

Behind the magic

Investigating the role of the music producer

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Vår 2019

Abstract

This thesis is a qualitative interview study of the function of the studio producer in popular music. I seek to navigate through the different aspects of being a studio producer through a discussion of the qualities needed when working with a band. In order to create a three-dimensional presentation of the work of a producer, both the perspective of the band and of the producer has been accounted for in in-depth interviews. The thesis leans on research from the popular music studies field and seeks to be an addition to the research about popular music producers who have often been overlooked or vaguely defined at best. The study is focused on the current environment of popular music, which includes changing structures in the music industry in a new economy. Through the research it is noticed how an integral part of the producer's job is creating relations with the band he works with. This is done by being a facilitator for performance and having the skill to interpret the band both on a personal level and musically. It is shown how the producer must create a framework for creativity in the studio, by establishing friendly relations and masking inequalities between them.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank the University for letting me finish this thesis on my own time. As a part of this Master program I have been able to study abroad, which I am very grateful for. Thank you very much Yngvar Kjus, for excellent guidance and support. My meetings with you have been very inspiring and informative. Seeing this process through was reliant on the patience and understanding of my friends and family. It has been a very rewarding process, and I appreciate all the support I have received, be it either studying tips or a reinforcing hug.

I want to thank the interviewees who took time out of their schedule to help make this thesis happen with the contribution of clever insight, self-reflection and generosity.

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Introduction

Music in itself is an art form that relies on cooperation. Music is played together, created together and enjoyed in togetherness. (Turino, 2008, p.1) Although the potential beauty of music is undeniable it does not exist in a vacuum, outside of the real tangible world. Music is in the highest degree part of an industry, and a changing one at that. The digitalization of music production and consumption is continuing to change the many facets of music; its content, its distribution, its value. As a musician myself, I have always been fascinated with how music creation is affected by its context. Music is human, and humans have agendas. The dichotomy between creative values and economical values has been a way to describe and outline the values that influence the creation of music. In this study I wanted to investigate how these values are negotiated between musicians and producers, as an excerpt of what is happening in the music industry today.

There is one job description in the world of popular music production that has been more ambiguous than any other (Askerøi, Viervoll, 2017, p.233) and it has traditionally been the job that manages both the creative and economical aspect of music production. The music producer is in many ways a key actor in the music industry, and like the other positions in the music industry, the producer has a job that is prone to change and the need to adapt to the current of the times. There have been many incarnations of the producers role, from the tape-rolling jazz producers, to the superstar auteurs like Phil Spector, or the hip hop producer and performer moguls. These different capes the producers have taken on have been coloured by the technological advancements, social contexts and genre norms of their time. Patrick Wikstrøm argues that the evolution of the producer's role has been "enabled or perhaps determined by various technological advancements" (Wikstrøm, 2013, p.126). My approach to study the producer's role is not necessarily technologically related, but the technological reality and development of the music industry is an important backdrop and a vital context to have in mind when studying the producer's role in production. The producer has also been one of the most ambiguous and undefined positions in the music industry, and the current discourse about the producer does not properly uncover what actually goes on in the studio. This leads to my main thesis question: what is the job of the studio producer?

This question can encapsulate all the different tasks and challenges that are involved with being a producer. It was important for me to be able to unite the symbolic aspects of music production as well as the pragmatic nature of the work. By asking this question it opens for a discussion about what the producers function is inside the studio, and how these two realms of creativity and economy are at play constantly. This thesis question allows for the importance of detail to shine through. By asking what the producer's job is without any presumptions, and with a curious naivety, allows for a fresh take on the subject. What previously might have been overlooked, taken for granted in the studio or side-lined in the relationship with the band and the producer, can be of equal importance to former knowledge.

This question allows the material to dictate the direction and the topics of the research, rather than imposing an idea about what I would like to find out. My hypothesis was based on the struggle between creative and economical values, and the thesis question should be open enough to let these topics arise naturally, if they are as prominent as I believe them to be. Hesmondhalgh claims it is one of the fundamental issues in cultural industries.

At the heart of cultural production is the question of the relationships between commerce and creativity, or between the drive to make profit and those other values which also motivate production: the quest to make interesting, intriguing, pleasurable, beautiful, informative, enlightening products. (Hesmondhalgh ,2013, p.229)

The current state of affairs

The model for payment and financial orders for producers in Norway has in recent years been based upon revenue accumulated from physical or digital sales. The producer receives a percentage of the sales as a royalty, in addition to an honorary payment. The standard in Norway is that the producer is hired by the record company to work with the artist (Dalchow, 2013, p.121) and receive a combination of honorary payment and royalties from the record company (Eidsvoll-Tøien, I. , Torp, Ø. , Gjems Theie, M. , Molde, A. , Gaustad, T. ,Sommerstad, H. , Espelien, A. , Gran, A-B, 2019, p. 23) . The music business in Norway is relatively small and centralized, especially in the popular music world. The potential for diversification and decentralization in the age of streaming will

have ramifications to how the flow of money is shifting. In USA the responsibility for hiring a producer is left to the artist, with the financial risk also left in the hands of the artist. According to Dalchow it was more common in the past to just receive an honorary payment as a producer, and as the power of the producers increased in the studio, so did their ownership of the material. The model the interviewees in this thesis follow is the mentioned older model: the producer receives an honorary payment, and the band owns the finished product themselves. This is more in line with the American model. It will be interesting if this is a model that is more suited for the modern music economy, and if it will increase in frequency in the future. The transitioning into a digital, streaming based economy creates more self-financed, independent artists, who practice music as entrepreneurs. (Haynes, Marshall 2017, p.2). A consequence is a redistribution of power from the major labels firm hand to the artists. This study will therefor investigate the dynamics between a producer and band that practices this model, which becomes increasingly more common scenario for smaller artists and producers.

As we live in a time where a music studio could be more easily accessed before, or built in a day in someone's living room, it could have had an erasing effect on music producers. Who would need a producer when you can do the same job yourself? According to BI's report on music producers in Norway that is far from the truth, and the revenue of music producers is increasing each year since 2011. There is a slight dip the last year of the study, 2017, but it is too soon to tell what that means (could potentially be 2016 was an abnormally good year). From total revenue of 139 million NOK in 2011, to 178 million NOK in 2017, we see a steady overall increase in the demand for studio producers. (Eidsvoll-Tøien, I. , Torp, Ø. , Gjems Theie, M. , Molde, A. , Gaustad, T. ,Sommerstad, H. , Espelien, A. , Gran, A-B, 2019, p.36) The producer is an integral part of music making, and musicians choose to seek out producers to be a part of the process. This is one of the reasons a study of the producers role is important. It is vital to understand the dynamics in the studio between the artist and the producer, which is a big part in the life world of people working in the music industry. Also it is important to unmask the myths of the producer's role and find out what really happens behind the curtains of music production, especially in a time of big changes in the music industry. To see how these changes are part in creating new structures, new models of

work, new type of relationships within the industry. Great music is not descending from the sky, but is created out of the labour of people, and therefore it is necessary to study the different dynamics between the people in this process.

As much as the producer is a part of the life world for musicians, they are also an entity of their own. In 2015 an organization called "Platearbeiderforeningen" (Union for record makers) was founded. In an excerpt from their website it is proclaimed that there was "a wish and a need to have a voice in a music industry that's continuously changing" (retrieved from <http://www.platearbeiderforeningen.no>). It is a union that is described to front the interests of producers and technicians both within the music industry but also in society more generally, amongst other things such as being a support network and developing skill. It can be argued that 2015 was way overdue for a union like this to be founded. It shows a clear desire for a more well developed and cohesive feeling of identity for the people who work with producing music. Hopefully this research can help gain insight and continue to support the development of a more widespread understanding of studio producers.

To be a producer of music can mean a lot of different things for different people. It is not a title that is protected in any way, and can be defined quite loosely. Different genres have different styles of producing, and different parts of the music industry raise different producers, with different goals and purposes altogether. It is also common practice for producers to be technicians or songwriters on the same projects as well (Bilke) Renowned producer Silvia Massy suggests three types of producers. One is the musician/producer, one is the fan/producer and one is the engineer/producer. (Askerøi, Viervoll, 2017, p.233). If the producer from my research were to be labelled after this division, he would have most in common with the engineer/producer type. However from the interviews conducted he shows a transition from the different types of producing through his career, and also between projects. Through this research I will argue that fluidity and versatility is qualities that are part of shaping what it means to be a producer in 2019.

In this thesis I will focus on one band and one producer who work together. Their experience working with each other and their previous music experience will then

illuminate a rather small segment of a vast music industry. The genre world of the band can be described as a branch of the popular music world, but more on the indie rock side. The producer operates in the indie/pop world, but is flexible with whom he works with, and does so on his own accord. This study will therefore reflect a slightly off mainstream branch of the popular music scene. It goes without saying that there are countless other ways of describing the producer's role than what is done here. Everyone who is working hands on with music positions themselves somehow, either consciously or subconsciously, in regards to creativity and economy. The structural changes in the music industry also affect everyone from the ground up to the big corporations. That's why I believe it will be universal topics deriving from studying this particular constellation of producer and band.

In the next chapter I will discuss the methodology of the research project. It will contain a guide through how the project was developed, a discussion about ethical issues and an overview of what methodological choices that was made to structure the thesis. Further on, the subsequent chapter will introduce the main literature that has been used to shape the perspectives and arguments I present. A brief discussion about the literature and how it relates to my thesis question ensues. In the theory chapter I establish a theoretical foundation based on a comprehensive range of different sources regarding the producers role. Following the theory chapter I will present the findings and discuss the material from the interviews. The analysis chapter consists of four subchapters, each dedicated to a vital function in the producers role. I will show how material from the interviews relates to relevant literature about the same topics. Eventually there will be a conclusion with closing remarks where I will discuss the overarching ideas, and try to point an arrow forward to what might come after this thesis in the field of researching producers in music.

Method

This research project is inseparable from its method, and the type of information I am after would be difficult to obtain in other ways. This is a qualitative interview study of the producer's role, with intentions of illuminating problems with creativity and economy. The main focus in conducting the study is to understand the role of the producer through the context of their work with the band. The semi structured qualitative interview is the method that allows for descriptive information to flourish, and for reflections, thoughts and meanings to arise through conversation. Steinar Kvale defines the intent of interviewing as "with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale, 2007, p.8) The term "life world" is key to understanding the type of direction I am approaching the project. In having a methodological focus point on obtaining insight in the life world of the producers and colleagues, I think the themes of creativity and economy will arise as they are strongly entwined with the practice of producing popular music and hence a part of the lived experience of musicians.

When developing a project and ending at a preferred method, many choices are made along the way. One of these choices is whether to aim for knowledge through deep or broad enquiry. Both directions have valuable information to provide, but a crossover is difficult to obtain in the same project. The methodological choice therefor leaves some viewpoints unexplored, but that is the inevitable result of making a decision. Kvale argues that the strength of an in depth interview lies the descriptive and the specific. (Kvale, 2007, p.12) A descriptive focus allows for nuance in the way a phenomenon is portrayed and therefor allowing diversity and variation to give insight rather than having fixed categorizations. Being specific can in this context mean to describe a specific situation or an event in detail. This provides the interviewer with a concrete fundament to derive meaning from, based on comprehensive accounts of specific incidents. The research project is based upon the notion that grand ideas can be derived from small details.

Selecting informants

The study will have a small selection of informants, as I am studying closely one particular music project and how the producer's role is articulated in this particular

setting. It would be interesting to see how different producers view their work and their role, and could reveal correlated similarities. Such an approach would perhaps create something simulating an overview of the field, but it could just as well lead to several dead ends, engulfing too many topics to find anything substantial at all. Music making is such a personal lived experience, and the purpose should therefore be to honouring that, rather than looking for similarities. According to Kvale the number of informants depends on the purpose of the study. If the number is too small, it is hard to generalize, and if it is too big it is hard to make a penetrating analysis. (Kvale, 2007, p 43) I found that the purpose of my study was best suited with fewer informants and a more in depth study of their relationship. By keeping the selection of interviewees small, and from the same project, it would be easier to get to the core of what the producer's role is in this particular setting. A universal insight would then be derived from the described life world of the participants, rather than drawing lines between statements from people who might not have much in common. Logistically it was more realistic to accomplish this by narrowing the scope, thus seeking clearance in fewer places and with more certainty of being able to plan meetings. This was a way to ensure fewer hindrances on the way. The opportunity to interview the band was an opportunity that came along while I was developing my project, and could therefore provide both direction and cohesion.

Creating interview guide

In order to conduct the interviews in a structured manner I created two different interview guides, one for the band members and one for the producer. The interview guides had to reflect the difference in perspective between the band and the producer. The questions were designed based on a table (Kvale, 2007 p.52) which exemplifies how to transform an overarching thought or research question into a more approachable question for the interviewee. By letting this inspire me I would ensure that the bigger picture and the direction I wanted to steer the conversation in always informed the interview questions. The questions were designed with the intent to allow the interviewees to think and reflect upon their practice. They could also allow for the mundane or everyday topics to arise as they can provide useful insight.

Before conducting the interview according to the interview guide, there would be a brief introduction about who I was and the themes of the thesis. To let the questions speak for themselves and let the interviewees interpret them on their own terms I kept the information presented to a minimum.

A pilot interview was conducted to test the grounds for further research and testing the interview guide in practice. It was found that the questions worked well as a starting point for conversation, but the interesting reflections came to be when associations began and the interviewee could speak freely and describe processes or relations. For the interview to reach that point, it required a tentative ear of me as an interviewer with the ability to have follow-up questions ready. After the pilot interview I reworked the interview guides to include follow up questions. Kvale argues, second questions can hardly be specified in advance, but requires a flexible on-the-spot follow up on the subjects answer, with consideration of the research question (Kvale, 2007, p.65). The follow up questions would be a safety net, and options I could use as taken from a toolbox. The follow up questions was a help to hold the direction of the question clear, avoid misunderstandings and support the overall direction of the interview. The same alertness was still required.

A key part of this project is also letting the interviewee decide what they want to talk about. What experiences rings loud in their world, and the task given before me than is to listen to what they are saying, paying attention and seeking out what is important to them. As this project should make them open up about their thoughts, not their answers to my thoughts (to some extent). This approach of the "Qualified Naivite" (Kvale, 2007, p.12) is where the interviewer exhibits openness to the phenomena, rather than entering the interview with presumptions and preconceived notions of what is important. The follow up questions should therefor support this method.

Ethics

The ethical aspect of an interview study is at the heart of an interview study. The human interactions are an entwined parts of the interview and therefor a part of the outcome of the research. (Kvale, 2007, p. 23). To secure the ethical and moral integrity of the research I took measures concerning how I would present the findings.

The whole project is anonymous. All names and identity markers will be omitted, as they serve no purpose. This way there is no possibility of any interference of the subject's professional life. In line with this I will from now on refer to the different interviewees as band member A (BMA), band member B (BMB) and band member C (BMC). The producer will be referred to as PROD, or as "the producer" depending on the context. To avoid any further Identity markers when other people are mentioned, they will be named after their function or relation to the interviewees. All band members are in the age range of 25 to 30, and the producer is in his 40s. Only the producer practices music as a full time job, although the band expresses a desire to do so, if possible.

The term "producer" is a term that has different significance and meaning depending on the context. Moving forward in this thesis the word producer will always be synonymous with music producer or studio producer.

In the short briefing I did prior to the interviews I gave a verbal overview of the ethical guidelines upholding the project. This included the prerogative to withdraw from the project at any given time (informed consent) (Kvale, 2007, p.27), the interview material would only be listened to by myself and deleted after the completion of the project and no names or identity markers would be used (confidentiality). I asked for permission for them to be directly quoted by text. By establishing a clear perception of these guidelines beforehand, they could enter the project more induced to speak freely without consequence. A verbal introduction was more appropriate than a written document.

I decided not to report the project to NSD. I will not in any way use identity markers in the project, as it is irrelevant for my study. This was decided with in unity with my supervisor. The wait for reporting new projects to NSD was about 3 months and to wait for a clearance would hinder my progress substantially. We decided to look at lit later and reevaluate this concern.

The interpersonal situation of the interview is where knowledge is produced and is constituted in the interaction itself (Kvale, 2007, p.14). To create an atmosphere where they felt excited to talk and self-reflect was a pivotal part in obtaining information. My

integrity as an interviewer therefor relied on making the interviews a positive experience. The best way to achieve this was to match the frequency of the interviewees, uphold certain ease about the conversation and have a friendly inviting attitude. This was supplied by being accommodating and flexible when planning the interviews, and at the same time taking the initiative without seeming too persistent.

The interviewer holds the monopoly over interpretation (Kvale 2007, p.15). The accounts of the interviewees are presented through the interviewers eyes. There is a moral obligation, despite the promise of confidentiality, to interpret, transcribe and translate the interviews on accord to what was said in during the interview. When translating the direct quotations from Norwegian to English, I aimed to stay true to the way it was transmitted, and at the same time obtain the essence of what was said. The oral and the written language are vastly different. When on top of that translating it to a different language, it can easily become clustered. I took the liberty to have a more playful form in the direct quotes, to best portray how it was expressed.

The methodological approach I used to analyse the interviews was mostly concentrated on interpretation of meaning. As language and meaning is interwoven (Kvale, 2007, p.104) it was impossible to not include language and discourse analysis as well. Together language and meaning can unmask subtext that can reveal motivations, agendas and views that are not spoken but eluded too. A more hermeneutic approach to the interview material requires manifestation in literature, and the integrity of the interviewer who was one of two people present during the meeting. In exploring the life world of a music producer and the job they do, this was the most fruitful way to approach the material.

Theoretical foundation

To navigate the field of research in the particular field is crucial to be able to contribute with new information and insight. A varying range of literature, and the specificity they provide construct the approach to theory in this thesis. In order to understand the phenomenon of the producer as best possible, it is helpful to have an overview of the conceptual, overarching thoughts as well as the more tangible and concrete research. The selection of literature will be presented in this chapter in a manner that could be described from broad to narrow. The eclectic nature of the literature sources provides different perspectives, across genre time and fields of research, which is intended to enrich and contextualize the analysis.

Working in a cultural industry

David Hesmondhalgh's book "the Culture industries" is a study of change and continuity in the cultural industries as a whole. He uses examples from different industries to exemplify issues dealing structure, organizing, power relations and a lot more. The theory he provides contributes to illuminate some of the more broad issues in this thesis, without it specifically being about music, but rather the human experience as part of an industry. The music industry is an industry in the fullest sense of the word, and in order to understand the fundamentals it is built on, it is important to look at it from that perspective, as well as a site of creative production.

Hesmondhalgh addresses one of the backdrops of this thesis in the introduction. The relationship between the commercial values and the creative values are not necessarily an opposition that is regressive for the production of culture, and he argues that the dichotomy has been too strongly portrayed. According to Hesmondhalgh the romantic views of creativity as impossible to entwine with pursuit of commerce is wrong. "The creativity/commerce dialectic helps to generate the relative and provisional autonomy that many symbol makers attain. It also adds to the uncertainty and difficulty of the environment in which cultural businesses work." (Hesmondhalgh 2013, p.29) He argues that the dichotomy then shapes the way cultural industries work and also how it's detrimental to understanding the mechanisms and tensions.

Hesmondhalgh uses a division of labor (Hesmondhalgh 2013, p.77) to demonstrate how the hierarchy of cultural industries are organized and structured. Looking at this division of labor with the intent of studying the producer in music raises a few questions. The division is primary creative personnel, technical workers, creative managers, marketing personnel, owners and executives and unskilled workers. By studying the producer in music we see that there can be a tendency for the producer to occupy more than one of these supposedly distinctive categories. Hesmondhalgh claims that there has been “no significant blurring of these functions, even if they interact in different ways” (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p.259). A study of the producer’s job could then serve to identify the accuracy of this statement, and if contradictory, then how does the producer slide between these allegedly rigid categories?

Hesmondhalgh also discusses a topic that is very relevant to the life world of the producer. A look at the working conditions of actors in the culture industry is important to understand their motives and driving forces. One of the characteristics of the cultural industries that also are true for the music industry is that it can be a project based work place, with self-employment and many connections with different network. However this form of work also has its downsides. High uncertainty, and low stability are common denominators that show up in all fields of the cultural industries. Further discussions about this topic include looking at what the reasoning are for entering the cultural industries, and what the rewards can be. To investigate the producers job its is important to factor in the work life, to obtain a full understanding of the picture.

Between the artist and the public

Hennion’s article “An intermediary between production and consumption” is an ambitious article with the intention of applying a scientific method of examination to a cultural phenomenon. The reasoning for this lies in the attempt to bridge a theoretical distance between science and culture, by showing how the “work of mediation, reducing the gap between producer and consumer and hoping by the same movement to reduce another artificial gap, between cultural and STS studies” (Hennion, 1989, p. 402) The key word and the inquiry of his study is mediation.

Hennion's volatile use of the word producer makes for a compelling argument to clarify what a producer actually does in the studio. The point he wants to make is how the study of the intermediary is necessary to study the production of popular music, and thus the intermediary becomes a producer in a more academic sense of the word, an actor of production. He also uses the term producer to describe the job of art directors, and the music producer as well. Interestingly enough it is well argued that a study of the intermediary is necessary to study the production of popular music, and it provides a useful perspective.

His main argument is structured around a set of main questions, which are deliberated about through describing the different parts of the production/consumption cycle. Hennion's description of the process of popular music production contains useful ideas about the producer's role. The first part process of production is what he describes as isolation. This involves shutting out the world in an isolated studio, creating a laboratory. "The isolation of people is as important as the physical isolation: in this vision we are not confronted with an acoustic problem but with the plans of an idealized microcosm of creation. Laboratory is no longer a mere image, its at least an analogy"(Hennion, 1989, p.408) From there on it is the fragmentation and decomposition of the real world that needs to happen. In order for anything to enter the studio it needs to be reduced from being a part of a system in the outside world to a piece that can be used in the studio. "they are taken from a mixed bag of sources: words, sounds, techniques, material, instruments, characteristics, people" (Hennion, 1989, p.410) " The studio does not discriminate, everything will be pried from its original context to be a part of the production. Further its recomposing the matter in a series of trial and error, and partly chance. The producer's role will be to represent the outside world to the singer, and this way starts to infuse the singer with a notion of an audience. This way the leap into the public will be incorporated in the creation process all along, and thus the final stage of releasing the music into the world, wont be a giant leap.

Rather than focusing on Hennion's main argument, that cultural studies should have a more scientific approach, it is much more interesting to look at the theories he uses to justify it. By comparing the music studio to a laboratory we have some hand fast tools to analyse the role of the producer. By positioning the producer as a version of an

audience to the artists, it creates a framework for studying the dynamics between them. The idea of the music studio as a laboratory is a useful analogy to understand the context and setting where popular music is created. The dimension of space is also a part of understanding the relationship between the producer and the artist.

Producer in discourse

Simon Frith's article "The place of the producer in the discourse of rock" is a study of how rock music critics have addressed the producer in the period when rock first emerged in the late 1960's. Although it mainly focuses on a period long gone, its relevancy is surprisingly current and a lot of the findings will be applicable to shed light on this study. Frith reflects upon a statement by Charlie Gillett, which declares the producer should not covet public recognition as well as payment. Frith claims that there is still uncertainty and vagueness regarding how the job of the producer is viewed. "I'm not sure that such attitudes have altogether changed in the 30 years since these words were written. Producers are no longer anonymous but critics are still uneasy about their role and their work is often therefore effectively ignored." (Frith, 2012, p.210).

There are several finds in Frith research that can be useful tools in understanding the producer's role. Firstly there are some presumptions about producers that emerged as part of the discourse about rock. One of them was how the producer represented the standardized and the commercial execution of rock music, as a counterpart to the live expression of rock that was founded on authenticity. The producer of pop music and the producer of rock music then represented a juxtaposition which Frith explains as "an pivotal but paradoxical role: they are central to both what makes good pop good and bad rock bad." (Frith, 2012, p.212) The producer of what then was good rock music was the producer who helped execute the artist vision. Frith compares this ideology to what Michael Jarrett portrays in "the self-effacing producer" but in the context of rock. This ideology helped lay grounds for a change in how the artist and producer were viewed. The shift in rock was now rather than a producer, who pulls the gears, and the artist is the puppet; the artist is in charge and the producer is the invisible aid.

Another interesting point is how the studio becomes a site for developing the characteristic sounds for the rock bands. No longer is the sound developed live, and

recreated in the studio, but in collaboration with the producer. The discourse then evolved to the producer being an invisible member of the band. Bands evolved with the reoccurring producer over time and developed sound and style together as a collaborative creative effort. Another ideology of production was the “keeping the tape rolling” and keeping the band happy ideology. Frith argues that both of these ways of looking at production is actually just that: “ideologies rather than a technical descriptions of what the producer actually did” (Frith, 2012, p.219). This is justified by a claim that the producer has the responsibility for the product after the session is finished. To claim this seems a bit farfetched without any evidence to back it up, and who is responsible for the final product might differ from studio to studio, and project to project. Thus in order to get a well rounded picture of what the producer actually does it is important to look at both ideology and also the technical descriptions of the work.

Frith explains the uncertainty in the discourse of the producer by the duality of rock music production. On one hand the expression is created in the studio with the producer’s presence, and on the other hand the recorded music is used as a template for expansion when the music is being played live in concert. The producer is not then part of the complete creation of rock music, then causing rapture in the understanding of what their role is in rock music.

Development of the producer

In “The music Industry” Patrick Wikstrøm draws lines between the technological developments that happens in the studio, to the changes in the producer’s role. To look at the development of the producer’s function in correlation with technological advancements creates a historical perspective, which is a necessary dimension of understanding the present. The first example is the ability to record multi-track recordings instead of only live recordings. He argues how the “multi-track recorders moved some of the creative work from the studio into the control room and into the hands of the studio engineer and producer”(Wikstrøm, 2013, p. 123) . In this statement the distinction between studio engineer and producer is still blurred, and it also raises questions of what the “creative work” actually includes. This will be discussed later in the thesis by examples. Wikstrøm proposes that the previous distinct and separate tasks

of different actors in the music industry was now thrown into the mix and rearranged to adapt to the new modes of production.

The pioneering work of The Beatles and The Beach Boys was part of shaping how the relationship between producer and musicians could be. The big involvement of the producer almost made the producers a part of the band, and by effect creating new facets of what it meant to be a producer at work. Wikstrøm argues that the digitalization of music also changed the producer's role profoundly. The power to edit digital music laid grounds for a generation of music producers who used singer and performers with star power to be vessels for their work. The collaboration was on the producer's terms, and they were in charge creatively. We see that the relationship between artist and producer go back and forth like the tide. Who is in charge, and on who's terms music is produced. In the digital age there is also a development of star producers in the EDM scene, and producer/performers in the Hip-Hop RnB scene. This eclecticism is also what makes the producer's role so uncertain. It can be many different things at the same time, in different genres, scenes and in different studios.

The backseat producer

Michael Jarrett articulates the concept of the self-effacing producer in detail. His study is an ethnographic report, which introduces several producers, through qualitative interviews. These are all producers with substantial amount of experience, and a star-studded resume. The producers that have been studied work mainly in the field of country and jazz, but their sentiments are generally universal in their account. The topics of the interviews regard more interpersonal relations, than style or aesthetic judgments. The article provide plenty of detailed accounts for the experiences the producers have had with making music, both inside the studio as well as the networking aspect of it. It must also be taken into account that although the article was published in 2012 plenty of the interviewees recollect their previous experience with producing. Although the ethnography is not very currant, the general ideological consensus is still very much applicable today and can give insight to the dynamics between artist and producer.

Jarrett points out “to summon music with presence- music that animates the body and of the signifier and transforms it into a meaningful expression- the producer effaces himself. Otherwise he will become the artist”(Jarrett, 2012, p.129). The excerpts from the article showcase many different views on how and why the producer must take the backseat role. Often as Jarrett points out, it a coherent ethical ideology about record production that emerges rather than aesthetic judgments only.

Hal Willner describes the producer’s role as someone who acts almost like an emotional guide through the recording process. “Joel Dorm taught me to create a framework. You’ll get the best performance from artists, if you make them feel a certain way. Sometimes that’s ever making them uncomfortable” (Jarrett, 2012, p.133). This sentiment is recurring in more statements, although expressed in different nuances. Tony Brown describes the same idea as saying the right things at the right time to make magic moments. He describes his way of working in the studio almost like a atmosphere leader, who makes people play off each others ideas, and make a space where people can get into the zone, while he leads them through the different takes. (Jarrett, 2012, p.134)

A slightly different angle rather than being a guide or a supporter is that of being someone who captures the artist’s essence. Tom Dowd compares the producer’s role to that of a sports photographer. “The artist is the creator and you are just a damn witness” (Jarrett, 2012, p.131) If the producer meddles too much with the artist it is troubling instead of helpful. Blake Mevi’s seconds this attitude by saying “a producer should help artists get their music on tape and stay out of the coloring process as much as possible. It’s the artists music that has to be on tape-not the producers”(Jarrett, 2012, p. 130). These two ways of looking at the producer’s role is not necessarily mutually exclusive, but they provide different perspectives on what the producer’s role is.

To conclude the article Jarred ponders about how the questions “Who makes recorded music?” and “How is recorded music actually made?” would shake some of the foundations the music industry is built upon. As he raises a comparison to the film industry, where the directors is often viewed as an auteur where the producer in music has a relative invisibility (Jarrett, 2012, p.147). As an example to demonstrate how the star-system is so embedded in the ideology of music marketing and distribution, Jarrett

declares that no library-search functions for music producers is available, or a custom at all. Why? Because the demystification of the recording process and a peek behind the scenes of the marketing of a star takes the music industry “ever so slightly in the wrong direction- towards reality” (Jarrett, 2012, p.147). In effect would this mean that a study of the producer’s role is a powerful way to look at what happens behind the veil of record production.

The eclectic nature of the literature sources provides different perspectives, across genre time and fields of research, which is intended to enrich and contextualize the analysis. A keen eye might notice these vast differences in literature and notice that it is sparsely written on the subject matter of the studio producer specifically. The studio producer is often written about as a side note, or a sub chapter, which gives the impression that the function the producer holds, is less of importance. However, it is fruitful to take use of literature that derives from other fields that are linked thematically, such as for example cultural studies.

Analysis

The analysis will be based on the interviews conducted in the period of November and December 2018. The analysis is presented through a categorization of the different topics that were prominent throughout the different interviews. I have been looking for aspects of what it means to be a producer and how the producer and artist relate to each other. Each of these main categorizations will consist of different topics that are elaborated through a look at relevant literature and quotations. In each category I will look for clues as to how the main thesis question is articulated, to look for insight to what the role of the producer, is in a particular popular music setting. I will also look at how (or if) the tug between creative values and economic values are articulated in the different aspects of the producer's role.

When categorizing the different topics it needed to be done with certain fluidity. There are by no means extremely ridged lines between the different categories, but more an expression of where the gravity of importance is most prominent. On several occasions quotes or passages can be nuanced, with subtle differences that makes it hard to pinpoint exactly what category it belongs too. However the point of this analysis is not to compartmentalise the information, but look at the broader strokes, and overarching themes of producing music. These categories were developed in line with what was the most prominent themes throughout the interviews. Recurring statements, similar ideas and shared perceptions studied in the light of the literature created the outline of these categories.

As producers and, I would say to a certain degree, musicians often talk about their practice in more practical terms rather than theoretic terms. (Jarrett, 2012, p.129) My task with this analysis is then to theorise and conceptualize the information obtained through the interviews. Even though the language is more practical, the understanding of the recording process is inherent on a more complex level, which makes my job to concentrate and expand upon this.

The producer as an expert

The first angle I want to investigate is an angle that deals most directly with the pragmatic nature of what it means to be a producer. As I mentioned in the introduction,

to work with a producer is a variable that often ends up being the preferable choice, rather than a necessity. Artists and bands choose to go the route to work with a producer, and the number of producers is expanding. The question is then; what is it the producer's contribution that can add something to the recording process, if it is technologically and practically possible to do the job without one? One of the many answers is expertise.

One of the ways expertise is articulated in the interviews is the utility of the technical knowledge the producer possesses. When asked about what the main job of the producer is, BMA, BMB and BMC stress the fact that one of his main functions is to create optimal sound for the recording. The skill of knowing how to record the different instruments optimally and how the different outcomes of decisions in recording differently, is knowledge the band do not possess themselves, and need the help of the producer for.

BMB: On one hand you have the compositions, and on the other hand you have the technical aspect: is it in tune, is it noise, is the production good. On the technical aspect we lay a lot of our trust in him. That is very much his job. He has got a very good ear for when it is out of tune and stuff like that.

BMB emphasises that the technical aspect is the producer's responsibility, and separates the technical skills of the producer from musical skill. The concept "the production" is expressed as the quality of the sound, as if it is separate from the music itself. An aesthetic evaluation of the final product is a recurring tendency in the interviews. It is deemed very important in regards to working with a producer that the end result is technically satisfactory for the band. The judgement of sound quality explains nothing about how the process is, or how the recording experience was. However it does say a lot about the importance of technical skill in recording and managing a studio including its equipment. A similar sentiment is shared with fellow band member.

I: Could you tell me about the difference between being there (basement studio) to be in the studio with (Producer)?

BMC: Yes. I think the main difference is that we have more limitations in the basement

studio. We don't have enough instruments to record the whole band there, nor do we have the knowledge to do it. So in the basement the focus is on the musical aspect, and with (Prod) it is to find the right sound and to find the right spice. Lets say we chop wood in the basement studio, and in the studio with (prod) we work as carpenters.

The same distinction is made by BMC. The technical aspect is singled out as something rather different than the musical aspect, where the producer is in charge of one and the band of the other. BMC recognizes that they need the technical capacity of the producer (and his studio) to execute their musical idea that they had prepared before coming in to the studio. The carpenter metaphor suggests that the finesse and brilliance that they seek of the final product is made possible through work with the producer and what he offers to the equation of production.

This way of looking at the producer's role is by no means new. Simon Frith notes that the way of looking at the producer, as a resource was how the bands viewed the role of the producer when the emergence of rock music was very prominent. The shift of power from the producer to the band was eminent with rock music. Frith says they "used the producer or engineers technical skills and trickery to their own artistic ends"(Frith, 2012, p.214). This development laid ground for a type of producer that still exists today, recognised in these statements. The producer's knowledge is a tool at the disposal for the band, to make their music and artistic vision a reality.

The technical aspect of being a producer is evidently very important. Of equal importance is the musical knowledge, if we are to use the same separation between the two as mentioned in the interviews. I will look at the more musical aspect of the producer's role, through viewing the producer as a consultant. By looking at the producer as a consultant it will be revealed a great deal about the power dynamics that goes on in the studio, and show outlines of the relationship between the band and the producer both on creative and economic terms. In the following passage we see how the band recognizes the producer as a professional expert.

BMA: The band can ask for advice, but you should not shove your opinions on them, but (PROD) does this with us, because we asked for it. We respect him, we trust his opinion, and we look up to him. And sometimes we are blank. We are not professional musicians. He is.

This quote demonstrates a few interesting points in regards to the relationship between the producer and the band. The band has specifically asked the producer to be vocal about his opinion, despite the notion that it is not how it is supposed to be. The subtext here is that the producer has to follow the lead of the band. However they showcase trust in him because of his expertise, knowledge and musical skill. Therefore they invite the producer more into the fold, to reap the benefits of this expertise. Distinguishing between professional and non-professional also creates a hierarchic relationship between the band and the producer; all the while the band is still in charge. Hendrik Spilkner describes a notion of musicians where the studio and the expertise accessible serve as a gateway into the professional world. It is seen as a vital step to make “proper” music and become “real” artist. (Spilkner , 2017, p.84). The approach displayed as having the producer as an expert or consultant could support this argument. Band member B shares the idea of the producer as a consultant.

BMC: It's a positive addition to have (PROD) there. If one is very unsure, it is good to ask him for advice. And when we do, I feel his opinion weighs the heaviest. Some of us are a bit uncertain sometimes.

The producer is seen as an addition to the process, and someone they can ask for advice. Both band members underline the fact that they listen carefully to what the producer has to say, and value his opinion heavily. It is expressed as a safety to have him and his knowledge available when recording. Band member A describes a similar situation where the musical knowledge of the producer is utilized even further than just as a consultant.

BMA: He can come with suggestions. Then he will teach it to the one who is supposed to play it. That can take a while. And if it doesn't work, which happened, he will play it.

Although the band expressed that the producer is mainly there as a consultant, sometimes the lines between the different roles blur. In this instance the producer who mostly is on the side-line as a consultant, enters the role of a musician to play an instrument on the track. The band allows this, because as we saw they expressed earlier, they have trust in him. This situation is not common practice for the band, but rather an exception to the standard. Having the producer contribute with arrangements does not diminish the feeling of ownership the band has over their music. BMA suggest that they actually want him to help because he is the expert.

It becomes evident that the idea of what a producer should or should not be is present with the band, although they express a desire to work the way they feel is best for them. Band Member B mentions this conception of the producer directly.

BMB: Originally the deal was that he should not have a typical producer role. We were just supposed to record there. But when he is there, we naturally ask about stuff. So it is more about us asking: "what do you think of this?" rather than him taking control.

It is interesting to see the conception of a "typical producer" mentioned here as someone who takes charge. The band had previously worked with a producer like this, but felt that it was too invasive in their music. After that experience they sought the opposite type of relationship with their producer and that's what evolved with the current one. The term "typical producer" might refer to the type of producer described as the boss in the studio. (Dalchow, 2013, p. 122) Traditionally the producers have been more in charge of the project, due to the fact that they are hired by the record company, and therefore have to balance both the bands wishes as well as the record company. The band expresses a desire to be more self-sufficient, and yet have the producer there to guide them through the process. The same thoughts about the producer, as a consultant are therefore clear in this statement.

Another facet of the musical expertise required of the producer is the ability to reference. In order to communicate effectively in the studio it appears to be crucial to have easy access to a wide range of musical references. This mode of communication is how ideas are transmitted the easiest way, and how commonly musicians describe their music; by citing other music. The producer mentions for example how a singer can

perform a song to him, and he would use a reference as a starting point for how he would produce the song. "If you were sitting there, in front of me playing a song. I would have maybe said, to me it sounds like a Woody Allen film. Maybe we can have that kind of sound." The ability to reference with ease, specific enough to get the point across, and broad enough to ensure the reference is caught, could be crucial for communicating in the studio. Musical listening is one of the key factors in being a producer. This involves the ability to dissect a production into parts, both musically and technically while still having an aesthetic overview of the production as a whole. Having to engage with historical and practical traditions of record production, this form of knowledge is experience based and developed over time. (Askerøi, Viervoll, 2017, p.234). It is demonstrated in the interviews how valuable the skill of listening is. The virtue in a collective setting is perhaps to apply the skill of listening to reference and communicate with the band or the artist.

Even if the band expresses a desire to work with the producers on their own terms, there is a perspective that problematizes the power dynamics between the two. If the band is in creative control and have the final say, it might possibly reduce the amount of risks the band takes when it comes to evolving their sound and take chances with production. BMC reflects upon what is needed from the producer in order to push the band further.

BMC: I know our record label has challenged us quite a bit to work with other people. To use producers that can make us more pop and catchy, but we have had so little time. We have not really lived together in the same city. So we haven't had the time for the long process. We didn't this time either, because everything needed to be ready for the tour.

He (mixing technician) has been very much like; I need to give you a new sound. I want to mix it differently. It needs to sound fresher. Sound like an evolution. Things like this we have never talked about with (PROD).

If the first guy we recorded with had been a genius, it might have been very good for us. (PROD) doesn't alter very much. But it is very comfortable and good, although it never

differs much from what we had planned. Might be because we were not too interested in it anyways.

BMC recognises the duality between the comfort and familiarity with their producer, while also acknowledging that they are not challenged as much as they could be. The record company is mentioned as a driving force in challenging the band to try different sounds, but in the end it is the band that has the final say in choosing their producer. The familiar is convenient and safe, and also important to note; it is less time consuming.

When looking at the producer as an expert, the economical aspect is quite present in the discourse throughout interviewing with the band. It is made quite clear that the producer is hired by the band to do a job, similar to that of a craftsman or consultant. At the same time the producer has integrity and authority in his role, with the band recognizing the necessity of his work. They come into the producer's studio, where he is the boss, but at the same time not. This sort of contradictory relationship is dealt with in different ways, and managed with different mechanisms to create the best possible atmosphere. That leads into the next category of describing the producer's job.

The producer as a facilitator

It is now established how the band views the producer as a consultant, available when they need his expertise. However, there are other more subtle nuances to what is required for the flow of work to be as smooth as possible. For this next category I will discuss the side of the producer more thoroughly, to gain insight on what he believes his job is. There are facets to the producer's role that might not be as clear to the band. A way of looking at what the producer does is by viewing the producer as a facilitator of the recording process. Michael Jarrett explains this function in Derrida's words, as the "metaphysics of presence". (Jarrett, 2012, p.129) By this it is meant that the producer is hard at work to try to create that little extra magic that can't be necessarily heard but is felt through performance. In this category I will explore the term "the self-effacing producer" and see how my interviewees express this idea. This term is discussed in the theory chapter for further references.

To be a facilitator can take many different forms, and some are more practical, while others are more social and relational. The producer has a clear idea of what his task is when it comes to working with this specific band.

PROD: With (Band) its mostly about creating a... to make this a place where they can do what they need to do. And provide input when I notice that I should contribute.

In this quote the producer phrases quite neatly the more underlying work that is required of him in regards of working with this specific band. The full context of this quote is that some bands require different type of producing, but in the instance of this band, his function is suggested to be more in line with what Jarrett refers to as the “self-effacing producer”. He manages quite eloquently to sum up the main task in a very straightforward manner. The question then, is; how does he make the studio into a place where they can work? And the follow up question to that will be; what does it take of him to do just that?

There are several different strategies for the producer to be a facilitator of good work. The first I will discuss is a more relational approach to working with the band. As showed through Jarrett’s ethnography, a common theme in producing is promoting the best performance. Hal Willner describes it as creating a framework to make the artist feel a certain way. This could be achieved by “even making them uncomfortable” (Jarrett, 2012, 133), with the purpose to create the best possible performance. Producer expresses this focus on performance, both as a fundamental approach to music, and as a way of working with musicians.

PROD: It was just fun to begin with. What happens if I do this? That sound Im hearing, I want to recreate it. The best way to learn is by trial and error when trying to recreate something you have heard. Most of the time you cannot do it. And as the years go by you understand why things are the way they are. Its so many layers that make a person sound the way they do when they play the guitar; most of it is the person itself playing. It took some time before I learnt this. Its all in the hands, in the performance. That’s how it happened.

The producer shows a very integrated sense of the human behind the instrument in his approach to music. This sense of emotional connection to music and performance colours the way he approaches producing for other people as well. By having a conceptual fundament like this he always has a platform to begin work and facilitate production. The producer discussed what his days are like working with different people.

PROD: It can be that you are sitting next to the artist, holding their hand while they are singing to make them do a better take.(...) For example if we are doing vocals, and the person cant reach the notes they want to, I will do what I can to help but the responsibility is at the artist. For example with drums, I can mic up the drums with the microphones that I have and the drum kit should theoretically sound good, but it is the drummer that makes them sound good.

The producer expresses here the duality of facilitation for the artist. On one hand it can mean emotional support, and on the other hand it can mean practical solutions. Both are means to reach the same goal; to make the performance as good as possible. He sees his role as someone who is there to extract the maximum potential of the musicians he is working with, rather than trying to steer the direction the production is going in.

Although the quality of the final product is important, there is also expressed the importance of the process to get there.

PROD: I can say maybe you should play a bit softer, because our drum kit cant handle too hard playing. You will just kill the drums. However sometimes you understand that they aren't able to play softer. Then I need to do what I can to make him feel like he is doing a good job. You are supposed to have fun as well. Not many people make a living of being artists, so they are here out of passion. So it is important for me that they are enjoying the time recording their record.

The concept of atmosphere, enjoyment and process is a big part of the producer's job. The producer is not just selling help and assistance, but is facilitating a total experience of being musicians in a studio recording music. The fun of the process is important, and

I believe this is a way to work around a fact of the relationship between the band and the producer; it's a buy/sell relationship. By creating an atmosphere where everyone feel they are working towards the same goal, and are there to create something together, it does not matter who is paying whom anymore. The band is also conscious of the importance of having a process that is based on a positive experience. After working with the same producer for a few years they have developed a connection with him.

BMB: The first record we did was with another dude. And that felt like having a new person there with a lot of opinions and was going to take over production. Really just change everything. That did not work for us. The deal with (PROD) is that he is very good at making you feel that you are doing it right. He makes you comfortable and creates a very comfortable journey.

It is interesting to note that when asked why they choose to return to the producer the reasoning was based on what it felt like in the process of recording, rather than the evaluation of the final product. BMB stresses that a part of the good experience with the producer is how he makes you feel about what you do. The line between friendship and professional relationships needs to be addressed in this context, and it can help to clarify more about what the producer's part plays in record production. BMA reflects about their relationship with the producer.

BMA: We like him a lot, he likes us a lot. So we don't pay by the hour anymore like ones supposed too, we have a package deal with him. He likes to be with us and hang with us. We usually do it in bulks at the time. Where we come and go over a period of time or hang out there the whole day. It is become a pleasant thing with him. I think it is important that we get along.

The band values the developed friendly relationship with the producer, and not only on the economical terms where they get a package deal for the studio time. The importance of being on friendly terms with the producer has value of its own. BMB goes more in depth about the process of recording, and why a sense of friendship is important to the process.

BMB: We have become friends in many ways. We joke around and things like that. Since we are here so many at the same time it is often some of us space out. Not all six of us work with (PROD) the whole time. It is more like, the one that is recording its instrument, and two more that comments. The others take a mental break. In that sense we are working in turns, while he is working the whole time.

But we pay him to be there. It is no secret; we are not trying to deny that. I still think its possible to have a nice tone, and at the same time have a professional relationship. That we can joke around with each other as if we were friends, and still have a professional relationship.

The friendly relationship emerges even though it is a professional relationship at the core. According to BMB the two are not mutually exclusive, and it is only beneficial for both parties if they are able to maintain a form of friendship. This is in line with the producer's views on why it is important to maintain the atmosphere friendly.

PROD: If you get angry and upset, what kind of environment is that to be creative in?

This statement nicely wraps up the idea about how the producer works as a facilitator. By maintaining a friendly relationship and a positive atmosphere it allows creativity to flourish. One could say that the professional way of working together in a music studio is to value and nurture personal connection and friendship.

The producer as an interpreter

I will now return to the producer's description of his job: to make the studio a place where the band can do what they need to do. If facilitating performance, creating an atmosphere and being the consulting expert is the job of the producer; what are the qualities needed to do this job? There are two main answers to this question that emerge from both Michael Jarrett's ethnography and my interviews. The correlation is prominent even across time, geography and genre and could be considered relatively universal in the art of being a producer.

The first part of the answer is to be able to understand what people need. In order to help musicians doing their best job the producer needs to be able to decipher how they work, what they need, who they are as human beings and who they are as musicians. To understand how to make the musicians perform their best, it is vital to be able to know approach them.

PROD: What I think with (band) is, with them I have a certain role. I know what they like to have for lunch. It is different from person to person. Others like to go to a restaurant, then you do that. You talk about this and this. I have even noticed that I have dressed according to whom I am working with. So it depends really. Overall the most important thing with being a producer is being able to understand people.

We see here an adaptability shown by the producer. Beyond what is needed of him technically and musically in the studio, it is important to understand what the people you are working with need. This quote shows how the context of the work is important as well as how the work is done, because the context affects the work. He has a specific role in relation to this band, and a different one with others. I want to argue that “the self-effacing producer” is actually more an extension of a different ideology rather than an ideology in itself contradictory to what Jarrett claims (Jarrett, 2012, p.130). In order to know when to take the back seat, when to facilitate, when to intrude and when to be dominant the producer needs to be an interpreter. Situations needs to be interpreted, people needs to be interpreted, dynamics, relations between the band and so much more. To be self-effacing in this case then becomes more of a tool used when it is most appropriate.

PROD: With (band) they have so many strong opinions, and are really great when it comes to arrangement and performance, so it's often about not getting in the way of what they are doing.

We see here that the grounds for the producer to be self-effacing are to firstly to interpret what the band need. As the producer recognizes that the band work well without much interference, he makes an informed decision based on first interpreting the needs of the band. Thereafter he decides the best possible tool to facilitate

production is to be self-effacing, and let the band be in control. By presenting it as a coherent ideology of production that the producer is self-effacing, I feel a vital part of understanding the relationship between producer and artist are overlooked. Therefore I suggest that the producer first and foremost is an interpreter.

Interpreting is also an act that requires musical intelligence. When artists or musicians present their music in the studio, the producer must be able to see the direction the band wants to go in. The producer must understand the musical references, and understand how to record it. In other instances the producer must also create an image of what could become of what is shown. In a sense the producer functions as a sort of a musical fortune-teller, in a process that resembles commodification. The journey the producer must imagine then is the road from ideas, sketches, and visions, to a finished product ready for a market.

BMA: I feel his talent, and maybe what you need to have as a producer is the ability to understand concepts. To understand "the thing". You can hear a band play live, and there are so many different ways to record music. For example like when I was a technician with him with that other band (Band name). They play very much in the style of the Beatles or the Beach Boys. It's vintage music. They play and sing like they do, and then (PROD) know how he could capture the essence of the band, and how he could do it on a recording. That's is a very important role the producer has. To be able to understand the idea.

According to BMA this is one of the defining qualities of the producer, to understand concepts. By capturing the essence of the band, the ideas and visions can be interpreted by the producer and transformed into a crystallized collection of those ideas. Orin Keepnews says of this (Jarrett, 2012, p.137) that the artist is the concept. The producer's job is then to incorporate as many aspects of the artistry as possible, but that cohesion and concept is important when working on a set of songs. This aspect of producing has the audience in mind. How can the music be presented to an audience in a way that makes it clear to them what it is? Although the term commodification sounds cynical in this context, in some ways that is what is going on. It is the producer's job to see the connective thread between the songs, when maybe it is not clear to the artist, who has most likely sat with the music on their hands for a while, looking and listening.

Simon Frith comments on how this function of the producer was articulated in the early rock music. The phenomena of *the band* were based partly on a sonic personality, and a characteristic sound. Such qualities were developed through a creative collaborative effort in the studio, where the producer functioned almost as a member of the band. However he notes; “at the end of a session it is the producer who has responsibility for the product- the result of a creative process in a form fit for market. This is the respect in which the producer cannot be just another member of the band. The producer's job, to put it another way, is to put an end to the creative process.”(Frith, 2012, p.219) It is interesting to see the producer's job as putting an end to the creative process by putting it in a form fit for market, and at the same time having the ability to capture the idea and concept of the band. When asked about who was responsible for the final outcome of the product after a session, all members of the band unanimously agreed however, that the responsibility was on them. This was based on reasoning that “if we are not satisfied it is our job to let him know”.

The concept of musical listening emerges once again in a slightly different context. In order for a producer to be able to understand musical concepts and ideas, it requires thorough musical knowledge. In order to apply that musical knowledge to what you are presented by the artist, you need to have the skill of musical listening, as defined by Howlett. (Askerøi, Viervoll, 2017, p.232). That is the starting point for musical interpreting. Through an understanding of sound meaning, and being able to compartmentalize those references into concepts could be said to be the interpretation of the music that is presented to the producer.

The producer as the first audience

As I have made a point of interpreting, there is another dimension to the meeting with the producer that is worth looking into. When a band enters the studio with a near finished demo, a sketch or a song idea they meet their first audience. The audience they are used to does not exist inside the studio. By looking at how the producer can position themselves as an imagined audience is interesting both in the sense of the creative process, and in terms of aiming music to a market.

Hennion has a point of view that can shed light on the producers role is the position of the intermediary between the band and the public. Hennion argues that the function of this particular position is to incorporate the public into production. "By standing in the way, the intermediaries capture the attention of the singers. Producers put the obstacle of their bodies between the singers and the publics desire." (Hennion, 1989 ,p.412) He explains how the publics desire is actually unknown, and that the public known, is an old public, and the public they are looking for is still unknown. The new public is the variable in the equation. But the information known about the old public can still be incorporated into production. However the idea that the producer can represent the public in a microscopic way is clearly present in the understanding of the producer's role. Band Member B explains one of the functions of the producers like this.

BMB: In terms of a producer, it is having another person there. One you can spar with and ask: how does it sound? He is listening with a new set of ears.

The producer functions as the very first audience who hears the music. This way the feedback from the producer is incorporated into the production, and thus a part of the public is now integrated in the production. Band Member A shares the same notion about the producer being a first audience, "I want him to see me, my music. And make something awesome with it". The word "see" in this context refers to a form of understanding and appreciating. The idea that the producer must see the artist, as an outside force, mirrors the process Hennion explains. The validation or critical judgement of the producer becomes a more manageable way to deal with a full-scale public or audience who can approve or disapprove of your work. And with the producer seeing you as an outside force he/she can help to incorporate that into the music. "They (producers) take them away from their double-headed dream: the public and I".(Hennion, 1989, p.413)

Producer also repeats this notion of understanding the publics desire and being the intermediary that brings that into production.

PROD: This person needs help to move forward, or some support. Just say: I think this is good, we dont need to do it one more time. I understand that you have the need for it to be

perfect for you, but for the rest of the world you present your music for could not care less. It does not matter if that "T" is too high or too low"

The producer also demystifies and modifies their perception of an outside world to make it seem less overwhelming. The creation process is described as long and that it is easy to get stuck on nit-picking the tiniest of detail. If the producer as an intermediary has a function to be the first audience, it also then involves being able to listen to the music with fresh and uninhibited ears in order to bring the public into the equation.

The producer as self-employed

When interviewing the producer I understood how a big part of his reality as a producer also revolved around being his own employee. The topics discussed so far have mainly covered what happens inside the studio, but this angle will provide some more contexts to the life world of the producer. There are many clues that reveal how being a producer is not just a function inside a studio. It can be a personal journey of self-fulfilment, creative expression and a job that also needs to be done to pay bills. These are topics I find inevitable to look more into, and I will demonstrate how looking at the producer through the lens of being self-employed can be informative in terms of the discussion between creative and economical forces.

It is of importance to not just understand the producer as a function or a job. In order to understand what it means to be a producer, it is important to have a sense of the person as well. The music industry is known for being cutthroat, with tough competition for those who seek to work in it. As presented in the theory chapter, Hesmondhalgh investigates the working conditions of actors in the cultural field, and notes that business can be irregular, uncertain and unequally compensated (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p.254). This is also rings true for the music industry. Producer tells about how he first began his work.

PROD: Around this time friends started to ask if I could help them out in the studio. I thought, Ok Ill do it. Everyone I had worked with in the studio earlier with my own music was musicians who had become producers. They didn't have a technical background either. It was the aesthetic I was looking for. I was not looking for someone who could create the

perfects signal. It was the aesthetic. And they started asking, and eventually it became so much that I had to take time off work, so they had to pay me. It was a sort of part time job for many years, until it eventually became a fulltime job. So now I have been a producer for over ten years. Both full time, and part time.

We see here how the producer shows the drive for creative fulfilment. He shows a desire to expand upon his practice as a musician by venturing into producing. Hesmondhalgh explains this as a “labour-of-love” (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p. 255) approach where the creative calling outweighs the potential risk of failure. As mentioned in the quote, there was a long transitioning period for the producer to be able to have it as a full time job. Hesmondhalgh notes that another explanation for people seeking work in a cultural industry is because of their attraction to high risk. The producer shows a different approach where he slowly and steadily builds a practice as self-employed and that way eliminates or reduces risk. Another question arises when discussing the creative and aesthetic side of producing. How does producing for other artists fulfil the creativity of the producer, in the setting of a client/customer relationship? The producer says he finds satisfaction in a different, more practical, sense of the word creativity.

PROD: Even if I might not write any music with the people I work with, or create an arrangement it is very creative for me to turn the knob on all these boxes. Also things like: where are we going to place ourselves? Last week I had someone called (a band). They wanted to record live. The guitarist had to be in the drum room, but he plays really loud guitar, that's how he gets the sound he wants. I didn't want to tell him he couldn't. I would like to hear how it sounds when he plays that loud. It was extremely loud. So we had to build a thing between the two rooms, to avoid overhearing as best as possible. I ended up building a cabin around the drum kit. I love to work creative that way. Almost more than when people ask me what to play. Im like; I don't know, play something cool. Maybe something like this?." But to build a cabin over the drum kit, finished everything, record and afterwards mute the guitar to find that there is almost no guitar on the drum tracks. That's awesome. And then the vocalist is in the booth singing amazingly, I send her voice to a spring and say: Its ready, go ahead. And then they start to play and it sounds so powerful. It moves me. These three people are here playing together. Wow.

This view of creativity displayed by the producer in this passage is more of an inclusive view on creativity, if we go by Raymond Williams (Negus, 1983, p.24) etymology research of the word. The producer does not feel like the creative genius behind the production, it is more about how to produce in a creative manner. This goes beyond music making and into a more practical search for solutions. The result is again to facilitate for the performance. The producer expresses feelings of great reward and feelings of togetherness with the band when the creativity of his production gives the optimal results he hoped for. The bond that is created through this practice is deemed important for the producer, and the feeling of working together with the band has value in itself.

Throughout doing these interviews I noticed how hesitant interviewees were to talking about money. It is not revolutionary to question how money and time are correlated, but in the instance of this interview the connection was quite clear. The economic terms were almost consistently discussed in terms of time, and how time could be managed, organized and negotiated. In effect looking at how time and economy is expressed we will reveal interesting facts about the structures of the relationship between the band and the producer, and also of the producer and his self-employment. I would like to argue that the transforming of money as an exchange rate, to time as an exchange rate, is part of the project of masking the inequalities between the producer and the band, thus contributing to the friendly and creativity-fronting framework. BMB suggests that this way of working is by no means a hindrance.

I: How does it feel different working there (basement studio) versus in studio?

BMB: When we work with (PROD) it's a bit different, as we are working on the clock. That's one thing, knowing you have a limited amount of time. We know he is working with other bands as well. It is the money thing as well, but that is nothing we care too much about. Its more that you have a limited space where you say; lets make something within this time frame, and then its about getting to the finish line. So we use less time trying new stuff, because that can suddenly take a full day, and then you are at the same place the next day. So we try to avoid that when we get to the studio.

Here we see that by using time as a way of expressing the economical relationship between the producer and artist, it can be used as a trigger to create an environment where production is efficient and goal oriented. The limitation of studio time is in effect turned into something positive, which helps creativity and work be the main focus. It is noted that BMB mentions money, but the topic is not dwelled upon, rather mentioned briefly. However the fact is that the amount of time they have in the studio are their moneys worth of time. To discuss time then is equal to discussing money. However, when turning time limits into a work-inducing boundary, it takes away from the customer/client relationship between the producer and the band and sets them on more equal grounds to work towards a shared goal. It is more manageable way to deal with the relationship, so to speak.

PROD: On my part I see myself as a craftsman who work here, and then you pay for my time, and then I do what that person needs me to do, or a band or whatever it is. I do my best, and we agree that; these are the songs and we are taking them here. Between that is the work. Both practically and in terms of managing time. Its important to organise how much time is needed. It happens that people ask me to work with them, write together and record and release it, without me getting paid for my time, only through royalties. So far I have declined all those offers.

I: You have declined all of them?

PROD: I don't feel like I can justify spending three weeks on a song, have it released and earn nothing from it. I would like to do it, but that would require a different personal economy to set aside that much time to not earn any money. It is so little money in streaming. It happens I do music for commercials if Im approached by people I know in an agency. I have no problem doing that, I actually think it is fun.

The producer mentions to manage time, but there is a double meaning implied in this statement. One aspect is to manage the time that is paid for by the band, to satisfy their wish, and use the time well to create something finished. The producer mirrors the band member's views on what his position are in terms of this exchange. He also expresses a need to have an ability to see the overarching picture of the production and be able to understand how that can be done in a certain time frame.

It is interesting to note how the discourse of time is also present in the way he talks about his own economy. What we see in the second half of this passage is how economical and creative desires come to a head on collision. He expresses an interest in being able to write and produce for artists, and receive royalties instead of payment. This kind of work is more of a gamble for the producer as the potential success is unknown. He notes that the time he spends working with artists needs to be justified, it needs to be a guarantee of income. The way money is distributed in the music industry makes sacrifices like these inevitable, where the influence of money directly affects creative expression. Most often times these choices can be convoluted and distorted. Maybe even subconsciously expressed, but the producer has a clear conception of how his personal economy affects his creative work. The passage also reinforces that despite the seemingly casual friendly atmosphere in the recording studio, between expensive mixing desks, guitars and microphones perhaps the most valuable asset is time.

Conclusion and closing remarks

Out of these observations arises the outline of an evidently complex relationship. I envisioned this research project as a mapping out of the producer's role, see if there was possible in a way to systemize it, and make clarity out of a web of intricate functions that make up the daily life of a music producer. The intention was not to solve any specific issue, as I believe the tug of these dynamics between the producer and the band is a vital part of the connectivity that happens when music creation is a collective practice. It was more important for me to hopefully unveil what actually happens in the studio, and present the struggles that arise when balancing creativity with work. Although perhaps not empirically true, and most definitely not rigid by any means, I do believe the categorizations of the producer's functions can help to create a deeper insight into what the job of the producer is.

First and foremost it becomes clear how much of being a music producer is about working with people. The mode of work illustrated in the interviews calls for a producer who is comfortable with people. Being a music producer seems to be equally about interactions as it is about music making. These relationships require a very tentative and alert producer. It also becomes clear how versatile the producer needs to be. It is a job that requires a lot of flexibility in terms of working with all kinds of different musicians, and being able to adapt to situations with a fluidity and ease. The producer is in a way responsible for holding up the whole room. Through this thesis I believe the value of a producer being able to do so, is very evident. The role of the producer as a facilitator is noticeable in both literature and in the interviews provided, and the social skill it requires is generally noted as a primary part of the job. These social skills are transferred to musical and aesthetic qualities through a focus on deriving the best possible performance from the band. To be able to determine what separate individuals need, the dynamics of a group or the mood of the room is what makes the producer also an interpreter.

It is also interesting to see the mechanisms in play that function to create an illusion of equality between the producer and the band. From the outset the gap between them is quite big. The producer owns the studio and the band owns the music. The producer is a seasoned professional and the band is working to achieve a solid standing music

industry. The band is paying the producer, and he is giving them his time. A part of the producer's function is in a way a project of concealing these differences, so everyone in the studio is on equal grounds. This is done by for example simulating a friendship that exists in the vacuum of the music studio or speaking about money in the form of time to make it more manageable. Like Hennion's metaphor, the studio becomes a laboratory where only parts of the outside world are allowed to enter. When the doors to the studio are shut, all differences are set aside. Who is paying whom becomes irrelevant. The importance is now on the creative process, and about the work that everyone is a part of.

In a changing music economy it is important for the producer to guarantee his income. As the producer I interviewed is secure enough to have steady flow of work, it highlights how important it is to develop a bond with the bands you are working with. It will be interesting to see the development of the model of hire alongside the more permanent shift to a streaming economy and what that means in the long term. As a producer it means that in order to make bands return to you for work you need to tend to these relationships, and provide a service that makes the bands satisfied as a customer, and want to work with you again. A producer can be an expert, a musical genius, but if nobody wants to return for a second album it will be more difficult to create an income. Being a self-employed producer, and being an interpreter therefor goes hand in hand when developing skills as a producer.

The downside to this model where the band hires the producer to do a job might be an increased difficulty in expressing an honest opinion. Efforts to push and challenge the band might be in vain, as the position of the producer is less powerful than it have been in different eras. It is a slippery slope between challenging to attain the best possible performance and going against the comfortable atmosphere and perhaps putting the band off. This is a thin line the producer has to manage in order to do a good job. You cannot go against the bands wishes, but you also need to understand when you can insert that extra jolt to make magic happen.

We see outlines of other potential consequences of this model. There is a growing division of labour between the home studio and the so-called professional studio.

(Spilker, 2017, p.84) If the practice of being an entrepreneurial artist grows, and the practice of using the home studio to record demos that are almost ready for radio, it could suggest a scenario where the producer role is more marginalized in production. However, there is still the notion that in order to produce “real” or “proper” music, it has to be done in a professional studio with the expertise of the producer. This notion is very present in the bands perception of the producer and the recording studio. Such a division requires a different approach to recording from the producer. We see therefore an urge of the producer to not only create music with the band, but too elevate it. The function of producer as an expert is likely one of the crucial functions moving forward in a changing music industry, as a stepping-stone for bands and musicians to enter from the home- studio into the, perhaps perceived, professional world.

There are many different roads a further study could take. I believe the most interesting development of this study would be to have a more participant observer approach to the study. The information obtained through interviews are very relevant, but to be a part of the process in the studio could give further insight to details that are not deemed as important by the subjects, but hold value for research purposes. It would be interesting to see exactly how the dynamics I have described in this thesis affect aesthetic choices hands on. Further, it would be relevant to focus more specifically on a branch of the music industry that is more targeted at the mainstream, through for example studying producers who are working with artists signed to major labels. I think this would make points that more directly show how the producer has to deal with aesthetic and creative choices and relate them to commercial success. A broader range of interviews would also benefit a further study, to eliminate instances that are personal and subjective, and bring forth something that is more universal in its nature.

The scope for this project did not allow for such an extensive research, but I believe the main purpose was to enlighten the path that leads to further questions. The perspectives provided will hopefully be a starting point for further discussion, and the seeking to gain more knowledge about the music producer. It would be a shame to have one of the most prominent figures in the production of music remaining an enigma.

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