

Meeting the Audience and Myself

A singer's search for reflection through music



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ABSTRACT

As a classical singer, I have asked myself in what way I can meet my audience, and how to move into a new context. I have wondered how I can create and use immersive music experiences as a tool for reflection, and in what way can I use lyrics as a starting point. To find answers, I created three different projects: a music video, a meditative concert and a sung "exploration" in a water reservoir, all based on my personal connection to the lyrics. I tried three different ways for the audience to listen to the music, with headphones, lying down or wrapped in blankets in a dark reservoir. I also tried three different ways for the audience to reflect afterwards, by immediate interpreting, writing and talking. I have found that several layers of understanding are created around a performance, when the audience is asked to first immerse and then share their experience afterwards. This is a way for me to meet my audience and myself.

Key words: meeting, audience, reflection, immersive, dialogue, changing context, lute songs, melancholy, emotions, lyrics

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Listening/reading instructions

I have chosen to create a podcast, because I believe it is the best way for me to share my artistic research project, as it is based on my voice.

My voice, as in my views.

My voice, as my tool.

My voice, as my mean of expression.

The podcast is divided into two parts; the first is about my background and the second about my research project and my time spent in the masters programme Contemporary Performative Arts.

You can listen to the podcast when you go for a walk or just lie on the sofa. If you want, you can read the manuscript at the same time, but I would recommend strolling in a park or closing your eyes to listen. Just a little heads up: at one point in 'part two', it would be good if you had access to the Internet.

For the podcast not to become too difficult to grasp in one go, I have written an additional text to be read afterwards, with more in-depth information about the Early Music movement and the field of immersive theatre and their connection to my project.

Hope you enjoy listening.

Anna

* M A N U S C R I P T *

You are about to listen to
Meeting the Audience and Myself
A singer's search for reflection through music
by Anna Thunström

PART ONE

Opening music: John Dowland- a phrase from Mr Dowland's Midnight (1)

1. Questions and introduction

In what way can I meet my audience?

And what happens when I take music, usually performed in churches, and move it to a new context?

How can I create and use immersive music experiences as a tool for reflection?

And in what way can I use lyrics as a starting point?

These are some of the questions that I have been thinking about over the course of my masters in Contemporary Performative Arts. My name is Anna Thunström, I'm a classical singer and I'm going to talk to you about my artistic research project that I have been investigating during two years in the Academy of Music and Drama in Gothenburg.

But in order to talk about my research and where I am today, I first have to talk about where I come from. I'll start it off by playing you this:

Narrative music: Bartolomeo Tromboncino- Se Ben Hor Non Scopra el Foco

You just heard *Se Ben Hor Non Scopra el Foco* by Bartolomeo Tromboncino. But more importantly, you have just heard the singing of soprano Emma Kirkby.

For as long as I can remember, the sound of her voice has mesmerised me. I love how crystal clear it is and how she seems to sing with such ease. When I discovered that people sometimes found my voice to be similar to hers, I thought of it as the greatest compliment I could ever receive. She's an expert on Renaissance and Baroque music, which is usually referred to as Early Music, and I have always been very fond of that particular sound. From an early age, she has been my idol and my role model.

Transitional music: John Dowland- a phrase from Mr Dowland's Midnight (2)

2. Growing up

When I was young, I was very shy. I liked to sing, but I didn't dare to in school, because I didn't feel safe enough. I was afraid of being noticed and maybe judged, and I think I made myself pretty invisible.

But when I was ten, I asked my mum if I could sing in the girls' choir of Uppsala Cathedral. We lived in a small town just outside of the city, so I learnt how to, on my own, take the bus to the city and to walk alone to the rehearsal venue. It was a big step for me and there I finally dared to use my voice.

But in school I was still struggling, trying to find out who I was, so for me the chance to change school to study music in Uppsala when I was sixteen, was an opportunity to start over and try again.

I soon discovered that I was quite unusual, because I liked singing classical music, and I happened to be good at it. Most of the other singers preferred musical theatre and jazz. So, within just a few weeks I had found my identity, I was "the girl who sings classical music" and it was a great feeling. It became my value, like I was finally worth something by singing this type of music. I felt really appreciated and I stood out from the crowd in a positive way, and I think this is how I built my self-worth on the fact that I was a classical singer.

But after I graduated from that school, I moved away from home to study at a folk high school. There, there were loads of singers who *also* specialised in this. They were *as good*, or even better than I was, and the self-esteem I had found earlier just dropped. *Who was I now?*

I soon realised that I didn't enjoy practicing as much as the other singers seemed to, I often felt vulnerable and alone whenever I was in a practice room on my own. I would stand in there and judge every note that came out of my mouth. I was uncomfortable being overheard when I tried to learn a new aria, I thought the other students might listen and think "What on earth is she doing?"

This way of thinking stretched to concerts as well. The audience mostly consisted of teachers and students, fellow classical singers. For me, they became the judges of whether I sang well or not, whether I was good enough or not. I believe that's when I started to see the audience as my enemy, or at least, as my judges.

Later on, when I went to study at the Music Academy, this became even more of a problem for me. My singing teacher had the habit of pointing out the things I didn't do well and didn't often give me positive comments. I think it was supposed to be a way of spurring me on, making me think that I could do even better, but unfortunately, that type of reverse psychology didn't really work on me. It just affected my self-esteem.

I still remember one concert specifically. Before the concert there was a little mishap and I had to improvise an introduction for the audience, so the musician would have a chance to get ready. The music was quite challenging, so we had practised it a lot, but the intro speech I had to give was completely improvised in the moment.

The concert itself went *really well*, I was so pleased with my singing. My teacher, who had been sitting in the audience, came up to me afterwards and the only thing that was said was: "It's a shame you don't talk as well as you sing" ...

Maybe it was meant as a sort of backwards compliment, but comments like those really coloured me and emphasised the idea of how the audience and the enemy could be the same thing. I was trying to be good enough for them and good enough for myself.

Towards the end of my studies I bumped into someone, who used to study music at another academy, but had dropped out. He told me that he had stopped playing when he realised that he didn't think it was fun anymore. That he started to play because he used to really like it and that he felt like he needed to stop studying music to find the joy of it again.

What he said really resonated in me and I remember asking myself when I had last thought singing was fun.

So, as a reaction to this I started a band, playing songs I had written, because it was fun. And for my last term in the Music Academy, I decided to specialise in Early Music, the type of music that made me want to sing in the first place. I will now play you an example from this time. Steffano Bernardi's *O Dulcissima Dilecta Mea*.

Narrative music: Steffano Bernardi- O Dulcissima Dilecta Mea

3. London and Dowland Works

After I graduated from the Music Academy, I moved to London. I moved because I felt I needed a little break, and for the chance to study an acting course and learn more English. I thought I would only stay for a few months.

So, I didn't move to study singing, but right before I moved I happened to get hold of the email address of my idol, Emma Kirkby. I knew she lived in London, so I sent her an email on the off-chance that she would reply, asking if I could see her to take a singing lesson. I don't know what I expected, but when she replied and said "Of course, you're welcome to come to my house", I couldn't believe it. I felt both lucky and scared.

So, on a spring day in 2012 I knocked on her door and *she* opened. This was the lady whom I've always admired, I'd always wanted to be able to sing the way she does. I can't remember ever being star struck before. It took a while for me to settle, to take my music scores out of my bag and *to sing in front of her*.

But I did it. And I didn't feel judged, only appreciated. After the singing lesson she said that I should dive deeper into Early Music, because she thought it really suited my voice. She recommended me to send an email to The Lute Society and ask if anyone there was interested in teaming up with me.

I had no clue what the Lute Society was, and I wasn't sure I had even heard a lute before, not played live anyway. So, I was quite clueless, but Emma made me feel like I could do this. I felt seen and encouraged to spend time exploring the kind of music I have always enjoyed. So, because it was Emma who suggested this, I did email the Lute Society and soon after found a lutenist to collaborate with, Wezi Elliott.

Wezi and I formed a duo and together we started to explore the world of lute songs from the English Renaissance. We rehearsed a lot, and this was something that I for the first time found really enjoyable. I think it was because I wasn't alone, I was with a friend and my focus was on the discovery of the music, not on the quality of my singing. We had lots of fun and spent hours trying to decipher the music scores, which most of the time were facsimiles, which is music copied straight out of the books from the Renaissance. They look quite a lot different from the music scores I had grown up reading, so that was quite challenging.

We also talked about the texts of the songs, what they could mean and how to interpret them in our own way. I think the texts became more important to me than before because they were in a language I understood. Before I had often sung in German, Italian or Latin, but these texts were in English and they meant something to me without needing translations. We could talk about the core of the lyrics without any detours, which I noticed I truly enjoyed. Wezi and I started putting together concerts and playing in churches around London.

Fairly soon after we met, we had the opportunity to audition for the Brighton Early Music Festival, to participate in a workshop and a concert, sharing the stage with Emma and two other duos. We were successful in the audition and all of a sudden, we were performing with my role model. This was meant to be a one-off performance, to give young duos a chance to play for a bigger audience. The singer that people came to hear was of course Emma, but we got as much space as her in the concert, so it was a great collaboration. Everyone involved loved the idea of a group of singers and lutenists, led by Emma, and this is how the group *Dowland Works* was born. And I was a part of this group.

A typical concert used to consist of a few singers and lutenists, including Emma and a professional lutenist. We often sang in churches and mostly performed music from the English Renaissance. Emma used to talk to the audience in between songs. She knew an incredible amount about the music, the composers and the historical context, so she would often share what she knew with the audience.

There's a whole world of knowledge around this type of music and the history is very much present. The history affects how the music is performed. This is usually referred to as *Historically Informed Practise*. The Oxford Dictionary of Music explains it as:

"Practice of music-making aimed at 'authenticity', or fidelity to the circumstances of a work's original performance (and, it is thereby assumed, the composer's intentions)."¹

Basically, it means the striving to perform music the way it's believed it was performed back then and according to the intention of the composer.

During these concerts I was trying to be the best singer I could possibly be, singing the songs as 'authentically' as I could. I often thought that the audience knew more about how this music was supposed to be performed than I did, in my eyes they were the experts. I guess I was thinking too much as I tried my best to live up to what I thought the audience expected from me.

Transitional music: John Dowland- a phrase from Mr Dowland's Midnight (3)

¹*The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 6th ed. Rutherford-Johnson, Tim, Kennedy, Michael and Bourne Kennedy, Joyce, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) s.vv. "historically informed (period), performance."

4. Event reflection: *Come Heavy Sleep*

Something is going on in the audience at the back of the church. People are moving and talking.

I am just about to sing *Come Heavy Sleep*, the song I've been most nervous about for this concert. It's one of the more difficult songs for me to sing, because of its long phrases. And I know that it's a favourite for many people, so I need to sing this well.

I'm ready, but I'm asked to wait. Something's wrong.

I'm told that an old lady in the audience has collapsed and that we need to hold the performance until the ambulance arrives. We are asked to remain seated and just wait. I'm trying to stay present and focused on my task, but the situation is so distressing, and I can feel my body responding to the gravity of it. My heart is pounding, and I feel so sorry for the lady, and her family. Is she dying? I've never faced mortality this way before, and I'm supposed to just sit here?

Finally, the paramedics come and take care of the situation. They take the lady out and the audience settle, and now we're supposed to start the concert again. It's my turn to sing.

I can't sing a song about wanting death to come. Not *now*.
Wezi looks at me and asks if I'm okay. I'm not sure, but I have to nod.

I start to sing. I have no control over my voice, I have to breathe constantly, and my voice is shaking. Every word is a challenge. I don't recognise the way I sing, but at least I'm making sounds...

Somehow, I manage to get through the song and then all I have to do is to listen to the others until the interval.

During the break, a man from the audience comes up to me. He asks me if I had been affected by the situation and the words. I have to confess I couldn't control my voice. He says that he has heard this song being performed many times before, but never like this.

And he thanks me for that.

Narrative music: John Dowland- Come Heavy Sleep

That was *Come Heavy Sleep* by John Dowland.

5. Discovering the lyrics

In *Dowland Works*, it wasn't just Emma who knew a lot. Everyone in the group seemed to be extremely well informed when it came to the historical context. They all contributed with facts and trivia about it. Emma was like a living lexicon, and the others weren't far behind, as far as I could tell. But I never joined into this ongoing conversation. Sometimes I wondered why I never contributed to the knowledge in the group. I mean, I guess I could quite easily find out facts about the history of the music, if I searched for it. So why wasn't I?

The situation in the church with the lady that collapsed, had made me think. Not every audience member wanted to hear the music performed the way they've always had heard it. The collapse had affected me a lot and made the lyrics of the song dictate the way I could perform it. The words of the song took over the performance of it and at least one of the audience members thought that was a good thing.

I started to think that maybe the simple explanation to why I didn't know that much about the historical context of the music, was because I didn't care enough about it. I couldn't relate to the history of the music, but I could relate to the emotions described by the words in the songs. It was the words I cared about.

Because when I think about it, I believe one of the main reasons I fell so much for the English lute songs was the lyrics. They just went straight to my heart. They convey such strong emotions and the texts are so powerful when combined with the music. I often feel like the lyrics could be straight out of a diary or a conversation with a close friend, and I knew that the composers often wrote the lyrics based on their own experiences, which made them even more relatable to me.

The songs express so much of the same feelings that people still have today, so in a way you can say that there is nothing historical about the lyrics, or at least, the feelings behind them. They are as current today as they've ever been, which is something I would come to discover more and more.

Transitional music: John Dowland- a phrase from Mr Dowland's Midnight (4)

6. Event reflection: *To talk to the cows*

I am sitting in a beautiful room, large windows on the walls display the rural and green English countryside outside. I am looking at the cows wandering slowly in the field below. The sun is shining and I'm thinking I should go out there and spend some time in the nature. Say hello to the cows and let the sun warm my face. It's May, and I can feel the summer waiting around the corner. I would really like to go outside, I could really do with stepping outside...

All of a sudden, I realise that I have stopped paying attention to what is happening in this room. I have spent a long time gazing out of the window and I have not listened to what has been said. I force myself to return my focus to the ongoing workshop. I put on my "listening face" and hope no one has noticed that I had "left the room" for a while.

They are talking about how to pronounce a certain word, where to place it in the mouth. The woman who's turn it is to sing, is sitting down on a chair in front of *us*, the audience. She has a lutenist next to her and the teacher is wandering around in the space, trying to communicate what she means. The singer tries to follow her instructions. The words they are working with are "Eyes, look no more, for what have all the earth that's worth the sight?"

I find the words haunting and beautiful, and I'm fascinated by this song that I have never heard before. I want to know more about the words and the emotions behind them.

The teacher is an absolute expert in this field. I want to learn as much as possible from her.

And I am myself embarking on a career in this musical context and I was the one who decided to attend these workshops on the English countryside...

But I have just found myself wishing to be outside this classroom, not in it.

I feel very confused. I start to think of why I wasn't listening and how I'd like to listen, if it was up to me.

I realise I don't really care about where the words should be placed in the mouth.

I realise I would really like to focus on the melancholy in the lyrics.

I realise I don't really want to sit on a chair with my "listening face" strapped on as a mask.

I realise I would really like to lie down and listen.

The workshop is over, and I stand up with my new thoughts. I don't talk to anyone; my head is buzzing, and I feel overwhelmed. I quickly eat my lunch and head out to talk to the cows.

Narrative music: John Danyel- Eyes Look No More

Eyes Look No More by John Danyel.

7. In Darkness Let Me Dwell: London

I still remember how I felt that day. I felt confused and excited at the same time. I was embarrassed over the way that I had “checked out” when they were discussing singing technique. I had always tried to be a good technical singer and good technique could perhaps make the words clearer and easier for an audience to understand, but I started to wonder if the feelings behind the words needed more than just clarity to really be conveyed. I have always loved the sound of the lute songs and I wanted to be able to share that particular musical atmosphere, so I didn’t want to experiment too much with vocal techniques. Instead I wanted to investigate how the feelings from the lyrics could affect my voice, because I had realised how much the melancholy in them had moved me and how much I enjoyed being moved.

Here I had found a starting point, an idea of a performance that was quite far from the concerts I usually performed in. I wanted to create a performance where the lyrics were the main focus and I wanted to give myself a chance to really sing with all my emotions, without censoring myself.

I decided to base the performance on the theme of melancholy, because those songs were the ones that really made me feel. I could relate to the sorrow that was described and I felt an urge to give that sadness a voice.

“This is your invitation to allow yourself to feel.
To lie down, relax and listen.
To cleanse, drift and meditate.
To forget about yourself.
To connect with yourself.”

These were the words you could read about my performance *In Darkness Let Me Dwell*, that I put on in an arts venue in London about a year and a half after I had left to talk to the cows. I had bought blankets and cushions for people to lie on and borrowed fairy lights, so they could create a calm atmosphere. I had put together a programme of music, filled with sad lute songs, and I was ready to try my idea.

I had previously experienced that it was difficult to get some of my friends to come and hear me sing. They said that they rather not go to church concerts, because they didn’t really feel at ease in that setting. So, when they had a chance to go to an arts venue instead, I got a whole new audience. The fact that they would lie down to listen seemed to be something that people liked and made them open to listen to music they didn’t know much about before.

I enjoyed performing *In Darkness Let Me Dwell* a lot. I really had fun and I got very positive feedback from the audience afterwards. I had chosen to not say much about my intentions behind the concept of *In Darkness Let Me Dwell* beforehand, but after the performance the audience could choose to read about it in the programme. This is what it said:

“I have been thinking a lot about how much time we spend on social media,
sharing our happy moments with friends and strangers.
I wonder where our feelings of sadness and melancholy get their outlet?
Do we postpone those feelings, to only allow them when we have time for them?
And if so, when do we take that time, living in such a busy world?

I created *In Darkness Let Me Dwell* with the hope of making that space.
Not necessarily for you to dwell in dark thoughts,
but to give you time to meditate, to feel.
It doesn't matter if you listened to the words or not,
if you drifted away and almost fell asleep.
My only hope is that you had your own personal experience.”²

My intention for the performance was for people to stop for a while to reconnect with themselves. Either through melancholy or by just lying down for a moment. I had lived in London for almost four years now and I had noticed how stressed people seemed. Rushing from one place to another, no one had time to feel anything, especially not bad feelings. I hoped that lying down whilst listening to music about sorrow and grief would stop people in their tracks and give them some time to reflect. I also hoped that they would enjoy hearing Renaissance music performed in a setting that they felt at ease in.

And I was also finally at ease. When I met the audience after the performance, I recognised that my feelings towards them were different. I could at last see them as my equals. I think it had to do with the fact that I changed the context, there were suddenly no rules to relate to and I finally felt free enough to allow myself to interpret the music as I wanted to, with the lyrics as my starting point.

There was one member of the audience who came up to me afterwards and he said something that I would really cherish. He said:

“I've never heard this music in this way before. You only ever hear this type of music sounding pretty, not with feeling. But you had so much feeling in your voice. I think you can change how people experience this music”³

The reason why I can quote this very precisely is because it made me so excited I had to write it down. This was something I wanted to do. I wanted to change how people

² Programme: *In Darkness Let Me Dwell*, Anna Thunström, 2015.

³ *In Darkness Let Me Dwell*. Audience member's comment, 28 November, 2015.

experience this music, and I wanted to do it with feelings. I had always loved Early Music because of how pretty its sounds, but I didn't only want to sing it in a pretty way. I wanted to sing with feeling.

This is when I figured out that I had a creative side of me that I needed to embrace. I needed to continue to explore more ways of connecting with the lyrics,
with the audience,
and with myself.

Narrative music: Angelo Notari- Intenerite Voi, Lagrime Mea

This was a recording from the last concert I did with *Dowland Works*, me and Emma singing the duet *Intenerite Voi, Lagrime Mea* by Angelo Notari. Two days later I moved back to Sweden to start studying at the master's programme Contemporary Performative Arts.

Now you know my background.

PART TWO

8. Event reflection: *Exiled forever*

Prefatory music: John Dowland- a phrase from Flow My Tears

*Flow my tears, fall from your springs,
Exiled forever, let me mourn*

I'm walking my way to the university. It's the beginning of my second term of my master's and to be honest, I feel a bit lost. So far, I've been exploring through drama methods what happens to my voice if I really feel what I sing. It's been interesting, but not entirely satisfying for me, and I'm starting to feel like there might be something more than this for me to explore.

But right this moment, I'm thinking about lute songs. In a few weeks, Wezi is coming to Gothenburg to perform with me and we need to decide on a repertoire.

*Flow my tears, fall from your springs,
Exiled forever, let me mourn*

I know this music really well, but one phrase in the lyrics makes me stop walking.

Exiled forever, let me mourn.

I start to think about the things I hear on the news every day, about people fleeing their home countries with the fear of never being able to return.

Exiled forever.

John Dowland, who wrote this song, had to leave his home country and although that was over 400 years ago, I start to realise that the text he wrote is still current.

I wonder, is there a way to connect this music with what's happening in the world right now?

My mind goes to my classmate and friend Georgios Giokotos. He made a performance a few months ago that really moved me. He used paper boats in a stream to highlight the situation in his home country, Greece. I wonder if he'd like to do something together with me?

I stop walking and pick up my phone. I send him the lyrics, a link to my recording of this song and a question:

“What can we do to illustrate this text?”

...

So, dear listeners to this podcast, I would like you to soon pause this for a little while. Find a place where you have access to the Internet and search for “Flow My Tears: a comment”. Please watch our video with an open mind and I’ll see you soon...

Transitional music: John Dowland- a phrase of Lachrimea Pavan

9. Music video: Flow My Tears: a comment⁴

Background music: John Dowland- a phrase of Lachrimea Pavan

"The video has something to do with power. She's playing a game, like when you move a stick around to mess up an anthill"

"The woman gets courage from eating the donut, that's why she dared to release the pill into the water."

"The pills were her medicine, but she wasn't sure if she should take them or not."

"She has to choose between the good things in life, the donut, and the bad and dark things in life, the pills. She first chooses pleasure, then darkness."

"Difficult to put together, I don't understand, but I don't think I have to"

"The woman is looking for an answer in the bowl... she came to life when the pills started dissolving"

"She's dampening her thoughts by using the pills somehow"

"It's about doing whatever you want to do, but still the feeling is very hopeless."

I don't know what you saw, dear listeners to this podcast, but these were some of the answers I received when I went out to find an audience. I went to the City Library and the theatre Stora Teatern in Gothenburg to ask people if I could have a moment of their time. I showed them the video and asked for their interpretations.

Many people thought that it was about good vs bad, about choices and that the person in the video was either lonely or manic, or completely without expression. Some people thought about childhood and games, and some about limitations and power. There were all sorts of interpretations of what the video was about, and in a way, there were no wrong answers.

When Georgios and I first started working on this video, my first thought was to be more descriptive and illustrate what I thought the text was about. But Georgios had a vision about playing with contrasts between the imagery and the music and to leave it more open for interpretation. We had made our own understanding of the song *Flow My Tears*, and when Georgios told me his idea, I really liked it and I was happy to abandon my thoughts of being

⁴ Giokotos, Georgios and Anna Thunström. *Flow My Tears: a comment*. (2017) <https://youtu.be/NBkykJ6ENiE>

more clear and logical. He said he didn't want to, and just couldn't, illustrate a more realistic version of the text, because he was concerned it would be too frightening. When I saw the results of the video we did make, I thought it did convey a feeling as alarming as the lyrics, in its own way.

When I went out to talk to people, some of them asked me afterwards what our interpretation was. I told them our thoughts and everyone who asked said that hearing our interpretation added on to their experience. I was afraid that hearing our version would overrule theirs, but the people who asked for it claimed it did the opposite. Instead they said that it added on a layer to their own experience.

Our interpretation of the video is this:

The person is a kind of Trump-like character and has a lot of power, but is apathetic and cut off from feelings. The pink socks and donut could be signs of still being stuck in childhood somehow. Inside the glass bowl there's a whole world, and the dissolving pills are bombs to shatter it. The song you hear is coming from one of the boats in the glass bowl.

The video was not appreciated by everyone. When it was posted on Early Music forums on Facebook, it was not as well received. Some people liked it, but a few people wrote that they didn't understand the video and that it was unnecessary, because the music itself was well performed. "The melody is beautiful, but I do not understand" and "The singing and music is so good, I didn't need the video" were some of the comments. But one person went so far as to say that our video was a disgrace to the music of John Dowland.

I have to say, I was quite perplexed when I heard about that comment. The music itself was recorded by me and Wezi almost five years earlier, so it was not performed out of the ordinary or in a provocative way. I remember Sting made an album⁵ where he sings songs by John Dowland, and when people in Early Music forums discuss this, a lot of comments are derogatory, because of his interpretation of the music and modern singing style. But in our case, it wasn't the music that was upsetting, it was the imagery that made people react.

Maybe it was the fact that we paired Dowland's music with ambiguous visuals that weren't historically accurate, that made people react, but by choosing this particular song, I wanted to show people that Dowland's text was still relevant and worth putting emphasis on. We obviously didn't have any intention to disgrace the music, we only wanted to highlight the lyrics with imagery and show that a text written in the end of the 16th century could still be seen as current news. I was proud of the collaboration between myself and Georgios and thought we had created something that was quite innovative.

⁵ Sting, Songs from the Labyrinth. Deutsche Grammophon, 2008, compact disc.

After having made the video, I started to understand that my research was about more than just my voice. I had enjoyed working with Georgios, who came from another context than my own, and meeting people to hear their different interpretations. I had found that there were more ingredients to my research than I first had thought, and that I wanted to continue by exploring more ways to engage in dialogue and reflection.

I thought one way of doing that could be to revisit and develop *In Darkness Let Me Dwell*, but this time in Gothenburg. I decided it could be made relevant to serve as a part of my research project. I found myself a new collaboration partner, the lutenist Dohyo Sol, and I rented a small theatre space and once again, I was ready to dive into melancholy.

Transitional music: John Dowland- a phrase from Lachrimea Pavan

10. Melancholy and Facebook

I have always really liked having in-depth conversations about life. If I'm in a group of people, I often find myself wanting to talk more concentrated with *one* person, rather than talking a bit with everyone. I think sometimes people can find me a bit "too serious".

So, when I in London discovered how melancholic the Renaissance lute songs often were, it really resonated in me. Here I found texts that dared to be extremely serious. I felt like the lyrics were emphasised by the music and that I somehow understood what the composer meant.

Encountering these sad songs made me think about how rarely we talk about melancholy. How we tend to avoid it. As you might remember, I had previously addressed my concerns in the programme for *In Darkness Let Me Dwell*. There you could read:

"I wonder where our feelings of sadness and melancholy get their outlet? Do we postpone those feelings, to only allow them when we have time for them?"⁶

I finally had a chance to ask these questions, a few weeks before the Gothenburg premiere of *In Darkness Let Me Dwell*. I went to an open talk⁷ at a theatre and the headlines for the conversation were narcissism, beauty ideals and our chase for outer approval. The audience had a chance to ask questions, but I decided to instead email my questions to the journalist and author Kristofer Ahlström, who was in the panel that evening. I asked:

"How does it affect us, if we push sadness and sorrow away and constantly focus on things that make us seem successful and appropriate as "Facebook-updates"? Do we create a sort of self-fraud, that we ourselves believe in?

That is, do we become happier by portraying ourselves as happy? Or do we pile the sad things up inside us, and will they show later in life?"

I received an answer⁸ later that same day.

Kristofer said that he thinks it differs from person to person how happy we feel, depending on how successfully we autosuggest. Autosuggestion means, convincing ourselves that things are the way we'd like them to be. So, for example: if you convince yourself you're happy, you will feel happy.

⁶ Programme: *In Darkness Let Me Dwell*, Anna Thunström. (2015)

⁷ *Ett fult samtal om det sköna (alt. tvärtom)*. Folkteatern, November 8, 2017

⁸ Kristofer Ahlström, e-mail message to author, November 10, 2017

He also wrote that he doubts it is possible to autosuggest every hour of the day, and that we would have to drop our guard at some point. He figured that it could be good with a few “emotional rinses”, in order to avoid what he called “emotional constipation”.

So, I figure that the self-fraud I was asking about, could be the term autosuggestion, the ability of convincing yourself. I had also asked about Facebook, if we post happy updates, will that make us happier?

Kristofer included a link in his email to a study called *Association of Facebook Use With Compromised Well-Being*⁹, published in *American Journal of Epidemiology*. The researchers in this study had looked at the connection between wellbeing and the use of Facebook. They had collected data from over 5000 people and discovered that using Facebook was in fact associated with lower life satisfaction¹⁰. They found that people have a tendency to post the most positive aspects of their lives on social media, which then might cause them to compare themselves with others and lead to lower self-esteem¹¹. They also suggested that by using social media a lot, we probably draw away from “more meaningful real life experiences”¹².

This might not be big news, but when I read the research it seems to me like it tells us that focusing on the best sides of our lives in social media isn't a very successful way of feeling happy. Maybe we actually need some melancholy?

What Kristofer wrote about “emotional constipation” made me think about how I created *In Darkness Let Me Dwell* with the thoughts of using melancholy as a way of rinsing through and dealing with emotional blockage. So, when I recreated the performance in Gothenburg, I added on a few things that wasn't a part of my original idea. One thing was a way of taking the rinsing further. I created a feedback form for the audience, so that they could, only moments afterwards, reflect on what they had experienced.

Another thing that was new for this version of *In Darkness Let Me Dwell*, was that I chose to welcome the audience myself. Usually I would walk onto stage when the audience has already sat down, but by meeting people beforehand and ask them to follow me into the performance space I felt like I was a part of a group. I wasn't just as a performer, I was also just myself amongst other people. The borders between audience and performer were blurred and I think this created a feeling of *us*, instead of *me* and *them*.

⁹ Shakya B, Holly, and Nicholas A. Christakis. “Association of Facebook Use With Compromised Well-Being: A Longitudinal Study”. *American Journal of Epidemiology* (2017) Accessed April 15, 2018, doi: 10.1093/aje/kww189

¹⁰ Shakya B, Holly, and Nicholas A. Christakis. “Association of Facebook Use With Compromised Well-Being: A Longitudinal Study” 4.

¹¹ Shakya B, Holly, and Nicholas A. Christakis. “Association of Facebook Use With Compromised Well-Being: A Longitudinal Study” 1-2.

¹² Shakya B, Holly, and Nicholas A. Christakis. “Association of Facebook Use With Compromised Well-Being: A Longitudinal Study” 8,

So, now I am going to do just that. I'm going to ask you to follow me, so you can experience *In Darkness Let Me Dwell* yourself. This song, written by John Dowland, is the title and final song of the performance. Come with me.

Narrative music: John Dowland- In Darkness Let Me Dwell

11. Event prose poem: *In-between Land*

there a moment in space, a state of mind, in between sleep and being awake
I call it the in-between land
there, the boundaries are blurred.
between what is real and what is sprung from your imagination

you're still somehow aware that life goes on around you, but you're on pause
the images you see are affected by what you hear, feel and what you've seen
life is still happening around you, but you're having a moment that's only yours.

grief.
pain.
pity.
sorrow
these are words you hear, embedded in music.
words you otherwise might avoid
maybe because you don't have time for them
if you let them in, they might grow
or maybe because you're afraid
of where they might take you

but they are *here* now

there's a few seconds of complete confusion
when you come back to life
I see it in your eyes
as you wake up
all bewildered

you sit up
and seem to wonder where you are
and where you've been
but you look relaxed ... like you just exhaled

I love capturing this moment
when it seems like the sounds of melancholy
have not caused you any harm
but have been your fellow companion
in your own in-between land

Transitional music: John Dowland- a little phrase from In Darkness Let Me Dwell

12. In Darkness Let Me Dwell: Gothenburg

This was my favourite moment of *In Darkness Let Me Dwell*. Seeing all these people, like they just woke up. I felt like I could actually see the effect of the performance in the bodies of my audience. In their naked faces. They all took time to come back to life and for a few minutes they all just sat there.

Eventually it was time to leave their blankets and to return to the real world. Once they stood up and went to the foyer, they got their phones back. Inspired by the Facebook study¹³, I had created a mobile cloakroom for this version of *In Darkness Let Me Dwell*. I had asked the audience beforehand to hand their phones in, as I hoped that would make them feel more emotionally available. I believed that the audience would be more able to focus when they were stripped of social media, as the study¹⁴ had suggested.

I thought that some people would perhaps not like the idea of giving their phones away, but to my surprise, everyone was willing to. Sometimes I think of social media as the total opposite of being present. The end of the performance, the waking up, was very still and peaceful and I think it had to do with the fact that people couldn't check their phones as soon as the performance had ended. This meant that the music and the moment had time to resonate.

After the audience had woken up and got their phones back, they were asked to fill in the feedback form I mentioned earlier. In their own time they could answer the question "What did you experience?". I hoped that this way the audience members would capture what they had just experienced, instead of rushing off to their next thing and I think that they did. The writing in many of the feedback forms had a very present and open tone to it, like a stream of consciousness, and without the filters that might have come as an after-construction.

Through the feedback I got to know that some of the audience members had found it difficult to lie down, that it had been difficult for them to find a good position. But most people stated that they really enjoyed lying down and that it had made them relax and completely drift away. They wrote about meditation, problem solving and about melancholy. A thing I noticed was that I could find actual quotes from the songs in the feedback. Words like "sorrow", "darkness" and "pity" were mentioned as something meaningful and transcendent and many of the people seemed to have had almost a private moment, even though they were surrounded by others.

One thing that struck me with using feedback forms, was that I didn't get much feedback in person after the performance. The feedback was already written down, so people just handed it in and said thanks. At the time it made me feel a bit unseen, but when I read all

¹³ Shakya B, Holly, and Nicholas A. Christakis. "Association of Facebook Use With Compromised Well-Being: A Longitudinal Study"

¹⁴ Shakya B, Holly, and Nicholas A. Christakis. "Association of Facebook Use With Compromised Well-Being: A Longitudinal Study"

the reflections the day after, I felt like I had been more seen than after any other performance. People had given me their time and effort and stayed after the performance had ended to dip into what they had experienced and that was a great gift.

“My body started to switch off functions and go into rest mode, it felt like everyone went home and turned off the lights in my arms, legs, feet and hands. In almost the entire body, except the chest”¹⁵

This is what one of the audience members wrote and an image that stuck with me. It feels so rewarding for me to think that I had created something that caused a chest to glow.

Transitional music: John Dowland- a phrase from Mr Dowland's Midnight (5)

¹⁵ *In Darkness Let Me Dwell*. Audience member's comment, 29 October, 2017.

13. TedTalk: *The Gift and Power of Emotional Courage*

I was recommended to listen to a TedTalk a few weeks ago, because the core of it is very connected to my own idea of using melancholy as a way of “rinsing through”. The talk is called *The Gift and Power of Emotional Courage*¹⁶ and is about emotional suppression and why it’s necessary to embrace all of our feelings, not just the good ones.

Psychologist Susan David introduces a concept she calls “emotional rigidity”. It means our tendency to “bottle our emotions, pushing them aside and permitting only those emotions deemed legitimate.”¹⁷

She says in her talk:

Recording from the TedTalk:

“In a survey I recently conducted with over 70,000 people, I found that a third of us -- a third -- either judge ourselves for having so-called “bad emotions,” like sadness, anger or even grief. Or actively try to push aside these feelings. We do this not only to ourselves, but also to people we love, like our children -- we may inadvertently shame them out of emotions seen as negative, jump to a solution, and fail to help them to see these emotions as inherently valuable.

Research on emotional suppression shows that when emotions are pushed aside or ignored, they get stronger. Psychologists call this amplification. Like that delicious chocolate cake in the refrigerator -- the more you try to ignore it ... the greater its hold on you. You might think you're in control of unwanted emotions when you ignore them, but in fact they control you. Internal pain always comes out. Always. And who pays the price? We do. Our children, our colleagues, our communities.”

So, Susan David explains that many of us are trying to *not* acknowledge our, so called, bad feelings. But by trying to suppress the feelings we don’t want to have, they instead grow stronger.

“Research now shows that the radical acceptance of all of our emotions -- even the messy, difficult ones -- is the cornerstone to resilience, thriving, and true, authentic happiness. But emotional agility is more than just an acceptance of emotions. We also know that accuracy matters. In my own research, I found that words are essential. We often use quick and easy labels to describe our feelings. “I’m stressed” is the most common one I hear. But there's a world of difference between stress and disappointment or stress and that knowing dread of “I’m in the wrong career.” When

¹⁶ David, Susan. *The Gift and Power of Emotional Courage* (2017, November) [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/susan_david_the_gift_and_power_of_emotional_courage

¹⁷ David, Susan. *The Gift and Power of Emotional Courage*.

we label our emotions accurately, we are more able to discern the precise cause of our feelings. And what scientists call the readiness potential in our brain is activated, allowing us to take concrete steps. But not just any steps -- the right steps for us. Because our emotions are data.

Our emotions contain flashing lights to things that we care about. We tend not to feel strong emotion to stuff that doesn't mean anything in our worlds. If you feel rage when you read the news, that rage is a signpost, perhaps, that you value equity and fairness -- and an opportunity to take active steps to shape your life in that direction. When we are open to the difficult emotions, we are able to generate responses that are values-aligned.”

What she is talking about is the importance of being able to accept *all* of our emotions and she has, in her own research, found that *how* we use our words are essential. If we label our emotions more precisely, like instead of saying “I am sad”, say “I’m noticing I am feeling sad”, that will help us realise that *we are not our emotions*. Instead the emotions are data that says something *about* us. When we listen carefully to what actually caused these feelings, by using the emotions as information, we will understand what active steps we need to take, in order to make positive changes in our lives.

So, what I take from this talk, is that if we acknowledge our emotions, the good as well as the bad, it is not only a way of getting to know ourselves. It is also a way of using our feelings as a guide for actions that we want to take in life.

When I listened to this TedTalk, it made me think that maybe this is exactly what I did in London without knowing it. Somehow, I recognised that I wasn’t feeling completely content musically, even though I thought I should be.

So, that I decided to create *In Darkness Let Me Dwell*, was not only an opportunity to dwell in the melancholy I love, but it also served as a springboard for me to realise that I needed to do things differently. By noticing that I was feeling unfulfilled, I realised that I had found values in singing that I needed to follow and changes I needed to make.

Transitional music: John Dowland- a phrase from Mr Dowland’s Midnight (6)

14. Ljusets hjärta

I find it really interesting that words can matter so much. I got an inkling when some people had quoted words from the songs performed in *In Darkness Let Me Dwell*, but listening to this talk made me even more aware of it.

I have always been keen trying to find the right words to describe a feeling or a moment. If I find the exact ones to describe what I mean, I experience it makes talking and thinking about it a lot easier. The same goes for if someone else pinpoints my concerns, using the perfect words, and this was the case for my final piece of my masters. I had decided that I would create something around words that were very special to me. I wanted to create everything from the lyrics. The song I chose is called *Var inte rädd för mörkret*, which translates to Do Not Fear the Darkness. The text is originally a poem by Erik Blomberg and the music made by Karin Rehnqvist¹⁸.

So, I had a song I wanted to use. And after thinking about it for a while, I knew the exact place where it should be performed.

During the course 'Performative Sound Art and Physical Form', we had visited an old water reservoir with an incredible acoustic. In there, the sound travels for around 11 seconds and singing in there creates layers of sound.

The space itself, called Kulturtemplet, is really challenging to be in. There's no electricity, so that means no lights, no heating and no running water. There are two flights of stairs down to the main space and it's cold and damp. Every move you make creates a big noise, so you can't even talk in there, you have to whisper to be understood. It's a big space, so there's always parts of it that you can't see because it's too dark. It's a place for mixed feelings; scary and very magical at the same time.

Just before Christmas, I was lucky enough to get the keys to the reservoir. It was about two months before my final presentation. It was cold and dark both outside and inside of Kulturtemplet, so I had to wear really warm clothes and bring a torch to go there. I went there once on my own, but the darkness and the strangeness of the place made me feel that one time was more than enough. So, for the rest of my preparation time, I had to ask friends to come with me to explore my ideas. It sometimes felt more like a research expedition to Antarctica, than preparation for my masters presentation.

I could be down in the reservoir for around an hour and a half at a time, then it felt like I sort of 'hit the wall' and I had to get up into daylight and a world that was easier to understand.

¹⁸ Rehnqvist, Karin, "Var inte rädd för mörkret" Sångur ur jorden. Text by Erik Blomberg. Stockholm: Edition Reimers, cop. 1992.

But the only way I could develop my ideas was by going down there to try something and see how the space responded, because the sound was so unpredictable I couldn't really know beforehand.

When I got home, I evaluated what I had tried out, adjusted my ideas and then I had to go back again another time. It was time consuming, but in a way, I saw it as a collaboration between me and the space. I brought something, and the reservoir responded and then I had to decide if I wanted to keep it or if I wanted to try something else. Having a dialogue with a place instead of a person was a completely new way for me to create and it was very tiring, but also really exciting. I think I developed a good relationship with Kulturtemplet.

My main idea was to create a sort of fantasy world based around this one song. I chose not to have a narrative in the world I created, but I still thought of it as a story. It was my story, both based on my past and on where I am today, and each and every audience member's story as well. Their story was in their interpretation.

I decided to not call it a performance and instead I referred to it as an exploration. I called it that partly as a way to take away the stress of creating a final performance, but mostly it was the idea of exploring the reservoir and its fantasy world together with the audience. I wasn't intending to perform for them, I wanted to discover my story and theirs together with them. We would all each experience something, both separately and then together, and this is what I thought of as exploring.

I called the exploration *Ljuset's hjärta*, which means Heart of Light, and made it into two parts. The first part of *Ljuset's hjärta* was down in the reservoir. I met the audience outside and welcomed them, then we went down the stairs to the space. In the reservoir the audience were seated on chairs in a circle, facing outwards, with their backs towards the centre of it. This was so every person had a different outlook, because I wanted the audience members to experience different points of view and for them to feel like they had their own experience. That they were together, and at the same time alone with themselves.

Before going down the flights of stairs in the reservoir, each person was given a jar with a candle in, to carry down with them. I had instructed them to blow it out when they heard the door shut.

Because I was doing this on my own, I didn't have to consider where in the space a musician would be. This meant I was free to walk around and sing from different places in the reservoir. I created a journey for myself and started far away from the audience to then gradually move closer.

The first minutes were in complete darkness. I had placed candles on the ground, that in my mind transformed into an upside-down sky, filled with stars, as I lit them when I walked past. Try to imagine it, if you close your eyes.

Narrative music: Karin Rehnqvist- Var inte rädd för mörkret

Background music: Karin Rehnqvist- Var inte rädd för mörkret

Do not fear the darkness,
since that is where the light rests.
We cannot see any stars,
where there is no darkness.

In the bright ring of the iris,
you carry a dark pupil,
since darkness is everything that light
with tremor longs for.

Do not fear the darkness,
since that is where the light rests.
Do not fear the darkness,
which carries the heart of light.

After having been down in the reservoir, people walked up into the outside world again for part two. I had placed six wooden stands outside with texts on, that I asked the audience to read in a certain order. The texts on the pages described what I told you in the beginning of this podcast, that I was shy as a young girl, but still wanted to sing in the girls' choir of Uppsala Cathedral. One of the first songs I learnt in this choir, was the song I sang down in the reservoir. The audience could read the lyrics and how they had always been a comfort for me through life.

The second part of *Ljusets hjärta* was for the audience to read these texts at their own tempo, and then create groups of four to go back into a small room by the top of the stairs in the reservoir. In there, I was waiting to ask the audience if they wanted to share their experience. Each audience member was asked to light their candle again and then they had the opportunity to say what they wanted to say, but they didn't have to, they could just listen. This was another way of reflecting than the one I had tried for *In Darkness Let Me Dwell*. I wanted to try talking as a way of capturing the moment.

I found this way of reflecting a bit stressful. I hadn't thought about how people waiting outside would affect me. I got a bit stressed thinking about the people that weren't in the room, wondering if they were okay, if they thought they had to wait for too long and so on.

So, talking as reflection I think would suit me better if everyone was involved at the same time, but because the limitations of the space that wasn't possible.

What I learnt was that everyone had a different interpretation and story to tell. Just like the music video, people had their own idea of what they had experienced. It was everything from being inside a mother's womb, finding hope in depression and meeting themselves through various stages in life. A few people mentioned how it had reminded them of being in a church or being a part of a ritual. I hadn't until then thought about how similar the reservoir was to a church, but when I heard those comments it struck me. I had created a world, in a new context, that was very personal to me and at the same time this world was very similar to the practise I come from. The audience comments made me think that I had let my two worlds meet and mix.

The beautiful thing about talking to the audience was that they shared things with me that I probably wouldn't have heard otherwise, maybe not even in writing, because of the extra effort that goes into finding the right words to describe what you mean.

"I have been searching for ways of understanding healing, but it has been difficult. When I experienced the space and the singing, all those feelings were boosted and came rushing back. I thought of people I have lost, so I sat down there and cried. I thought it was fantastic. I felt like I was half awake and half asleep, it was very meditative. I will remember this."¹⁹

This was said to me by one of the audience members and something I don't think I would have heard unless I had asked. To be able to give an experience like this to someone, makes me understand why I create and why I sing.

¹⁹ *Ljusets hjärta*, part two. Audience member's comment, 23 February, 2018.

15. Event prose poem: *When I stand*

Background music: Karin Rehnqvist- Var inte rädd för mörkret

When I stand in complete darkness,
I think about how incredibly scared I used to be of it.
I think about the young girl I used to be, who didn't want to be seen.
I think about how I now chose to be here on my own, surrounded.

When I stand in complete darkness,
I realise the length of my journey.
I realise the amount of trust given to me by the people here in this space.
I realise the amount of trust I now give myself, my voice and my worth.

...

16. Thoughts and conclusions

When I chose music for my final presentation, I decided to not choose a lute song or a piece of Early Music. I chose *Var inte rädd för mörkret*²⁰ written in 1992, a song from my childhood, because I wanted to base everything on lyrics that had a personal connection to me. Through my research project, I have recognised how important words are to my work and these specific lyrics has been like a comfort to me through life, which is why I wanted to share them in my final performance. Singers are the only musicians fortunate enough to have words to convey, but as a classical singer it is too easy to only think of them as means of transporting notes or musical lines. I have come to believe more and more that it is both our privilege, and responsibility, to also use them as means of communication.

When it comes to finding my field and how to continue onwards, I'm still not sure where I belong. I am still a part of the Early Music movement in some ways, by continuing to create performances using music from the Renaissance, but I have taken steps away from how that music is usually performed. Instead I have chosen to create experiences that the audience can immerse themselves in, which is perhaps more closely related to the field of 'Immersive theatre'.

There are many definitions of 'Immersive theatre', but there's a few ingredients that people seem to agree on. For instance, it is made for the audience to immerse themselves into another world for a while. It often takes place outside of the conventional theatre space, venues like a warehouse or a nightclub can be transformed into an immersive space, and it is usually designed for the audience to participate and have their own experience.²¹ The borders between performers and audience members are often not as clear as in traditional theatre.

So, there are some similarities between 'Immersive theatre' and how I have created during these past two years. Like the blurred borders between myself and the audience members and the idea of them having their own experience and to let go of any presumptions. But in immersive theatre the audience can often affect the performance by interacting with the performers or making different choices, which is something I have chosen not to offer. Instead I give my audience what I have already created, for them to receive as they want. There are some set rules, like where to sit or lie, but on the whole, I let people experience things as they like. They are instead offered to interact afterwards, when I ask them if they want to share what they experienced.

²⁰ Rehnqvist, Karin, "Var inte rädd för mörkret"

²¹ "What Is Immersive Theater?" by Stephen Eckert.

<https://contemporaryperformance.com/2017/12/09/immersive-theater/>

In some immersive theatre productions, the audience is involved in elements of perceived risk-taking, like saying yes to unknown people in the street or daring to be kidnapped²². To me, it seems like the audience, this way, is meant to get a thrill and to perhaps feel a bit vulnerable. But for the experiences I create, I think the opposite is necessary. The audience members need to feel safe, in order to relax enough to feel what is happening inside of them. I would like my audience members to feel that they are secure, even though they don't know exactly what's going to happen. My hope is for them to feel able to have a private moment, tuning into their emotions, even though they are surrounded by others.

This is my way of being in dialogue with the audience members and it is also a way to create *layers of understanding* of a performance, and how to develop it further. For example, the people who asked for mine and Georgios' interpretation of the music video, said that they got an extra layer to their own experience. This made me curious whether the people commenting in the Early Music forums would view the video differently if they had received that extra layer. Investigating this could be a step to learn more about how to blend the Early Music movement and contemporary interpretation.

With *In Darkness Let Me Dwell*, the layering was the other way around; what the audience members wrote to me afterwards, sharing how the words and the moment of stillness had affected them, created an extra layer for *me*. This is when I understood how much the words of the lyrics had mattered to the audience and I would like to research further if putting words onto melancholy can help releasing trapped feelings, maybe by finding a collaboration partner within the field of music psychology.

When it comes to *Ljusets hjärta*, the layers were several.

The first layer was in the reservoir, when the audience experienced their own world in the darkness. The only thing they knew beforehand was that there was no narrative for them to look for or understand.

The second layer happened after they came up from the reservoir, when they read about my background and my relation to the song they had just heard.

The third layer was created when we all came together, and they had the opportunity to share their stories with me and each other.

There were as many different narratives, as there were audience members and I got to receive a part of the personal world that they had experienced. Asking the audience to share the narratives that they had created inside the reservoir, was a way of asking them to find words for where their imagination had taken them; a way of asking them to dip inside

²²Alston, Adam. "Audience Participation and Neoliberal Value: Risk, agency and responsibility in immersive theatre". *Performance Research* 18, no. 2 (2013): 11-12, accessed April 18, 2018, doi: 10.1080/13528165.2013.807177

themselves and try to convey what they had found. At the same time, my own interpretation of *Ljusets hjärta* was expanded.

Transitional music: John Dowland- a phrase from Mr Dowland's Midnight (7)

I am reaching the end of my masters now, as well as the end of this podcast. *So, what have I discovered over these two years?*

I have discovered that I have reached a different kind of audience than the one I usually have. Coming from a classical background, I have usually performed in churches, but because I have changed the context, there's suddenly no presumptions from the audience about how I should sing.

Changing the context and meeting the audience, both before and after a performance, has shifted my perception of them. To me, they are no longer enemies, judges or experts. They have instead turned into people that I can have a dialogue with to exchange thoughts. I have also discovered that I have changed my own expectations of the way that I sing, by creating this new context where I feel free to decide my own interpretation.

When I decided to call my final presentation for an "exploration", instead of a "performance", it encouraged the idea of me and the audience finding and creating something together. It helped me to discover that I always want to have a sense of exploration when I perform, that there are possible things to discover in each moment. I will most likely continue to use the more commonly known word "performance" for the things that I do, but I hope I will always keep a sense of "exploration" in my performances from now on.

I have recognised, through Kristofer Alhström, the journalist who sent me the Facebook study²³ and his own thoughts²⁴, how much I believe there is power in melancholy as an emotional discharge, and how this is a concept I want to continue working with. There is a whole world of melancholy music from the English Renaissance that I have yet to discover and this would be a great way of doing so.

In my future work, I want to continue encouraging my audience to put away their phones, to experience this world in real life, through timeless music, without technology and social media for a while.

²³ Shakya and Christakis, "Association of Facebook Use With Compromised Well-Being: A Longitudinal Study"

²⁴ Kristofer Ahlström, e-mail message to author, November 10, 2018

There is a strong link between words and emotions, something I realised through the TedTalk²⁵ with psychologist Susan David. How we are more able to make the changes we need to make, if we label our emotions with precise words. But first we need to find them. I had a glimpse of how to address this when I explored *Ljusets Hjärta*, and it is something I want to continue investigating. How to use lyrics to invite people to have their own moment where they can just feel, and in what way I can meet them to exchange thoughts about what they experienced.

...

Do you remember that I mentioned earlier about how some people spoke ill about Sting and his attempt to sing Dowland songs? In the journal *Early Music America*²⁶, he talks about his love for Dowland's music and says that before he recorded his album, he listened to well-respected, historically informed, recordings of this music. He continues with saying:

"As a matter of fact, I listened to a lot of Dowland recordings and felt that I couldn't compete with that style but also thought that maybe there was something I could do in my own style that would be relevant, respectful, and new."²⁷

I find it really brave and inspiring, to take something that you love and make it your own, even though some people might object. Not only did Sting introduce Dowland's music to a bigger audience, but by daring to take his interest seriously, he also contributed to keeping this music relatable and alive. Something I also wish to do.

After these two years at the masters in Contemporary Performative Arts, I have understood that I do love the sound of Early Music, especially English lute songs, but that conveying the lyrics is equally important to me. I will probably sing within my former context again, but the difference would be that this time I would allow my voice to be affected by the lyrics and the feelings behind them.

I have come to see myself, not only as a singer, but as an artist that has expanded my frames. By changing the context, I have created freedom for both the audience and myself to interpret and reflect through ourselves.

Since I was young, I have thought that I *should* sing in a certain way, because I can. I love singing, but it was the fact that I *could* that made me feel valuable. Now, I think my value lies in myself, and my voice is instead something I can use in different ways to give people a moment to reflect through music.

²⁵ David, *The Gift and Power of Emotional Courage*.

²⁶ "Sting sings Dowland" by Craig Zeichner. <https://www.earlymusicamerica.org/files/Profile%20Sting.pdf>

²⁷ "Sting sings Dowland" by Craig Zeichner. 20.

I have found my own tools for when I create; the combination of music and lyrics, my sensibility and my voice. With these tools I create immersive experiences which offer the audience members a chance to reflect, and by immersing into these moments, I hope more people allow themselves to feel and to connect within. Through all this, I have not only managed to finally meet my audience, I have now also met myself.

Thank you for listening.

End music: John Dowland- last phrase of Mr Dowland's Midnight (8)

FURTHER READING

Historical Informed Performance and Immersive Theatre

Historically Informed Performance

Historically Informed Performance (HIP) is the aim of performing music in the style of what is believed to be 'authentic' to its history. In *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, one can read:

"Practice of music-making aimed at 'authenticity', or fidelity to the circumstances of a work's original performance (and, it is thereby assumed, the composer's intentions). At its simplest this requires that appropriate instruments (for whatever period) are used instead of their modern equivalents, but there are implications too for ornamentation style, tempo, rhythm, and even tuning."²⁸

There has been a renewed interest in medieval, renaissance and baroque music, known as the Early Music Revival. There seem to be many different opinions on when exactly this revival started, but sometimes during the mid 20th century seem to be agreed on. In *Early Music: A Very Short Introduction*, Thomas Forrest Kelly writes that this interest has in recent years been divided into two specific trends:

"First, a rediscovery of little-known and under-appreciated repertoires, and second, an effort to recover lost performing styles, in the conviction that such music will come to life anew using those performance practices."²⁹

The HIP movement relies heavily on the accuracy of musical scores, due to the lack of recordings from the time. In a guide³⁰ aimed at music librarians, one can read that online platforms and music score library projects often offer digitized performance editions that are full of errors, and how the choice of a music score is of great importance for HIP performers. Accurate musical scores introduce a vast source of information on how the music has been previously performed, on the performance practice and the intentions and expectations of the composer.

In *Dowland Works*, we mostly performed from facsimiles from the song books of the Renaissance, such as *The First Book of Songs or Ayres*³¹ by John Dowland or *A Booke of Ayres*³² by Thomas Campion and Philip Rosseter. The lutenists read tablature and the singers sang from mensural notation, the type of musical notation that was used in Europe between 1260-1600³³.

²⁸ The Oxford Dictionary of Music. 6th ed. s.v. "historically informed (period), performance" accessed April 11, 2018. <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/view/10.1093/acref/9780199578108.001.0001/acref-9780199578108-e-10220>

²⁹ Kelly, Thomas Forrest. *Early Music: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 1

³⁰ Scott, Rachel E. HIP Librarians: "An Introduction to Historically Informed Performance for Music Librarians". *Music Reference Services Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (2014): 128, accessed April 14, 2018, doi: 10.1080/10588167.2014.935587

³¹ Dowland, John, *The First Booke of Songs or Ayres*. Witten: Broude Europa, cop. 1613.

³² Campion, Thomas and Philip Rosseter, *A Booke of Ayres*. Witten: Broude Europa, cop. 1601.

³³ *Encyclopædia Britannica*. "mensural notation" accessed April 11, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/art/mensural-notation>

Here is an example of my music score All Ye Whom Love or Fortune Hath Betrayed, by John Dowland, both in facsimile notation and standard notation:

XIII. CANTVS.

All ye who loue or fortune hath betraide, All ye that dreame of blisse but
Care that con-sumes the heart, inward pain
 lie in greif, Al ye whose hopes are e-uer- more delaid, Al ye whose sighes ij. or

All ye, whom love or fortune John Dowland
care sing my sorrow's

All ye, whom Love - or For- tune hath
 Care that con- sumes - the heart with in-
 - be- tray'd; All ye, that dream of bliss but live
 - ward pain, Pain that pre- sents sad care in out-

The music and the poetry in lute songs often relate to each other. In *The Oxford Companion to Music*³⁴, we can read that lute songs were often written so the structure of the music relates to the poetic form, and the vocal line usually composed to illustrate the poem the song is based on.

During the reign of Elizabeth I (1558–1603), also referred to as 'The Golden Age', the idea of melancholy became widely popular in poetry, art and music. The composer John Dowland was very popular and became a symbol for this artistic movement³⁵.

John Dowland's lyrics are famous for being melancholy, with songs like *All Ye Whom Love or Fortune Hath Betrayed* (music score example: see above), *Come Heavy Sleep*, *In Darkness Let Me Dwell* and most famously *Flow My Tears*. One of his more famous compositions is a pavan called *Semper Dowland, Semper Dolens*³⁶ (translates to 'Always Dowland, Always Doleful'), which also became his signature and motto³⁷.

The group Dowland Works still performs music by Dowland and his contemporaries, for full churches around England, as the *Oxford Companion to Music*³⁸ states:

"Though a miniature genre and comparatively short-lived in its original form, the lute-song has achieved a prominent place in England's musical heritage."

Immersive theatre

Immersive theatre can be described as a form of theatre performance that focuses on the individual audience member's experience, often including several senses like taste, touch and smell. The design and the space of the performance is important, and a production can either chose the performance space based on the theme of their work, draw inspiration from it or even transform a space to fit their needs. There is a strong connection between the location and the work, and the space is often an essential part of the dramaturgy of the performance. Many companies work with blurred borders between audience and performers, creating moments of one-to-one encounters for only one audience member or having one or more performers as a guide through the experience³⁹.

Josephine Machon writes further about how an immersive theatre audience is separated from the conventions and etiquettes of more traditional theatre spaces and paints a picture of what a traditional setting is like:

³⁴ *The Oxford Companion to Music*. s.v. "lute-song", accessed April 13, 2018, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/view/10.1093/acref/9780199579037.001.0001/acref-9780199579037-e-4102>

³⁵ Headlam Wells, Robin, *Elizabethan Mythologies: Studies in Poetry, Drama and Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 189-190

³⁶

³⁷ Lindley, David, *A New Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture* Ed. Michael Hattaway, (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons 2010) 274

³⁸ *The Oxford Companion to Music*. s.v. "lute-song", accessed April 13, 2018, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/view/10.1093/acref/9780199579037.001.0001/acref-9780199579037-e-4102>

³⁹ "What Is Immersive Theater?" by Stephen Eckert. <https://contemporaryperformance.com/2017/12/09/immersive-theater/>

With immersive theatre the audience is removed from the 'usual' set of rules and conventions expected from 'traditional' theatrical performances.

To be clear, 'traditional' or 'conventional' in this particular context (and accepting that these are contestable terms themselves) is a theatre experience, whether in a large Victorian theatre with a proscenium arch, the open-plan theatres of The National or in smaller studio spaces, where audiences enter an auditorium, sit in their assigned seat in a given row, obediently hush as soon as the house-lights dim and stage lights come up, perhaps, even still, a red, velvet curtain is raised. Audience members applaud at the end of each act, take a drink in an interval, after which they return to their seats and, as the performance ends, there is a final applause for the 'curtain call' and they leave. These rules and conventions can be understood to be in place in any spectatorial, theatre production where the audience/actor (us/them) relationship is defined by the delineation of space (auditorium/stage) and role (static-passive observer/active-moving performer) where the audience is viewing the action ahead of them. This is a theatre experience which, on analysis, suggests it does not matter if you are there or not; the audience could get up and walk out and it would carry on.⁴⁰

Machon writes about how the audience knows what to expect and how to behave in a 'traditional' theatre environment and points out the audience/actor relationship as us/them. She here refers to the theatre world, but I believe it could be easily translated to 'traditional classical/church concerts', the type of concerts I have most experience from.

The immersive theatre scene has grown bigger these last two decades and is now an established movement,⁴¹ with prominent, international companies such as Punchdrunk, dreamthinkspeak, Third Rail, You Me Bum Bum Train and Cantabile 2. There are also Swedish contributors in this field, such as Poste Restante and Osynliga Teatern. The companies' websites are often mysterious and do not give away much information about the performances.

This also goes for the new immersive theatre experience made by dotdotdot, that launched in March 2018 in London. The company's website does not disclose much, but in a promotional clip⁴² on YouTube, you can hear the CEO Andrew McGuinness talk about the show. It is based on layered reality, i.e. virtual reality combined with actors. They have built a big set especially. McGuinness talks about a big production team with sound designers and technical directors from the film world.

That is one side of immersive theatre. On the other side is the Danish company Cantabile 2. On their website they present their viewpoint on immersive theatre, called Human Specific Performance.

⁴⁰ Machon, Josephine, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 26-27.

⁴¹ "What Is Immersive Theater?" by Stephen Eckert.

<https://contemporaryperformance.com/2017/12/09/immersive-theater/>

⁴² "London's new immersive theatre production Somnai | First Look | Time Out", accessed 10 April, 2018, <https://youtu.be/-yzbDKA-D4s>

“A specific quality of Cantabile 2’s Human Specific work is the basic principle of non-fiction, thereby abandoning the concept of role and make-believe. We think that as soon as the spectator recognizes the performer as playing a role, he or she will be reassured by the existence of a distance, of a fictitious reality, which keeps a safety line between him or her and the performance⁴³.”

Cantabile 2 is, in this way, going the opposite way of dotdotdot and Somnai, by basing their work on non-fiction, to make sure that the audience member doesn’t feel detached from the performance. They state that their ambition is to make it possible for the audience member and the performer to be both responsive and receptive to each other, and to make sincere meetings happen⁴⁴.

A mix?

These two fields, Early Music and immersive theatre, are practised separately and I have not been able to find more than one example of a potential crossover. Stockholm Early Music Festival (SEMF) gives a series of concerts called *Early Late Night Concerts*. The audience is offered a matress to lie on, and the concerts are performed in candle light and start at 23.00 in the evening⁴⁵. This concept could possibly be look at as ‘immersive’, although there is no mentioning of it in SEMF’s advertisement.

In the future, I might be active in either field, Early Music or immersive theatre, as they are defined today. However, I think it more likely that you will find me somewhere in between, in a space where I can create immersive music experiences, based on the lyrics.

My next planned project is about just that. I have made a recording of a song called *Det är vackrast när det skymmer*⁴⁶, which translates to *It Is Most Beautiful at Dusk*. The song is by the neo-classical composer Gunnar de Frumerie and is usually sung with a quite operatic voice. I sing it my own way, with a slender tone and a focus on the lyrics. The text is based on a poem by Pär Lagerqvist⁴⁷ and, in my opinion, the music and the words really enhance each other.

This would be my first attempt at a one-to-one performance, which means it’s only for one audience member at a time, and I have made a couple of try-outs already. The performance is set outside at the time of dusk, and through this I am going to research what happens to the audience member’s experience if their private moment is *in fact private*, and how to use the lyrics as a theme for a conversation between just me and them.

⁴³ <https://www.cantabile2.dk/en/human-specific/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.cantabile2.dk/en/human-specific/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.semf.se>

⁴⁶ de Frumerie, Gunnar, *Det är vackrast när det skymmer*. Text by Pär Lagerkvist. Stockholm : Nordiska musikförlaget., cop. 1943

⁴⁷ Lagerkvist, Pär. *Kaos*. (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Atlantis, 2001)

I chose this song based on its lyrics, just as I did for *Ljusets hjärta*. The music itself is quite far away from Early Music, but the way I choose to sing it is not. I don't want to limit my singing to only a certain type of music, instead I want to embrace lyrics that resonate in me and continue onwards from there.

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