

Can self-focused questions inspired  
from a coaching technique help create  
a new self-help entertainment genre?

Svanlaug Jóhannsdóttir



Listaháskóli Íslands  
Department of Music  
NAIP Master of Music

Can self-focused questions  
inspired from a coaching technique  
help create a new self-help entertainment genre?

Svanlaug Jóhannsdóttir  
Mentor: Sigurður Halldórsson  
and Kristín Valsdóttir  
Spring 2014

## **Abstract**

Singing and the happiness of other human beings are major motivators in my in life. After I was introduced to the tools of coaching I found a way to create an outlet for my singing, a sense of independence and a feeling of contributing good to the world.

My goal was to write stories to match a certain type of music (different for each project) and convey some constructive message. My goal being, that by identifying with the hero of the story, we may be better equipped to make decisions in our own lives. To play with surprise and use the coaching method to generate honest answers from the audience about themselves and their challenges and passions in life.

A famous award winning Icelandic writer once said:

*“It is my believe that fairytales try to tell us something about what we are. Fairytales are full of stereotypes and archetypes that reflect reality. Sometimes hidden and sometimes obvious. Fairytales take us further than reality can.”*

(Andri Snær Magnason, 2014)

With inspiration from Andri Snær, it was my vision and my innovative practice, to create a term and content for something that could be called "Coaching-tainment". An artistic experience that not only swept you off your feet, made you cry, laugh or at least smile and get goose bumps but most importantly, got you thinking. It also gave you time to speak to yourself, be kind and honest with yourself and to set goals on paper.

Not only did this make for an innovative idea but also gave me a chance to communicate different types of music that I loved, to a public that, for example, would perhaps not choose to go to a "Icelandic folk music concert" but would be willing to hear the story of "What's beyond the horizon" which "apparently had a modern twist".

These pages will unfold my quest for this new art form, search for new singing techniques and content and discuss five successful productions written in this innovative practice.

## **Table of Contents**

<b>1. Introduction - Creating a creative outlet</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Theoretical Framework - Good Music and Human Needs</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Research and Conclusion - Professional Integration Projects 1 to 5</b>	<b>11</b>
PIP Project 1: What's beyond the horizon	12
PIP Project 2 : Your first step	14
PIP Project 3: Nothing is so entirely bad - a fairytale for a storyteller and guitarist.	16
PIP Project 4: Goya through the eyes of Granados.	17
PIP Project 5: Taste of Tango	19
<b>4. Discussion</b>	<b>22</b>
Challenges	23
Musicians	23
Reaching a wider audience	24
Being vulnerable	25
Female Tango singer	26
Hesitations	27
Inspiration and future projects	28
<b>Personal development story - Singing</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Resources</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>33</b>
Skills in Artistic Expression	33
Creative and Transformative Skills	33
Performance Skills	35
Improvisation Skills	35
Ensemble Skills	36
Workshop Skills	37
Technical Skills	39
Independence	42
Psychological Understanding	43
Critical awareness	43
Communication and project management skills	44

## **1. Introduction - Creating a creative outlet**

When looking for a profession I wanted something that would allow for a creative outlet for my singing, a sense of independence and a feeling of contributing to the world. It took me a long time to find out what really worked for me. I was a classical singer with a business degree and a very strong feeling for music needing to be a stronger part of my life than it was.

I am fascinated by energy. All sorts of energy. The kind of energy that gets people going, the kind of energy that makes a person turn their life around and the kind of energy that really moves mountains. I get my energy from many sources, but I love the energy I get from singing, witnessing an amazing concert, hearing an incredible song or getting goose bumps because from some lyrics that move me.

Sitting and absorbing good art, I always fill up with energy and ideas and feel like I can conquer the world. I leave the concert hall/theatre looking at the other members of the audience, thinking they must feel the same. Then, the majority of the public just goes home to sleep, to a bar for a drink or moves onto something that does nothing to harness this feeling of being on the top of the world.

I have also sat through a number of concerts and theatre works that I felt did nothing for me. They were a waste of my time. Lack of story and content was "painful" and tiring. Some music is just better enjoyed from a CD in the comfort of your home. I decided that as an artist that I must always give my audience a real reason for showing up, paying a ticket and sitting through a show. Give them clues as to what to listen for and a reason to listen.

It was then that I decided to lend a real story and content to music I would perform.

Singing and the happiness of other human beings are my major motivators in life so when it came to selecting a theme for my stories it was to me an obvious choice to search for a constructive storyline.

I was lucky enough to be introduced to a type of self-help method simply called Coaching (often Life Coaching) and it gave me an idea for a new tool. I wrote, performed and produced a show called "What's beyond the horizon" at a local theatre festival called ironically "Art-Fart" (a reference to artistic people being called arty-farty). There I combined my fascination for Icelandic folk music, Icelanders respect for their ancestors and my newfound tools of coaching. My show told the story of a land settler that had to overcome many obstacles to make her dreams come true. In the performance the audience is seduced by the story of Ísgerður and the use of Icelandic folk music makes the story even more accessible for the Icelandic public. They let their guard down and get involved with the story. Once they had witnessed Ísgerður overcome her obstacles in order to fulfil her dreams they were taken out of story land. The focus was taken away from the story and moved onto the audience. I had prepared a special workbook for the occasion and it was passed to members of the audience. They had to complete assignments based on their own past experiences and dreams. Then each had to write out their own dreams and ultimately write down for themselves, which were the three steps they needed to take to achieve that dream.

This little game of enticing the audience into the adventure and then turn the adventure up on the audience had an amazing response at that festival. In order to see if the method only worked for Icelanders I translated the story into English and performed it at the Icelandic Culture House for an international music festival in Iceland "Iceland Airwaves" and then performed it for an international conference of Rotarians in Iceland. I then wanted to see how the project would do within the corporate world and the show was performed for a sales team at a security company, mostly for men in their thirties.

Feedback was more than positive and people embraced the surprise of being put on the spot about their own lives.

A nineteen year old girl (who had been chewing gum in the back during the whole show) came to me and said: *"I never thought I could earn/gain so much by going to the theatre"* and a 65 year old man, owner of a huge trucking company in Europe was happily in tears after the show.

I was thrilled to see that I could have so much affect on people with my words, song and exercises so I wondered if I could make up a new genre of *"Coaching-tainment"* .

We already have "Edutainment", a term for educational entertainment. For people who either prefer education to be entertaining or simply like entertainment and don't seem to mind if they learn something along the way. Sources claim the term was first used by the Walt Disney company in connection with the launch of the series *True Life Adventure*. (McFarland, 2011)

We are blessed enough to live in a part of the world and at a time where we are encouraged to "do what we love", "go after our dreams", "live our passion" etc, but after generations of "doing the right thing", it is my opinion that we, as the general public, are in great need of guidance of how to do that. Society has a great deal of answers and ideas for us on how to fulfil our dreams: buy a bigger house, faster car, firmer boobs or whiter teeth, but people's dreams rarely match that of propaganda.

We are also living at a time where people seem to be less and less interested in God and the conventional idea of a church. This is all well and good, perhaps part of an evolution. But, when you take out a practice that people have used to lean on in times of trouble and thank when times are good, it creates a gap that is difficult for the individual to fill. All sorts of rituals, developed through the ages have helped man make a sense of his life and at the same time a sense of belonging. When all that is removed, what do you do instead?



How do you take care of your mental health and peace of mind without any kind of reference or guidance on how to do that? How do you create the same sense of importance around Christmas if it is not the birth of Jesus but just another costly holiday?

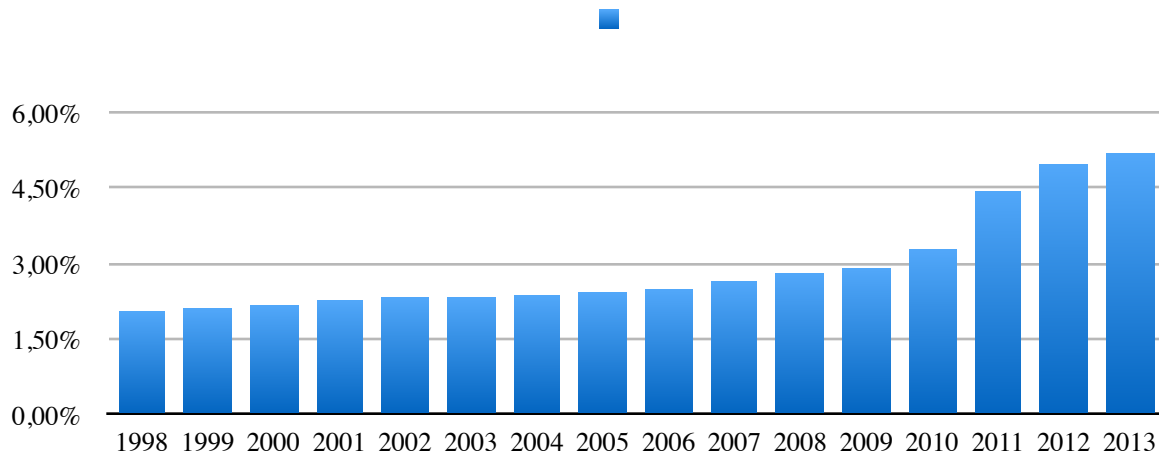


Table 1: Percentage of registered inhabitants of Iceland who are not registered to a religion (Statistics Iceland, 2014.)

Are you just as happy and thankful if you never have a reason to look to the skies and thank someone (or something) for your day or just for the dinner on your plate? It is not my intention at all to replace any religious rituals, but rather to be open to the possibility that with the absence of the church, people could be more open to intimate gatherings.

It was therefore my vision, my innovative practice, to create a term and content for something like "*Coaching-tainment*". An artistic experience that not only swept you off your feet, made you cry, laugh or at least smile and get goose bumps but most importantly, got you thinking. It also gives you time to speak to yourself, be honest with yourself and to set goals on paper.

Not only did this make for a innovative idea but also gave me a chance to communicate different types of music that I loved, to a public that would perhaps not choose to go to a

"Icelandic folk music concert" but would be willing to hear the story of "*What's beyond the horizon*" which "apparently had a modern twist".

I knew I could make this once, but could the experience be repeated with a new story and other music? We humans, all tend to have more or less the same problems: the pains of growing up, of identity, of direction, of love, of family, of work, of growth, etc. I was eager to try and touch on as many human challenges as possible.

## **2. Theoretical Framework - Good Music and Human Needs**

If I were to choose how I would want my projects to be described it would be: simple, honest, beautiful, effective.

I wanted to be effective and use the best techniques to encourage people to open up and answer their own questions, I took an intensive course of coaching and became a certified coach (ICF, The School, CoachU). My course deepened my admiration and fondness for the profession and helped me better understand human nature. The definition of coaching according to the International Coach Federation is:

*“Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential.”*

(International Coach Federation, 2014.)

In practice, this means finding the real questions that an individual needs to answer in order to take his/her personal or professional life to the next level.

I also took a course of *Strategic Intervention* designed by Tony Robbins, one of the World’s most known therapists. While coaching is designed for one-on-one and group work over the course of a few months, *Strategic Intervention* is designed to make dramatic changes in a person in a short space of time. It is also designed to be put in use in front of a large group. That way everyone involved can learn and benefit from one persons growth.

To find subjects for my show I looked just about everywhere I could imagine for a need that could become a story. I automatically evaluated most conversations I had throughout the process of this NAIP Master of Music to find a repeated human challenge.

One of the great tools I learned during my studies used for analysing human behaviour is called the "Six humans needs".

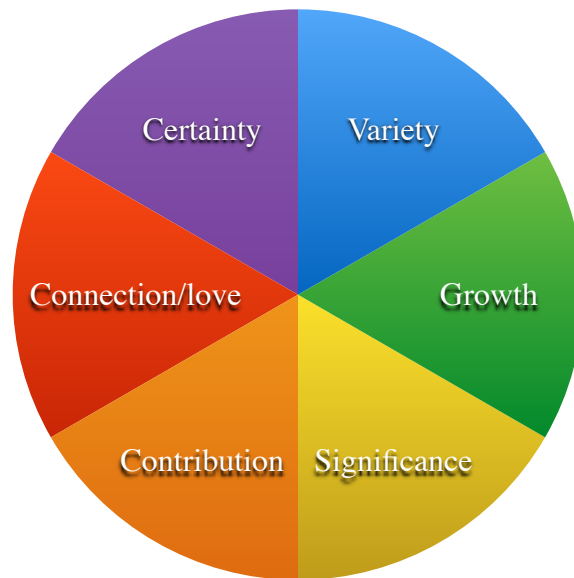


Table 2: Six Basic Human Needs According to Anthony Robbins

1. **Certainty:** assurance you can avoid pain and gain pleasure
2. **Uncertainty/Variety:** the need for the unknown, change, new stimuli
3. **Significance:** feeling unique, important, special or needed
4. **Connection/Love:** a strong feeling of closeness or union with someone/thing
5. **Growth:** an expansion of capacity, capability or understanding
6. **Contribution:** a sense of service and focus on helping, giving to and supporting others

Anthony Robbins believes everyone is, in their daily life, motivated by their desire to fulfil these six needs. People find all sorts of ways to do that. For example to satisfy the need for significance a person might run for president in a local club, make themselves indispensable in the life of their children or even hold a person at a knife point. A person's need for variety can be satisfied by travel, by changing jobs, by reading the news or even eating. Each of us usually holds two to three of these needs more important than the

other and this shapes our character. Are we thirsty for variety or do we seek stability more than anything else? (Anthony Robbins, 1996).

Mentioning this tool might seem confusing here but I do so because the Six Needs have served as an invaluable tool for me to understand human behaviour without judging. When I was putting together stories and analysing what could be learned from them, what questions should be asked and how they could be important in people's lives, the Six Needs came up again and again. This raised questions and provided alternatives. I have not yet made a project where they appear to the audience but they are an underlying thread of evaluation in all my projects.

To get a better idea of relevant subjects I decided to go where people end up when human challenges have overcome them. I interviewed the head of Iceland's Psychiatric Hospital to find out what were the major challenges of the modern man. The current director of the Hospital is surprisingly open to a conversational method to improving the patient's mental health. It had been my opinion that psychiatrists preferred medicine to actually talking.

I looked at the use of storytelling and found approval in my approach to people everywhere. Perhaps the most obvious book of stories that are 'supposed' to change human behaviour in our society is the Bible. Throughout the Old Testament we read about all kinds of stories and in the New Testament we read about how Jesus devoted most of his life to telling tales. His goal being, that by identifying with the hero of the story, we may be better equipped to make decisions for our own lives.

The book "Experimental Theatre: From Stanislavsky to Peter Brook" speaks of development in theatre and mentions particularly the great influences of Stanislavsky and Peter Brooks (James Roose-Evans, 1996).

Further reading on these pioneers was essential for me and I was pleasantly surprised to see this paragraph in a book on Stanislavsky's work:

*“What Stanislavsky called the System does contain [...] but it also contains much more: His insight that empathy can be a more powerful prompt to creativity than personal emotion. The 1990’s discovery of mirror neurones, which activate in the brain when a person watches another perform an action, gives new credence to his intuition that observing others is as good as observing oneself”*

(Sharon Marie, 1998, p. 3)

The last line in this paragraph is maybe the best possible support for doing the work that I do. “Observing others is as good as observing oneself”.

**If this can really be achieved, then if we have already seen “ourselves” reflected in the actor onstage, in a fairytale conquering obstacles that we can identify with, we should be able to transfer that experience to ourselves, to our obstacles and therefore the solutions of them. To me, that makes the whole project: of storytelling, singing and completing an exercise valid.**

Music is an integral part of the mix. It allows the audience to let loose, let go of restrictions and be at one with the story. It relaxes the brain from the conscious to subconscious and is even more effective if we know the music beforehand (Binns, Corey. 2006).

It seemed to me, that I could support with data, that the tools that I was planning on using to achieve my goal, were as good as I had originally considered them to be, so I continued with my research.

Below is a summary of the main main concepts, my tools and my understanding of them,;

Coaching: a theory that claims to ask people the right questions so that they themselves may best make their own decisions.

Storytelling: a successful method to give people ideas and explain content

Music: a strong tool to successfully connect with another human beings and bring out the best in them.

### **3. Research and Conclusion - Professional Integration Projects 1 to 5**

#### **Method - Work with the material and construct performances**

To see if I could construct this new genre of art I decided it was important for me to find music that I thought I could use as an important part of a story. I went through old and new repertoire to see if I could detect an untold story.

I found I still had stories on Icelandic folk music. I gathered some old Icelandic ballads and old Spanish music. My biggest surprise was the source I found in Argentinian tango. A three day course at the beginning of the study period absolutely swept me off my feet. It had everything I needed at the time, story, emotion, good melody, demanding singing and theatrics.

My goal was to write stories to match a certain type of music selected for each project and convey a constructive message. It was important to me to be playful, work with the element of surprise and coaching.



## **PIP Project 1: What's beyond the horizon**

What's beyond the horizon was the first mini-musical I wrote. This is the project described in the introduction which was based on Icelandic folk music and the history of land settlers. It was later the project that set the bar and the one I measured other projects up against.

The performance team consisted of me as the singer and storyteller, a violinist and a guitarist. The three of us performed together on the stage. The subject was a story about a land settler. The moral of the story was: go after your dreams, although it will be tough, it's worth it.

PIP 1 was my first project and perhaps the one that sped up the learning curve the most. Since I had the opportunity to perform it several times with very different crowds, in English and Icelandic, I soon understood a lot about what worked and what didn't.

---

During performances I sometimes felt embarrassed for by story. I skipped some chapters to make it shorter. I made this decision on stage without communicating it to my musicians. It worked fine and the story was alright without every detail. However afterwards, I realised that by cutting it short I had refused the audience the opportunity to stay in the story, get emerged and really get a chance to be at one with the story. In a concert we want the opportunity to clap between songs and listen to the silence between songs. When listening to a story we need the "silence" of the story, or the part where not that much happens to digest what has happened. For example when someone is telling a joke everything usually happens three times, but it is the third time that is funny. The first two are just a way to build up tension.

The exercise that I gave the audience, worked extremely well. I later tried longer and shorter exercises but I believe that for the theatre setup (i.e. when the show is not an

organised workshop) the length of this one was optimal. The audiences were lead step by step and asked questions about the past and then asked to contemplate on a question about the future which required more of them.

More than anything this project served to establish my faith in this sort of entertainment. It was both a feasible tool for me to work and communicate with but also a good and interesting experience for the audience.

## **PIP Project 2 : Your first step**

My first project (after joining the NAIP Master of Music) was a story about a puppeteer that challenged how parents view their children in a new way and had them consider what values they wanted to bring to their role as a parent. To tell the story I gathered mostly classic Icelandic ballads and borrowed a bunch of puppets to set the stage. Drawing on my successful experience of giving the audience an assignment I expanded the assignment part.

This time I expanded the accompaniment to three instruments, violin, guitar and a piano. This was my first experience of coordinating what I felt was now a real band. It was a good experience and reassured me that the music I elected was the music I wanted to work with for this story. I was surprised to feel how many opinions I had on orchestration and expression.

---

My daughter was four months old when this project was written and produced, so the subject of parenting was a natural choice. She was my first born and I was thrilled about being a mother. I was sad to see women going through the same experience, worrying about buying the right stroller, baby formula, baby clothes and in general focusing their attention on things I found in no way relevant. I found then and still find that women tend to speak a lot about their problems when it comes to babies. To me most of the problems seemed self inflicted and could easily be avoided by having a higher self esteem, by more participation from their partner in parenting and less focus on things to buy. Some of it feels like a cry for attention. I don't know why it happens. Lots of things come into play. A new mother, while being at disposal of the newborn 24/7 can lose touch with her own identity and it takes time to build a new one. It can be an exhausting job and sometimes not rewarding until sometime later. I really wanted to use the performance as a tool for parents to enjoy parenthood. I felt like there were few places where parents could or would have a heart to heart conversation about parenting. I

wanted to communicate a search for alternatives which I believed led to a better experience.

On this journey with the NAIP Master course I have been pleasantly surprised to find out that I really have been able to communicate a warm, sincere, positive message. Not only has the message been passed on, it has been received willingly. It has not been hard to communicate the message. It has been hard to dare to decide to be so completely sincere, so warm and unpretentious. At first I had to convince myself to be very brave and I continue to seek that braveness, but it gets easier with every show. In this PIP 2 it was good to feel that even though the message was meant for new parents it resonated well with audience of all ages. I witnessed the same reactions from parents with grown-up children.

In a trip with the University to Ísafjörður, a small village in Iceland, I wrote lyrics to a song and Björn Pálmi Pálmason, a fellow student, brought it to life with beautiful music in a modern/classical style. The lyrics were about welcoming my daughter to this life. It was the last song of the show *Your first step*. It was extremely empowering to deliver my own words on stage that had been set to music so brilliantly. I really hope to further venture into this world as it can be a way for me to more accurately convey the message of a story. I later tried to repeat writing text with some success but to me none had the same power of message as this one. I remember when I was writing it, having a sense of purpose, an extremely strong idea of what I wanted to say and wanting to say it with all my strength. I have tried to draw on this experience when sitting down to write, to have a crystal clear feeling. When I write this, I silently laugh at myself and wonder if it is even possible to have a “crystal clear feeling” about anything. It feels almost like a contradiction in itself. I don’t know if it has helped or held me back to experiment. I link this back to my project and am again faced with the importance on writing down thoughts and the clarity that can result from seeing your thoughts on paper.

I only ever performed this show once so I still feel like it has an opportunity to grow.

### **PIP Project 3: Nothing is so entirely bad - a fairytale for a storyteller and guitarist.**

As a way of further testing and expanding myself I tried writing a story for another performer. Instead of having the songs sung they were played by a group of eight guitar players and the story read by an actor. The story was aimed at a younger audience and the audience therefore not assigned an assignment. Instead the hero of the story was a young boy who took matters into his own hands, encouraging others to do the same.

---

It was really interesting to work on this project. To collaborate on a project and not have to think about everything myself was a relief.

In the end I wasn't thrilled about the actor's performance, who chose to read the story from a script and not to memorise it. It was a reminder of how delicate the storyteller form is and how well it has to be performed to keep the audience's attention.

I knew that the actor for this story was an old man before the story was written so the story is written for a male character, an older man reliving old memories. It was interesting to write from a boy's and not a girl's perspective. Would the boy behave differently? Would he phrase things in another way? Since the boy was very young in this story and kids that age don't differ that much depending on sex this was not an obstacle. However when, as an exercise, I tried to do a story with a man and a woman on stage I had real reservations on my ideas for the men's dialogue. It has since encouraged me to pay more attention to what different characters lend to different stories.

#### **PIP Project 4: Goya through the eyes of Granados.**

The Spanish composer Enrique Granados (1867-1916) was mostly known for his Goyescas and other music, composed under the influence from the works of the painter Goya. Tonadillas al Estilo Antiguo are twelve songs in an old style based on inspiration from some of Goya's most popular paintings and drawings. (Riva, 2005)

In this project the inspiration of the Goyescas was the most important part of the story. The idea was how people can be empowered to achieve great things with inspiration from greatness. If I could show the audience how greatness can be achieved from inspiration from others I believed it would make this show worth attending.

To emphasise this, to look at how Enrique Granados used the works of Goya to create his music, each member of the audience was equipped with a brush, paper and water paint. With a voice and piano I explained the love stories in the lyrics. During this time the audience was encouraged to paint the colours and movement they felt in the music. The object was of course not necessarily to create new masterpieces there and then but to play on the surprise element to engage the audience in music that would perhaps not have been as accessible before.

I gave a brief introduction into the life of Granados and Goya. Then the audience was invited to look at the works of Goya on a slide show and last but not least, look at how other artists had been inspired by his work.

The goal was to get them thinking about communication and ideas and how with each passing the content can change dramatically. It is useful to have in mind when interpreting messages or communicating with other people.

---

None of my projects have been merely an idea for such a long time before actually getting a chance to be performed. I had endless ideas on how to perform it, all sorts of philosophy to communicate and a long preparation period of the music itself.

The timing was perfect. I had spent the first part of that year in Argentina and was about to move to Spain the week after. I felt like it was a question of “now or never” for this project. It was my goodbye to Iceland and my hello to Spain.

The atmosphere was wonderful. I enjoyed the material playfully. I was slightly worried about my Spanish pronunciation since I had recently spent so much time in Argentina. To my surprise I found out that the very Spanish Tonadillas had originally been written for an Argentinian singer so her pronunciation had probably not varied dramatically from mine.

I had not worked with so many elements in other projects as I did in this one. Change of dress, videos, duets, painting and slides. I explained the text to the audience and felt like I managed to catch a glimpse of the fairy tale atmosphere I created in the other projects. The audience participated well in the exercise of painting while listening.

At the end of this project I felt like I could definitely do more of this kind of concerts but I preferred the “complete immersion”, the continuous story, the feeling of the fairy tale.

The music in this project was slightly more technically challenging than the previous projects. It demanded more of me as a singer and while performing I remembered big divas walking off and on stages after delivering each aria. I now understood better because it was very tiring to deliver a song that demanding, go on to talking and return to the next song without tuning out for a moment. I planned on practicing better the change between text and song for the next project. However, I also remembered my experience with creating silence in the first project so I managed to dwell comfortably in seconds of silence before and after each song to be ready to deliver the next part well. This worked well.

## PIP Project 5: Taste of Tango

To explore my newfound need to sing tango, the second semester of the NAIP Master of Music, was spent in Argentina. I was blessed to find great instructors from day one and got to know a number of well-known Argentinian musicians. I had several opportunities to perform publicly and gained a good sense of the world of Tango music in the short period.

Tango music was perfect for me. It has almost no set rules other than that it is considered boring for the singer to stay in time. It always tells a story and allows the singer to swiftly move between a classical style of using a voice to shouting and whispering, all in the same verse.

In my final PIP project I told the story of Pablito, my main singing instructor in Argentina. He had an interesting past as a teen star on TV and a less interesting future as a show host at a strip joint where he proudly introduced "*Tangos y Tangas*" but you will find that tangas is the name of a thong in Spanish.

The moral of the story is that one should always do what the heart leads you to do.

---

I first performed this project with no assignment for the audience. It seemed fitting because the project was first performed at Reykjavík's Culture Night and the majority of the audience walks right in from the street, with no intention of this being their last cultural experience that night.

I repeated the project at the first Reykjavík Tango music festival where, drawing on my experience from PIP 2, I cut the assignment down considerably. Afterwards I felt that was a mistake and that it was indeed too short and too straight the point. I judge this by observing the audience while doing the assignments. Where they looked confused in the long assignment, they looked like they were not committed in the short one.



Strip joints and prostitution are a big taboo in Iceland and people usually will not recognise knowing anyone that will use their services. It was therefore special to tell the Icelandic audience the story of my visit to the strip joint in Argentina ~~in Iceland~~ and use the contrast to the audiences own life as an inspiration.

My final performance was in Spain. I had assembled a wonderful band of musicians from Finland, Peru, Spain and Argentina. Yes, there are more foreigners crazy about Tango than I am!. We e performed in a little town, an hour away from Madrid.

I am familiar with this town and its inhabitants. It took me no time at all to sell the idea of a Tango story for the town. It took me a long time to convince them to let me make the assignment be a part of the show. The cultural leaders of the town had little faith in its inhabitants in that way and thought that they would not understand that part of it.

It was a true culture shock, performing for this town. I should of course have been used to the Spanish being loud wherever they go, but the amount of talking and chatting during the performance was extremely hard for my concentration and the delicate nature of the show. It is however not really regarded as rude, but a natural reaction to comment on your experience with your fellow theatregoer.

I remember the second line from the front being especially loud and for a moment I thought about kindly asking them to leave. It was then that I realised that in that row was a former prostitute who is said to have sold away nine of her children. I decided that perhaps nobody was in more need to hear kind words and see the importance of caring for what you love and being kind to your heart. So o I just kept on with the performance.

It was extremely well received and I was eternally relieved of having now done my first performance in Spanish. I now had experienced performing in Icelandic, English and Spanish. I left the theatre feeling that lack of language knowledge would not be a hindrance to any future performances.

Since the organisers were so resistant to my idea having the people write down a few words I made the assignment easy and now feel like I have a good feeling of how long and demanding such an assignment can be, depending on the audience and circumstances.

The Tango project had the added benefit of being both a fairy tale and a short history of Tango. The audience really seemed to enjoy that combination and so did I.

#### **4. Discussion**

From my PIP 1-5, and the successful production of all of them on various occasions in three different languages, I feel like I have found a way to combine coaching, storytelling and music.

It surprises me that even after writing five of them, I still find it challenging to write and story ideas do not "pop-up" all the time. I foolishly expected these ideas to "pop-up" as soon as I started working on this project.

More projects did not get performed but the idea was exercised in a variety of settings, in a Ghost museum, all girls amusement park and more. I tried to implement the idea of surprise every time I did anything in front of a group of people to develop the sense for what works and what doesn't. For example, when I did a talk on my stay in Argentina at the University I gave roses to all those attended. On another occasion, when I did a talk on the mission in my projects to fellow students I encouraged participation in discussion (something that is often lacking in Icelandic classrooms) by rewarding the brave person with a can of beer.

After PIP 1 I tried to always have a beautiful drink (non-alcoholic) in a beautiful glass ready for members of the audience because I felt that people were more ready to mingle and talk to others with a glass in their hand. This again is something not too common in Icelandic society and I was proud to be able to create an environment where people felt safe to relate to strangers. I did not manage to continue with this tradition in other projects but I hope to continue with it in future projects to enhance the overall experience for the audience.

I documented all of these projects with photographs and video and last but not least with a stack of memos on scriptwriting, music performance, acting and band directing. They serve as a precious reminder of what I like about my performance skills and communication and give me constant ideas and motivation to do better.

## Challenges

There are various challenges to each new production:

### Musicians

The nature of the shows is very delicate. For a successful production it is important to treat it like it is, small and fragile. That everybody involved believes that they have a purpose and that the purpose can have an important impact.

I found it difficult to really involve fellow musicians and have them approach the performance in the same way as I did.

The concept/look is a theatre world on a concert stage - or any stage/corner/part of a room. To create a new world on stage with no or almost no set design means that details are important. Do the musicians need to read everything from paper or do they have a chance to memorise their score? Do they sit or can they stand during the performance? Are they messy with their sheet music? Can they understand that the way they are organised on the stage is important to the overall look?

I find it extremely important that musicians are on stage with me and that the audience can watch them during the performance. To observe their amazing craft and artistry, the way they live the music. For this to be an asset to the show and not a distraction musicians must be involved and focused on the performance at all time. It is the same as in any theatre. If no actor pays attention to what is going on, the audience doesn't perceive its importance either. I was glad to find theatre pioneer Peter Brooks agree with me.

*“I can take an empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across his empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all I need for an act of theatre to be engaged”*

*(Peter Brooks, 1995, p.5).*

Having worked with various instrumentalists in two countries I found that I could not successfully communicate the importance of this to them. However, the ones that worked with me for more than one performance quickly learned and gained respect for the project.

It would be good for me to find a better way to communicate this. On an artistic level it would make for a better show. On a practical level the cost of taking these shows to other countries/locations could be dramatically reduced by working with local musicians and could deepen my experience of the performance.

### **Reaching a wider audience**

In a world of Youtube, Spotify and other online entertainment I could not help but speculate on online or mass distribution paths that relate to my message. To feel like an established artist I felt like I had to release something, have something well recorded, something to aim for and something to grow.

Keeping in mind that I found most versions of recorded staged theatre/opera uninteresting and did not want to go as far as to make a movie from the stories, I wondered considered my options. Would it be interesting to release as a whole soundtrack? In a LP form, but divided into stories with music? Should I just aim for the music and leave the story for live performances only?

I don't have an answer to that question yet. PIP 5, the Tango project in Spain, was recorded on video. I am very interested in the type of energy that can only be found when performing in front of an audience so I was excited to see the results. I was then disappointed that because the show was performed in front of a live audience, the camera had limited a space to move in order to get the best shot. access to choose an angle. I would be interested to have this recorded again with "un-restricted access" and focus only/mostly on my face. Thereby, playing on the old tradition of storytellers that only have their face and voice to communicate a whole dream world.

## **Being vulnerable**

During my experience in the NAIP Master of Music I sometimes felt slightly afraid to continue with the project. I am sure I am not the only one to have these types of feelings. In a world where appearance, speed, big and loud is so important, my small, quiet, feminine project sometimes seemed of little relevance. I remembered experiences from school and my siblings where I was mocked for being corny (mawkishly sentimental) and weak, whereas I understood empathetic and kind.

I remember this perhaps most clearly from the time I performed PIP 1, story with Icelandic folk music, in front of a sales team from a large corporation in Iceland. A whole department was invited to a "Surprise Saturday" evening. I knew that the department's demographics were fairly well distributed; age and gender wise but I did not know who would attend. The sales team were invited to arrive at a given place at 6 pm and told to be punctual. The night came and to my surprise I found that the audience ended up being only male in the age 25-35. They had obviously thought that they had been invited to a night of heavy drinking and not at all an evening of introspection and future planning. It was very early on in my "NAIP Master of Music journey" and I felt like cancelling the whole thing. Even half way through the show I thought to myself "I really should just pack my stuff and leave" because I didn't feel like I was connecting well enough with the audience. It helped me then to draw on previous experiences and the great feedback I had received. My mantra, while performing the show, was: "trust your tools, trust your tools". I had made the tools, proven them to be affective for me and now I just needed to trust them. After the show and the assignments given at the end of the show I mingled with the group that continued the evening at an organised party. You cannot imagine my surprise when one after other the "boys" from the audience came to talk to me and thank me for the show: "I was trying so hard not to cry", "I had no idea what this was all about when it started, but I loved it", "your voice is amazing". All a wonderful verification of a successfully completed project and a great motivator to continue the work.

This experience has helped me tremendously. It taught me once again that a good, warm, honest message is not reserved only for the sentimental but for everyone. That we all have so much more in common than we sometimes want to admit. The the Six Human needs that I learned about and spoke about earlier on, really are for all humans.

Later, when feeling awkward about a project, I often recall this evening and continue working with a smile.

### **Female Tango singer**

This is perhaps not a serious challenge but because it has manifested so often I find it important to touch on.

I looked for three months in Argentina for a role model. I looked for a good, relatively young, female singer that really cared for Tango. Many-concerts-attended-and-many-CD's-bought-later I found only one in that time that I could really look up to. I really felt like there was room for me and my voice within the genre.

It is really strange the ownership that is connected to the Argentinian Tango. Musicians and singers from all over the world perform the works of Beethoven and Bellini without their origins being questioned. However, when in Spain I was telling people about my Tango singing I was really surprised to see the various, almost hostile, response: "but you are not Argentinian", "but you are a woman", "but you are too young".

After listening to comments on my age, gender and origin it was important for me to have been in Argentina, have a good knowledge of the roots and have experienced standing ovation on various occasions after performing for locals.

My Argentinian neighbour here in Spain also helped me and said "the thing is Svana: you just sing it better the most Argentinians". True or not, it felt like a permission to continue on the same path.

## Hesitations

My feeling is that there is a trend in the world today that encourages people to be more optimistic, as opposed to the older message which was to be realistic. You can see it in the high number of life-coaches, advertisement, small messages on Facebook, self-esteem courses and motivation events. The message is “follow your dreams!”, “do what the heart tells you”, etc. I personally love the content and the intention and I am so grateful for this change of currents. Freedom, happiness, are feelings that I believe that every human being should be blessed with. However with the ever increasing marketing of the concept I sometimes wonder if we are on the right track or if we are just using this strategy to channel or manipulate people into a certain direction.

I was at an art festival in Madrid, Arco, where a painting read “The way to really enslave people is to promise them total freedom”. Unfortunately I did not pay attention to the painters name but the quote lingered with me. I started connecting it to this positive-movement and wondered: Is this just another way of brainwashing people? Is this really just a whole new “Arbeit macht frei?” A slogan which in German means “Work will set you free”. Used by Nazis in concentration camps during the second world war to increase productivity among the captured prisoners. (Otto Friedrich, 1994).

What I mean by connecting these two phrases is: Just like the “Arbeit macht frei” was a worthless promise of a prisoner obtaining his freedom because of his hard work the marketing of happiness is also an empty promise delivered by so many big corporations. My anger at the misuse of this powerful message perhaps peaked when I saw a pencil case of a seven year old, using this message to sell toys.

It said:

*Be your self,  
Be unique,  
Be a Monster.*

(Diversal, 2014).



So according to this advertisement/product, to be yourself and unique is to be a character in a story, or a plastic doll related to, or offspring of i.e. Dracula, Frankenstein or a werewolf.

A number of other bigger companies have used this sentence “be yourself” in their advertising with a similar promise, i.e. Bud Light beer, the supermarket chain Target and Audi cars.

It is not my intention here to complain about current market trends and marketing power, but it has played on my mind. In my opinion, every time you reach out to a human soul and touch it, you have a great responsibility. My objective is to do good and make sure that my shows, my message, is in no way manipulating but a real, true, caring message, full of integrity.

### **Inspiration and future projects**

It has been extremely rewarding working on this project. The challenges of every human are all unique, but still so alike.

After taking the time to dedicate myself to this master’s degree I already have a number of projects waiting to be completed. A new Tango show in Norway with original content, a further exploration of PIP 1-5 in new markets and dozens of stories that are waiting to be connected, written and produced.

I am enjoying a period of concerts where no storytelling is required, organised by others, but I look forward to giving my attention once again to the world of storytelling.

## **Personal development story - Singing**

When I attended the NAIP Master of Music audition I sang *Bíum Bíum Bambaló, Gracias a la vida* or something similar. I love these songs but I was forced to sing them. I had turned my back on the classical mezzo-soprano style. I believed I had a good voice, but looking back I had reduced my range and taste to just a few notes.

I have now written five plays that I have performed and produced myself in two countries in three languages. I have found a way to combine my need to sing, to tell stories and to do good in the world. I've had great feedback from members of the audience who have enjoyed my method.

I have dug into the world of Granados and Goya, spent months in Argentina and sung tango well enough to give the Argentinians goose bumps. I managed to find a new voice outside of the classical world, something I had been struggling with for a few years.

No less important, I managed to embrace my "inner classical singer", turn my voice up a register and am now a soprano. I have been taking lessons from the amazing Argentinian mezzo-soprano, Alicia Nafé, who has had a great career. Recently I sang: *Ave María* by Schubert, *Stabat Mater* by Vivaldi, *Lascia chio pianga* by Händel and *Panis Angelicus* by César Franck, all with a forty piece orchestra. I have been on this journey to find what I am capable of and not least to see if I can find myself a role within the arts.

I now feel like an accomplished singer with multiple tools to express myself. The technique of the classical singer, the story and expression of the tango singer and the creativity of the playwright. I am extremely grateful for my journey.

## Resources

Binns, Corey. (November 20, 2006). *Why Music Gives Us the Chills*. Retrieved from <http://www.livescience.com/1139-music-chills.html>.

Brooks, Peter. (1995). *The Open Door. Thoughts on acting and theatre*. New York: Theatre Communications Group.

Carnickle, Sharon Marie. (2009). *Stanislavsky in Focus, 2nd edition*. New York: Routledge Theatre Classics.

Diversal. Retrived March 3, 2014, from <http://www.diversal.co.uk/store-school-supplies/stationery/monster-high/safta/big-double-filled-pencil-case-55-pieces-monster-high-100001261-596-96-31-31.html>

Friedrich, Otto (August 1994). *The Kingdom of Auschwitz*. Harper Perennial.

International Coach Federation. *About ICF*. Retrived March 5, 2014, from <http://www.coachfederation.org/about/ethics.aspx?ItemNumber=n854&navItemNumber=634>

Magnason, Andri Snær. (January 30, 2014). *Orð um bækur*, Jórunn Sigurðardóttir. [Radio show]. Retrived February 10, 2014, from [www.ruv.is/ordumbækur](http://www.ruv.is/ordumbækur)

Monster High. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved March 1, 2014, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monster\\_high](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monster_high)

Riva, Douglas. (February 25, 2005). *Apuntes Para Mis Obras : Granados's Most Personal Manuscript and What It Reveals*. [Diagonal - Journal of the Center for Iberian and Latin American Music]. Retrieved from <http://www.cilam.ucr.edu/diagonal/issues/2005/riva.html>

Robbins, Anthony. (n.d.). *Six Basic Human Needs*. Retrieved March 10, 2014, from <http://training.tonyrobbins.com/the-6-human-needs-why-we-do-what-we-do/>

Robbins, Anthony. (January 1, 1996). *Personal Power II (The Driving Force: Six Human Needs, Volume 12)*. [Audio CD]. Robbins Research International.

Roose-Evans, James. (October 11, 1996). *Experimental Theatre: From Stanislavsky to Peter Brook*. New York: Routledge.

Statistics Iceland (2013). *Religious organisations*. Retrieved January 10, 2014, from <http://hagstofa.is/?PageID=2593&src=https://rannsokn.hagstofa.is/pxis/Dialog/varval.asp?ma=MAN10001%26ti=Mannfj%F6ldi+eftir+tr%FAf%E91%F6gum+1998%2D2013%26path=../Database/mannfjoldi/Trufelog/%26lang=3%26units=Fj%F6ldi>

Van Riper, A. Bowdoin. (February 8, 2011). *Learning from Mickey, Donald and Walt: Essays on Disney's Edutainment Films* [Google eBook]. Retrieved March 8, 2014, from [http://books.google.es/books?id=k1BDUjmppuC&dq=true+life+adventure+series+disney+edutainment&source=gbs\\_navlinks\\_s](http://books.google.es/books?id=k1BDUjmppuC&dq=true+life+adventure+series+disney+edutainment&source=gbs_navlinks_s)

## **Learning Outcomes**

### **Skills in Artistic Expression**

*1.1... be able to create, realise and express unambiguously to specialist and non-specialist audiences their own artistic concepts as a high-level performer, composer and/or leader, emerging as a well developed musical personality.*

Having produced five shows, and “sold” the new concept I continue to sell myself the idea for this time has been wonderful. In finding venues, collaborators, musicians and an audience I have talked about my creation, with respect, uncountable times. Each time I told a person that my project was interesting for a given reason; I told myself as well and became my own ally. I could wish for nothing more but to continue with that faith in myself and my projects.

It was a wonderful experience writing this essay and gathering work in a portfolio. What a great opportunity to actually think things through and practice innovative ways of conveying the message. I was pleasantly surprised how many resources actually agreed with my method and that the initial hunch could actually be supported.

### **Creative and Transformative Skills**

*2.1... demonstrate considerable capacity in creating and developing original musical material inspired by people, context and purpose.*

I can say with hand on heart that every single one of my projects, PIP 1-5 has had one purpose, to serve the audience with the available means. To create with what is available instead of what could be wanted for. Their subject was chosen to meet a need detected in the environment and people around me.

To create something in context with purpose was perhaps never as evident as when in class we created the tale of forgotten Yule Lads, Iceland's equivalent of Santa Claus. It was to be performed for disabled children right before Christmas. It was a simple story, drawn on recorded data for up to one hundred Yule Lads (in modern day Iceland they have currently been narrowed down to 13). I will never forget, after finishing the performance, when I got a chance to exchange words with one of the mothers. A boy, around 5 years old, lay in his bed. He had no control over his movements and was aided by many machines by his bed that helped with breath and nourishment. You could not see that he was stimulated by his environment at all. However his mother said "Thank you for your performance, Tommy had a great time!". She later told me that she could tell because she saw his heart rate rise on the machines.

*2.2... be able to re-create and transform repertoire building upon experience with representative works in their area and a variety of other musical styles and genres.*

Icelandic folk songs, Icelandic ballads, Spanish classic, Tango singing and classical soprano repertoire have been my inspiration in this Master's degree. I have gained access to all of these ways of communicating and they have been a source of energy and enjoyment.

I have been really pleased how wonderfully unexpected experiences have sent me on longer quests for music. A short Tango course sent me to study singing in Argentina. By moving to Spain I got to know an amazing classical singer who has inspired me to work hard on my classical technique. Then a random chat on Facebook led me to an exciting series of concerts in classical style with a forty piece orchestra.

I feel that after completing this study and after gaining the self-confidence that automatically developed along the way, I am more willing than ever to venture into new styles and take on new challenges, whereas before I was trying hard to do "my own thing".

## **Performance Skills**

*3.1... be able to project their musical ideas fluently, sensitively and with confidence in a variety of performance settings and for a variety of audiences using a wide range of musical material.*

I believe that of all the learning outcomes, this would be the one skill that has developed the most. I compare myself to the person that applied for the Master originally and so much has happened. I have added another octave to my range. I have immersed myself into the expressive Tango and the technically demanding world of classical singing. I have managed to merge the two and have access to both instruments on demand. I have experienced how to convey emotion and how to tell a story in three languages to different groups. I have seen tears in the eyes of my audience. Strangely enough, that is often how I measure the success of my performance.

## **Improvisation Skills**

*4.1... be able to improvise with fluency responding appropriately to the context.*

We had an intensive course in improvisation for a few days in a church with good acoustics. It was good to come together with no other agenda than to create sounds.

My project does not rely heavily up on improvisations skills within the music, but perhaps within text. In a live performance you have to respond quickly to any mishaps and any change.

I remember being in the middle of a performance, my character spoke these words in Icelandic “*hún skaut honum ref fyrir rass*”. The phrase can literally be translated into “and she shot him a fox for an ass”. Does it mean to win or to exceed somebody in a game?. A girl in the audience could not help herself (was one of two kids in the group)



and blurted out “ASS FOX?” and got everybody's attention and laughter instead. I was able to swiftly move in and out of character and explain the phrase without harming the performance. Early on in that same performance I saw a member of the audience look confused when I instructed the audience to paint a picture. I realised that the audience member did not understand Icelandic so I took a minute to jump between languages and explain my monolog in a few sentences in English so that they could at least enjoy some of the experience.

I participated in course in a small town in Iceland called Ísafjörður. We worked with students to create a piece of music as we had done earlier in Skálholt. It was both challenging and enjoyable to watch the students to create improvised music and text. We observed them and this inspired us to be creative. Both parties benefitted greatly from this experience.

## **Ensemble Skills**

*5.1...be able to take an accompanying/supporting role within ensemble activities.*

I didn't get a chance to do much of this (5.1) during NAIP. However as a choir singer since the age of 8 I am quite used to working in a group whose main aim is to sound as one voice.

It was interesting for me to work as a writer for a group/performance that I was not linked to at all in any other way than being the writer. I compromised my original ideas according to their wishes and yet, defended other artistic ideas. It was a new ground for me, debating artistic choices and coming up with an acceptable solution for everyone.

In the Christmas show we performed, (referred to in 2.1) as part of a team. Together we formed an idea and delegated different parts of the idea to all members of the group. In Ísafjörður and Skálholt we collectively performed a piece of music, written by the group.

*5.2...be able to take a leadership role within ensemble activities.*

I had to lead in all my music. This was particularly obvious in the Icelandic Tango project. Argentinian Tango is not a well-known genre in Iceland. Even though all musicians were familiar with it (some had studied it) it was new to everyone. Everyone looked to find ways to interpret it on their instrument and search for a harmonious and desirable sound at the same time. We decided that we would work together on arrangement in practice so when it came to rehearsals I was glad that I had a really good idea of the sound I was looking for and learned a lot on how to communicate that in the two week rehearsal period.

## **Workshop Skills**

*6.1... be able to facilitate learning in formal and non-formal settings*

After my experience in Argentina I was asked to cover the music part of a Tango course for the singers in the University. A colleague taught the Tango choreography. I was happy to given the assignment, but understanding of the lyrics of Tango is so important to be able to make sense of it. Not one of the students spoke Spanish, so I didn't know what to do in such a short time. I decided to try to teach them the freedom in Tango, but when singing Tango, there is really only one rule. You can't be in time with the band! This is a challenge for most classical singers. The exercise went from the students going "oh no I can never do this" into a good relaxed attitude where they could see the the possibilities of a song. It was a great experience and I learned a fair amount during this period.

All of my projects end with the audience participating in an assignment to do with themselves. I have led these assignments encouraging people to brainstorm and take

action. I assume that extending this part of my projects will probably be my success factor when I start to commercialise the idea where I live in Spain.

Experience in Ísafjörður and Skálholt also gave me a great insight into the valuable tool that is ‘workshops’.

*6.2... be able to participate and collaborate effectively within music making environments in a variety of settings.*

My projects were performed in a number of different places and atmospheres, with a band from 2 to 35 members. I was privileged to have been a part of them all.

*6.3.... be able to apply appropriate creative workshop skills when interacting with a particular audience.*

I draw attention to 6.1 again for this point. It was really interesting to need to decide “what really is my message?” and “what is the most important one?”. In the workshop in the university I communicated with singers on different styles of singing.

In my last performance of the Tango show, PIP 5, I knew that I was dealing with an audience that was most likely not used to expressing their hopes and dreams on paper or in person. Therefore I made the exercise short and to the point. This was completely different from my first audience for example, that were all artsy types used to all kinds of surprises.

The group of musicians I performed with in Spain and the group I performed with in Iceland were completely different. In the Icelandic group everyone was mostly new to Tango but for the Spanish group it was their most performed genre. In the Icelandic project I was the know-it-all and in the Spanish one, I was the newcomer. It meant less control and more trust on their musical intuition.

## Technical Skills

*7.1... be able to continuously renew and develop skills such as rehearsing, practising, interpreting and reading in order to support their ability to realise and express artistic concepts of their own and other's.*

In my thesis I discuss how, when I registered for this Master's degree I had turned my back on using classical music as a part of my repertoire. I had mainly dedicated myself to folk music and really narrowed my vocal range into something very small. I travelled to Argentina and found a new way of singing, which embraced my passion for storytelling, expression and freedom. It was a great creative outlet for me. I spent some time there but when I moved to Spain I met a new teacher that completely opened my eyes again to the possibilities of classical music for my voice. With her I learned to sing again, to correct my bad use of the jaw and improve my respiration. All of a sudden, I was not a mezzo-soprano but a soprano with a great range. I then had the opportunity to sing with an orchestra on various occasions and in preparing that program I improved dramatically and managed to deliver a performance I was really proud of. I feel that now I have access to three instruments that have all improved dramatically throughout this study period.

In creating new projects my independence has been greatly enforced. I had a hunch, an idea, at the beginning of the course and now I have confirmed that idea a number of times with performance and reading relevant material. Before I always needed the approval of someone before sharing my ideas with the world but now I feel confident that if I like the idea, there must be at least someone out there that could enjoy it too. That makes creating such a more enjoyable process and a more daring one too.

Working as a soloist with an orchestra of 35 instrumentalists these last few months has helped me incredibly. I am proud of my professionalism and the good attitude that I bring to the table. I am confident enough to have energy to share the joy with my co-workers

and embrace the journey that I am on. Yes, some notes could definitely be better, but at least they are better today than yesterday.

I have been successful many times with music and storytelling that I feel confident to start creating my own content. I'm still shy about it, but I quote:

*"I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear."*

*~ Nelson Mandela.*

I agree, it is easy to quote Mandela and perhaps even disrespectful to connect his battle with my own but it still reflects my conclusion. It is my belief that we change the world, little by little with all the good and bad we put into it.

I mentioned earlier on in the thesis that when I started out I thought that meaningful, interesting, original stories would almost jump at me, just when I would open my eyes to them. This was not the case and I was slightly disappointed. I started to take notes, scribble, compose and write without simultaneously judging. Small things, in no special order or correlation. When I started assembling my work for the portfolio and reading over these I was really surprised to find a great quantity of material that I really liked and I am confident I can create a few stories. I am glad to have implemented this into my lifestyle. My next goal is to take it up a notch and make a habit of writing something every day for the same purpose.

### **Knowledge and Understanding of Repertoire and Musical Materials**

*8.1... through self-directed study, research and practice, have acquired a comprehensive knowledge of relevant repertoire and be able to apply their knowledge about the common elements and organisational patterns of music to express artistic concepts of their own and other's.*

I refer to 7.1 for some insight into this.

I have accessed very different material during my study. Classical, Argentinian Tango, traditional Spanish music and Icelandic ballads and folk music. I feel like I can navigate different styles effectively and with different expression. Furthermore I feel confident to “make them my own” and play with different possibilities of performance.

### **Knowledge and Understanding of Context**

*9.1... be able to seek and apply knowledge from other fields of research.*

Much research is completed for all of my projects. Most of the research is more for inspirational purposes than for actual data. For PIP1 I read about Vikings, land settlers and traditions. PIP 4 was more “fact-focused” and I read everything that I could find on Enrique Granados and Goya and their work, life and muses. In this project it translated directly into text performed in the PIP4.

*9.2... possess knowledge of musical styles and their associated performing traditions in order to be able to develop, present and demonstrate programmes that are coherent and suitable to the performing context(s).*

I refer to 9.1 for more insight into this. In PIP 1-5 I treated context with much respect and by mixing music and story I believe I managed to get people to listen to music that they perhaps knew well in a different way.

*9.3... have a profound understanding of the interrelationship between their theoretical and practical studies and should have a sense of how to use this knowledge to strengthen their own artistic development.*

The wonderful thing about this Thesis is that it is all hands-on practical study and theoretical knowledge gets put to work instantly. I've had an amazing opportunity to develop artistically during this study period and I really think that nothing will change in the way I worked during my study and how I will work when I graduate from it. I look forward to continuing to developing projects, putting them into action and creating heartfelt moments for a new audience.

## **Independence**

*10.1... have become fully autonomous learners, able to integrate knowledge and to undertake in an organised manner tasks that may be*  
*o extended and complex,*  
*o applied in new or unfamiliar contexts,*  
*o based upon incomplete or limited information.*

If there is anything this course teaches you, it is independence. You need to have a really clear idea of what it is you want, how you want to approach it and how you want to work with the material.

My most extended research was done during the Granados program. I learned all I could about his life and found joy in connecting it to the life of Goya. In Argentina I had no leads on how to integrate into the small world of Tango or how to connect myself but still I managed to work with four excellent coaches each of whom hold a very important place within the world of Tango in Buenos Aires. I learned so much in the time I was there.

Since I have not dedicated myself to the work of solo concerts in concert halls, most aspects of my productions are usually unfamiliar and information limited. It is tough to go on that journey every time alone but it makes the feeling of success even sweeter when it is all over.

## **Psychological Understanding**

*11.1... be able to demonstrate self-awareness in a variety of situations, and be self-confident and experienced in working with various target groups from different backgrounds.*

This was a part of the study that I did not really anticipate. When entering NAIP my aim was to test the tools I had developed and see if they could be used in new projects. In the Thesis I explain how when I was expecting an ‘easy’ audience of all ages and both sexes I was suddenly faced with guys in the age 25 to 35, all ready to experience a night of hard drinking and not at all a night of introversion, reflection and folk music (as in PIP 1). My mantra throughout that show was “trust the tools, trust the tools” and when I’ve experienced ~~had~~ a challenging situation on stage since, I have leaned on that experience. Trust your preparation, trust your tools. It has been extremely rewarding.

I also point to 7.1 where I discuss a how honoured I was to work with a large orchestra this spring. I received extremely positive feedback on my ~~compliments~~ compliments-regarding professional behaviour, attitude and voice. I aspire to be able to extend these compliment to all of my future commitments.

## **Critical awareness**

*12.1... be able to make reflexive decisions based upon their critical responses, continuously renewing and developing their personal skills and knowledge within their profession.*

Perhaps the best example of this is the Tango course I took. There life really handed me a tool that I knew I had to master and I was advised by more experienced musicians to do so. A three day introduction turned into a semester abroad with my husband and six month old daughter.



However, whenever I have mentally decided to no longer pursue my classical journey I have always had a call from a former teacher or somehow been directed into it again. This time it was the orchestra that challenged me with music I could not possibly perform when I was handed the sheet music but today I sing with confidence and joy. I am grateful for the guides that lead me down my path, in whatever form they manifest.

### **Communication and project management skills**

*13.I... have become confident and experienced in their communication and social skills, including the ability to*

- o initiate and work with others on joint projects or activities,*
- o show skills in leadership, teamwork, negotiations and organisation,*
- o integrate with other individuals in a variety of cultural contexts,*
- o demonstrate their command of language (written or spoken),*
- o present complex work in accessible form,*
- o interact with and respond to a variety of audiences*

The first point in this list was my biggest challenge before this Masters degree. I could not imagine that I had anything interesting to offer musicians and therefore could not imagine they would work with me, particularly since I could offer little financial incentive in return. I will never forget my surprise when the first musician said yes to my offer of collaboration on the first PIP. Sometime after that I had another project. When I had asked the first person, all of a sudden somehow I had a band of five, with excellent musicians on each instrument, all ready to collaborate, determined to do excellent work and enjoy the experience. That has been a great experience to fear and then to conquer.

I have performed my projects in three languages so I've really had the opportunity to integrate with other individuals in a variety of cultural contexts. It has been a great pleasure to find out that people seem to respond in a similar way to my projects, despite their different backgrounds.

*13.2 ... be able to apply, using project management techniques, their knowledge, artistic understanding and problem solving abilities in unfamiliar and/or multidisciplinary contexts.*

I participated in a useful course on project management in our first term. I was in no way new to the concept since my final paper from my B.Sc. Business Degree was research into the use of project management within the creative industries in Iceland. I have worked as a project manager since then with the exception of two years as a stage director in the West End. I was therefore really surprised of the quality of the project management teaching on our course in Iceland. I gained access to a few new tools and a new refreshed, more human, approach to project management. I had successfully used the tools of project management for years in a creative environment so I left this course even more eager to manage well for a better output. The graphical part of project management, the way a Gantt chart can instantly show people the importance of their deadlines and how printed excel charts with bottom-lines explained to all participants can make even people with no sense for numbers get on board and find creative ways to complete a project.

