artist Is Present*, dir. Akers, Matthew, USA, Show of force, 2012, [DVD].

## Online videos:

Doug Watson interviews pianist Keith Jarrett in 1999, [online video], 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSdc9iyZxCI> (accessed 17th of April 2017).

FOLI (there is no movement without rhythm) original version by Thomas Roebers and Floris Leeuwenberg, [online video], 2010 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVPLIuBy9CY> (accessed 30th of April 2017).

Heath, Jason interviews Gary Peacock, "Gary Peacock on Zen, self, and the muse" *Contrabass conversations*, 8th of September 2017, accessed on 17th of April 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7KOWGOY3bM>

Iyer, Vijay introducing Herbie Hancock, "Herbie Hancock: Buddhism and Creativity" *Mahindra Humanities Center*. Harvard University, March 2014, accessed on 17th of April 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSFMkJQKigk>

Keith Jarrett - Interview + Speech at NEA Jazz Masters Awards 2014, [online video], 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDbOKHOuy9M> (accessed 17th of April 2017).

Keith Jarrett on doing the Cologne Concert - Köln Concert, [online video], 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9rTZLjBOfl> (accessed 17th of April 2017).

Schneider, Maria. *Finding a Rhythm, in Body and Mind* (2009, December) Accessed 17th of April 2018. [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://bigthink.com/videos/finding-a-rhythm-in-body-and-mind>

# Appendix A: Media list and filenames

## Reflective diary

Filename in GUPEA	Filename on web
Audio 1	27.03.2017 - Skinn.mp3
Audio 2	28.03.2017 - Intense flow excerpt.mp3
Audio 3	25.04.2017 - Song idea A.mp3
Audio 4	25.04.2017 - Song idea B.mp3
Audio 5	27.04.2017 - Inspired rehearsal.mp3
Audio 6	10.05.2017 - Improv.mp3
Audio 7	04.06.2017 - Mother Tongue at Jazzhouse.mp3
Audio 8	09.06.2017 - Tólf.mp3
Audio 9	22.06.2017 - Improvised intro.mp3
Audio 10	19.07.2017 - Song idea A.mp3
Audio 11	19.07.2017 - Song idea B.mp3
Audio 12	26.07.2017 - Upphaf sem aldrei hófst.mp3
Audio 13	14.10.2017 - Fundur studio recording.mp3
Audio 14	29.10.2017 - Free improvising.mp3
Audio 15	10.11.2017 - Á sunnudegi
Audio 16	25.11.2017 - Tenging solo piano.mp3
Audio 17	25.11.2017 - Tenging quintet.mp3
Audio 18	06.12.2017 - Sama farið at concert 2016.mp3
Audio 19	06.12.2017 - Sama farið at rehearsal 2017.mp3
Audio 20	29.12.2017 - Song idea.mp3
Audio 21	31.12.2017 - Becoming free.mp3
Audio 22	05.02.2018 - My sleepless nights in June.mp3
Audio 23	20.02.2018 - Angurvært.mp3
Video 1	16.01.2018 - Má.mov

## Instant composing project

Filename in GUPEA	File name on web	Sheet name (Appendix E)
Audio 24	1.mp3	
Audio 25	2.mp3	
Audio 26	3.mp3	
Audio 27	4.mp3	
Audio 28	5.mp3	
Audio 29	6.mp3	
Audio 30	7.mp3	
Audio 31	8.mp3	
Audio 32	9.mp3	
Audio 33	10.mp3	
Audio 34	11.mp3	
Audio 35	12.mp3	
Audio 36	13.mp3	
Audio 37	14.mp3	
Audio 38	15.mp3	
Audio 39	16.mp3	
Audio 40	17.mp3	
Audio 41	18.mp3	
Audio 42	19.mp3	
Audio 43	Ekki.mp3	Ekki þjóðlag, ekki jazz
Audio 44	Angurvært.mp3	Angurvært
Audio 45	Falin.mp3	Falin laglína
Audio 46	Ballad.mp3	Ballad for my fearless friend

## Appendix B: The questionnaire

Questions marked with an asterisk (\*) were not used in this work.

- If you are an improvising musician, what is your first memory of improvising? And how did it feel?
- Where there any turning points, certain situations that changed something, in your life as a musician? If so, feel free to tell about them.
- Do you make a distinction between practicing and performing? How?
- Do you perform music differently when in front of an audience? If so, why is it different and how?
- Do you prepare yourself mentally or physically before a performance? And how? Does that affect the performance?
- Do you give yourself some mental instructions before or while you play? (\*)
- Do you focus on something while performing? What do you focus on?
- How judgmental are you about your performing/composing?
- Do you have fears in your life as a musician?
- Do you meditate?
- How do emotions affect your practice as a musician?
- How does music affect your emotions?
- Do you engage in a physical activity on a regular basis? For example, gym, yoga, dancing, running, swimming etc. If so, how does that affect your practice as a musician? (\*)
- Have you had training in Alexander Technique, Timani or other body awareness techniques for musicians? If so, how has it affected your life as a musician? (\*)
- If you are an instrumentalist, do you use your voice when performing? For example, singing along with improvised melodies. If so, do you do it on purpose or it just happens? What are your thoughts on that?
- Have you used your voice to compose music? If it's not your usual way of composing, what are your thoughts on that?
- Have you ever played your instrument while enduring physical pain? If so, did that have any effect on the music? In what way?
- How emotionally attached are you to the music you are performing?
- How do you value the quality of a performance? When is it good? While others play or when you are playing.
- What are your thoughts on silence in music and life?
- Do you set yourself goals in your practice as a musician? (\*)
- When are you the most inspired? And what inspires you?
- Do you long to be inspired when composing/performing?
- Can you describe a recent music performance of yours when everything was perfect? What made it perfect? The surroundings? The audience? The players? The instrument? The weather?
- Have you ever experienced becoming one with the instrument while playing? Or in other words, forgetting yourself - completely immersed in the music.
- Can you describe the strongest experience you have had when this has happened? In your own words. Why do you think it happens? What were the contributing factors?
- Do you experience this feeling more often with a certain type of music or style? What type of music/style?
- If you are a composer, has a composition ever just appeared to you in its entirety? (\*)
- Are you familiar with the term "flow"?
- Do you think music is spiritual? In what way?

## Appendix C: Things to practice

<b>Melody:</b>		<b>Solo (technical)</b>	
Listen to the song		Connecting scales	
Sing the melody		Different placement in the beat	
4 note shell voicings		The rhythm pyramid	
5 note shell voicings		Arpeggios (in inversions also)	
Passing chords		3 notes together within scale	
Bassline in left hand		Upper structures + an extra note	
Bassline + melody		Play solo in right hand only	
Play melody in left hand		Play solo in left hand only	
Intro / Outro		Think about playing legato	
Sing bass line, play melody		Find common notes	
Transpose to another key		Anticipation of next chord	
Outline the melody		L.H. voic. In same rhythm as right	
Voicings and comping		Chromatic approach notes	
Diverse left-hand voicings		Percussive playing	
Left-hand voicings in inversions		Playing out of time	
Red Garland voicings		<b>Solo (more lyrical)</b>	
Big band voic.		Play expressive. Wild melodies	
Voicings based on 4ths		Sing+tap a rhythm, then play	
Block chords		Sing a solo while comping on piano	
Practice comping		Think about dynamics in lines	
Play fills		Play a solo and sing it also	
		Think about a story a motif	
		<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Rhythm</b>		Bass in left hand and solo in right	
Tap lid, tap feet		L.H. voicing + solo	
Piano in right, left hand lid		Same with metronome.	
Chords in left hand, right hand lid			
Lines in right, left feet		Record a solo and then listen	
Piano left hand, right with feet		Play along a known recording	
Play without moving body		Play in a different tempo than usual	
		Play in another feel	
Specific rhythms in left		Play in another time signature	
Play without looking at the keyboard			
Play with eyes closed.			
		<b>HAVE FUN!</b>	
		<b>Relax</b>	
		<b>Don't be tense</b>	
		<b>Always listen</b>	
		<b>Keep focus and be musical</b>	



# Appendix D: Seven things in music

## **Be yourself and believe in yourself. Don't be afraid!**

- Be yourself when you are playing. You are the only one who is like that and plays like that.
- Believe in yourself and accept what you are doing. Be confident and love yourself.
- When you are playing you should tell YOUR STORY.
- Forget all external things and people that don't matter in the given situation.
- Allow the "mistakes" to come and don't judge yourself.

## **Listen to everything you play, or play what you hear.**

- Really allow yourself to PLAY what you hear and notice it
- Really allow yourself to HEAR what you play and notice it.
- Be in the sound yourself.
- Be open for what is happening or could happen in the music.
- Listen with focus. Listening is a meditation of sorts.
- Sometimes think about giving extra energy to the music.

## **Rediscover everything in music as it was new - so that it sounds fresh**

- You have to discover everything you are playing as it was new to you. Even if you have played a certain song million times. The joy of discovering makes the music come alive.
- Try to find a way so that you taste each and every note and that every note has a fresh taste.
- Give each note the feeling that it is magnificent and new to you.
- You can pretend to be improvising everything even if it is not improvisation. And vice versa.
- Find a new path than your usual path while the goal or final destination might still be the same. While on this new path you notice new things.
- If there is a particular song you are playing, then the goal is to make the essence of the song shine.

## **Be in and experience the present moment. Just play!**

- Really try to be present in the moment and in this world. Enjoy, live and love!
- Be in love the piano, in love music, in love with improvisation.
- Be always sure where you are and who you
- Notice how you feel.
- Really mean what you are playing
- Get inspiration from whatever/everything around you.
- Allow and accept your body.
- Lean more into a melody, allow it to live more! Give life to it.

## **Lean into the stream of music. Music is easy!**

- The music is a stream and it's always there, also when we are not playing. The only thing we have to do when we are playing is to lean into the stream. It's nice to remove the artistic input from you and put it into the sound itself.
- You don't need to do anything because music just happens. It's after all just music.
- Easy, effortless and mindless. I am the instrument and the music plays me. It's not me who is playing the piano.

## **Give yourself time! You often have more time than you think**

- You always have more time than you think.
- Give yourself time and find the right focus for what you are playing.
- Don't forget to play music.
- All notes have birth, life and death.

## **Don't force anything into your playing. Music sounds best organic.**

- Don't play different than yourself because of audience or surroundings.
- Don't try to be something you are not.
- Don't play something you don't feel like playing and don't play bullshit lines.

# Appendix E: Sheet music

(The sheets are in the same order as they appear in the media list)

## Ekki þjóðlag, ekki jazz

Ingi Bjarni

Chord symbols: Fm7, Ab6, Fm7, Am7, Ab6, G7(b9), Bbmaj7(#11), Fm7, Abmaj7, Bb(#11), D(add9)/A, Fm7, Abmaj7, Bb6, Fm7, Abmaj7, Cm7, Ebmaj7(#5), G7(b9), Bbmaj7(#11), Fm7, Abmaj7, Cm7, Ebmaj7(#11), G7(b9), C/Db, C7, Bbm7, Bbm(b5), F#7(#11), Dm, Db, Eb7, Fm, G7(sus4), Ab7(sus4), Ab, Ab, Dbmaj7, Fm7, Fm7, Fm7.

Piano

# Angurvært

Ingi Bjarni

♩=81 A1 - guitar

G C#7/B Cm(maj7) D7(add13)/C G G(add4) C7(sus4) D7(add13)/C

5 G C#7/B Cm(maj7) D7(add13)/C G G(add4) Cm7 D7(add13)/C

A2 - trumpet

9 F B7/A Bbm(maj7) C7(add13)/Bb F F(add4) Bb7(sus4) C7(add13)/Bb

13 F B7/A Bbm(maj7) C7(add13)/Bb F F(add4)

A3 - piano

17 Bb E7/D Ebm(maj7) F7(add13)/Eb Bb Bb(add4) Eb7(sus4) F7(add13)/Eb

21 Bb E7/D Ebm(maj7) F7(add13)/Eb Bb Bb(add4) Ebm7 F7(add13)/Eb

V.S.

2

Piano

25 **B**F Ebm C<sup>ø7</sup> E F D/A

29 B<sup>6</sup> B B(b5)

C. Played somewhat rubato.

33

37

- Here starts a free improvisation in duo. Perhaps drums and piano. Then other can join only if they have the urge and it feels organic to join.  
 - After that piano starts hinting at the melody (A3) and it would be nice that it had reached a climax in a busy double time feel with the drums. Perhaps that starts already in the improvisation before.  
 - The song ends just however it ends

# Falin laglína

Piano

Ingi Bjarni

In rhythm. Focus on the rhythm and imagine the melody - it is hidden but it's there in the air

3

Hints at the melody. An example. This can be extended.

Main melody

Main melody with chords

17  $A\flat^6$   $D\flat\text{maj}^7$   $C\text{m}^{7(11)}$   $E\flat^7\text{sus}^4$   $F\text{maj}^7\text{add}^4$

19  $E\text{maj}^7(\#5)$   $D\flat\text{maj}^7(\#11)$   $C^7(\text{sus}^4)$   $C^7$   $F\text{m}$   $F\text{m}$

2

Piano

22 C7 C7(add4) A♭maj7(#11) Gm7

26 C7 C7 D♭maj7

31 Piano alone FINE

35 First time piano only. Band joins the full progression 2nd time

37

Piano solo:

39 A♭7(#11) F♯maj7(#5) G7(add4) C7

On cue to end pno. solo:

43 C7

Open-ish trumpet or guitar solo which morphs into the melody (like in intro)

46 Fm 3

# Ballad for my fearless friend

Piano

Ingi Bjarni

♩ = 78 Dr+ bs intro A Melody

7

11 E G

15 G D

19 Bb

23 Bb

27 *p*

33 *f*

36 Duo or piano alone, slower tempo? **Fine**

SOLOS

38 A maj7(#11) A tempo

42

46 E maj7(#11)

50 G maj7(#11)

After solo, then D.S. al Fine