

**Memorizing lyrics and performing from
memory: A study of professional singers'
approaches to foreign language repertoire**

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Abstract	
<p>The overarching aim of my research is to investigate the approaches professional singers use to memorize lyrics and remember the lyrics during a performance. I focus especially on the challenge of singing and performing in a language other than one's mother tongue since it is quite common among singers.</p> <p>The research questions that will address this overarching aim are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What different strategies do singers use to memorize lyrics? • What kind of strategies do singers use to remember song lyrics while performing on stage and what coping mechanisms do they use if they forget the lyrics? • How does the language of the song influence the memorization of lyrics and remembering them during performance? <p>Based on my research results, using various strategies based on different memory systems is the most effective way to memorize lyrics. It is recommended to memorize the song by deliberate memorization training instead of relying only on motor memory. By memorizing lyrics in deliberate ways, for example by using structural memory or emotional memory, when performing, a singer can rely on different memory systems and be able to cope in a situation where the motor and auditory based association chains fail.</p> <p>Strategies to memorize the lyrics include for example studying the meaning of the text, translating it into one's mother tongue if necessary, memorizing the lyrics phonetically, writing the lyrics on paper by hand, listening to a recording of the song and singing along with the recording, as well as attaching emotions and an interpretation to the lyrics, and making a storyline to structure the song. When forgetting the lyrics on stage common coping mechanisms include singing the lyrics of the previous verse or singing the same lyrics twice, singing without words for example scatting, humming, or singing with relevant syllables as well as taking a break and indicating to the band to play a solo or to continue longer in the part they are already playing.</p>	
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1 Introduction

Professional singers must memorize large amounts of music and later remember very detailed material under the pressure of performing in front of an audience. Compared to instrumental musicians, singers have the added challenge of remembering lyrics and performing mostly without notation so that they can express the lyrics and get engaged with the audience. The lyrics are a big part of the singer's work, from analyzing, memorizing, and interpreting them to conveying the story to the audience, often under the added stress of the performance. Often singers perform songs in multiple languages, which adds an extra challenge to their work as the mouth must learn new positions to be able to sing the words flawlessly and the memory is challenged to remember long stories in a language the singer does not necessarily speak fluently. As a professional singer myself who often sings in Spanish, which is not my native language, I have developed a personal interest in this topic. I therefore decided to study it with the aim of easing the work of other professional singers and offering some insights to singing pedagogy. In particular, I concentrate on professional singers' work with lyrics. By the word *professional singer*, I mean a singer who performs frequently for their livelihood and who has studied singing within the context of higher education. I wanted to limit my study to professional singers, as in my experience they are more likely to have versatile performances and a pedagogical perspective.

It is surprising that at least as far as I know there is not a lot of research on professional singer's exact strategies of working with lyrics and performing from memory. The Oxford Handbook of Music Psychology's *Performing from memory* (Chaffin et al., 2015) chapter talks about how even though there is a long history of performing from memory and even when it is a source of anxiety for many musicians there is no systematic understanding of performing from memory as one would think there is. These authors describe that while there are individual musicians who know a lot about strategies for memorizing, there is no common practice among musicians that would be based on analyzed knowledge of memorization. They further argue that,

There is no reason to think that musical memory varies any more from one person to another than any other trait or capacity. Beneath a superficial diversity, the cognitive and neurological systems involved in memory are common to all human beings. (Chaffin et al., 2015, p. 568)

For this reason, I propose that research on strategies for learning lyrics and performing from memory would benefit the physical and mental health of professional singers and ease their work, which is already very challenging.

The overarching aim of my research is to investigate the approaches professional singers use to memorize lyrics and to remember the lyrics in the moment of performance. I focus especially on the challenge of singing and performing in a language other than one's mother tongue since it is quite common among singers.

The research questions that will address this overarching aim are:

- What different strategies do singers use to memorize lyrics?
- What kind of strategies do singers use to remember song lyrics while performing on stage and what coping mechanisms do they use if they forget the lyrics?
- How does the language of the song influence the memorization of lyrics and remembering them during performance?

The study will explore these research questions from the point when the singer begins rehearsing a new song until their performance in front of an audience.

During my studies in the Global Music Department at Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki, the main focus of my studies has been singing and I have taken different singing lessons from flamenco and Cuban traditions to popular music and voice technique lessons. The motivation for this study arises from my observation during my studies at Sibelius Academy that during different singing lessons we concentrated less on lyrics and primarily focused on the vocal techniques, and the melodic and rhythmic elements of the songs. This has given me the impression that the work on lyrics is something that teachers let students work with on their own. For that reason, I suddenly noticed that I knew only a few different ways to work with lyrics and that is why I decided to do this research.

The structure of this study is as follows. In the next chapter, I present a literature review of previous research on the subject. In Chapter Three I discuss the theoretical and conceptual framework I used to understand and interpret my results and why I used them. Chapter Four focuses on the methodology and methods of this study, including data generation, data analysis, researcher position and ethics. Fifth Chapter focuses on the results and the Sixth on discussion and the reflection as well as conclusions based on the results of the research.

2 Literature review

As noted by musician, music psychologist and researcher Jane Ginsborg (2000) there is a wealth of anecdotal and pedagogical literature on practicing and memorizing strategies of singers, but very little empirical research has been done on what singers actually do when practicing and memorizing. In addition to three significant research studies on the memorization strategies of singers (Ginsborg, 2000 & 2002; Ginsborg & Sloboda, 2007) I included Hallam's (1997) research on memorization and performance of classical instrumentalists – since there are commonalities in the work of all musicians, it is relevant to know what has been researched on memorization strategies of instrumentalists. Also, since there is more research done on the memorization strategies of instrumentalists than singers, I found that often research investigating the memorization strategies of singers referred to research done on instrumentalists as well.

2.1 Memorization strategies of professional singers

Ginsborg's (2000) study on memorization strategies of singers investigated the question how professional singers practice and memorize songs. She reported that the best memorizer possessed a high degree of meta-cognitive awareness. According to Ginsborg (2000) the best memorizer started memorizing early, tested their memory throughout the practice sessions and worked on a variety of lengths of practice units. The best memorizer made and implemented plans, monitored, and corrected their errors, and clearly evaluated practice (Ginsborg, 2000). The singers were more anxious that they would forget the lyrics than the melody, so their

memorization strategies were primarily for the lyrics rather than the music (Ginsborg, 2000). The lyric learning included studying the meaning of the text, translating it into their mother tongue, if necessary, as well as memorizing the lyrics phonetically. They reported lyric learning to have three stages: 1) initial study, 2) learning and 3) deliberate, rather than implicit, memorization (Ginsborg, 2000).

A later study by Ginsborg (2002), observed classical singers' memorizing a new song and found that they use nine different approaches to this memorizing. These approaches, in order of how frequently they were used were,

singing the words (reading from the score); singing the words (from memory); playing the melody, accompanying themselves, speaking the words aloud, vocalizing, and counting aloud (reading from the score); counting aloud and speaking the words aloud (from memory). (p. 93)

Ginsborg (2002) noticed that, in general, singing the words and singing and counting from memory increased during the sessions, and other ways that had been used when learning the song first, such as speaking the words, playing the melody, accompanying, or counting aloud, decreased during the sessions. She reported that "The fast, accurate memorizers used more different modes of attempt than the slow, inaccurate memorizers did" (Ginsborg, 2002, p. 93).

Two studies of professional singers found that professional singers may not train and memorize as effectively as they could (Ginsborg, 2000; Ginsborg 2002). Ginsborg noticed that what the singers said in the interview phase about their theories of effective practice and what they actually practiced differed. It led her to conclude that while professional singers may have implicit theories of effective practice and memorization, singers either fail to practice according to their theories or their theories are false (Ginsborg, 2000).

Studies show that for professional singers memorizing words and music together is clearly a more effective strategy than memorizing them separately (Ginsborg, 2000; Ginsborg & Sloboda, 2007). According to two studies by Ginsborg (2000, 2002) knowing the semantic meaning of lyrics is not as important to memorizing the lyrics as it is to interpreting a song. Ginsborg (2002) found that the singer does not necessarily need to focus on the semantic meaning of the lyrics to remember them,

however, successful memorizers are sufficiently familiar with the semantic meaning of the lyrics so that when forgetting the lyrics, they can replace them with alternative words and thus be able to continue the performance.

2.2 Instrumentalists' memorization strategies

In music psychologist, educator and researcher Susan Hallam's research *The study of the development of memorisation strategies in Musicians: implications for education* (1997), 22 freelance professional instrumentalists and 55 novice instrumentalists were interviewed about their approach to memorizing songs. The study found that musicians have different approaches and combinations of strategies to help them memorize music, and that the use of different strategies was found to depend on the nature of the material being memorized. Everyone in the study from novices to professionals used combinations of aural, kinesthetic, or visual strategies to memorize the music and there was also evidence of considerable individual diversity in the strategies chosen. Moreover, Hallam (1997) also found that memorizing often happened automatically while learning the material and if not, the musicians played the piece more to memorize it. They practiced passages that were not memorized in small sections which were then linked to the rest of the piece. According to Hallam (1997) professionals, unlike novice musicians, also consciously tried to help memorization by developing an understanding of the structure of music by analyzing the piece. As Hallam stated, "Two approaches to memorisation were identified: one relying on automated processes, the other on cognitive analysis" (Hallam, 1997, p. 90).

To reduce performance-related anxiety, several strategies are often implemented simultaneously by professional musicians (Hallam, 1997). Professional musicians in Hallam's study (1997) knew the risks of relying solely on automated processes while performing and some chose to develop "cognitive" analytical approaches to memorizing. There were also some musicians who consciously chose to rely only on automated processes and avoided analytical thinking on stage, although as they themselves said it required courage and self-confidence (Hallam, 1997). An issue that Hallam (1997) identified was that if a musician uses only automated strategies to learn a song without analytical approach, but on stage starts to consciously think, for

example how the next passage went, it can disturb the automation and produce mistakes as the song was not originally learned analytically.

2.3 Singing teachers' approaches to working with lyrics

To see how singing teachers suggest approaching lyric learning and compare those methods to research on singers' memorization, I examined three articles published in the *Journal of Singing*. In the first article by De Young (2017) titled *The Art of Performance: Song Interpretation* singers are encouraged to learn lyrics by speaking them first without a melody but with its rhythm to create a basis for memorizing the lyrics. In an article *Texts* by Garrett (2016) it was suggested to memorize the text before the melody. For the purpose of memorizing the lyrics this approach does not coincide with the results of the studies by Ginsborg (Ginsborg, 2000; Ginsborg & Sloboda, 2007) that contend that memorizing words and music together is a more effective strategy than memorizing them separately. The third article titled *Challenges and revelations in the interpretation of short songs: Teaching the "small"* Phillips (2015) encourages teachers to teach "small songs", which can be understood as easier and shorter songs, for there to be freedom to focus on developing students' own interpretation. The approaches mentioned in the article focus on the semantic meaning of lyrics. The author suggests to "translate" the lyrics into one's own everyday language or try to put oneself into the situation portrayed in the piece as it might arise in one's own life (Phillips, 2015).

3 Theoretical Framework

In this study, the concept of memorization is important as it pertains, in particular, to the memorization of lyrics and different memorization strategies. In the article *Laulajan muisti* (Lindsberg & Groop, 2014) published in the medical periodical book, *Duodecim*, neurology specialist Perttu Lindsberg and professional opera singer Monica Groop discuss professional singers' brain, memory, and memory systems. It is written by a neurology specialist together with an opera singer therefore they have both neurological knowledge and the professional singer's own experience and expertise at their disposal, which makes it very interesting. When studying the specific memory of a musician, Oxford handbook's Chapters 35 *Performing from Memory* (Chaffin et al., 2015) and Chapter 11 *Memory for Music* (Snyder, 2014) were good sources of information. This chapter also includes a brief presentation about memory and its functions by using scholarly literature (Carlson, 2014; Ylinen & Sirviö, 1997).

3.1 Basic memory functions

In psychological memory research, various aspects of memory have been identified and classified. One of the most important classification criteria has been the amount of time that the material to be remembered stays in the memory (Ylinen & Sirviö, 1997; Snyder, 2014). On this basis, at least short-term memory and longer-term storage memory can be clearly distinguished from each other (Ylinen & Sirviö, 1997). Short-term memory can be divided into very short sensory memory, measured in milliseconds, or so-called working memory, which is active and slightly longer, lasting from seconds to minutes (Carlson, 2014). For example, in a singer's work, short-term memory is needed when learning a new song, while performing a previously memorized song on stage requires long-term memory.

Musical training shapes the way a person uses the brain (Snyder, 2014). Modern functional magnetic resonance imaging has revolutionized the possibilities of studying both brain activity during music performance and the anatomical brain changes that have occurred as a result of music training, caused by the plasticity of nervous tissue (Lindsberg & Groop, 2014). Singers have been found to have, for

example, exceptionally well-developed linguistic working memory (Christiner & Reitener, 2013). An increase in the size of the brain's memory structures such as the hippocampus is a well-known phenomenon in people who need a lot of memory-based information for their profession (Lindsberg & Groop, 2014).

3.2 Musicians' memory systems when performing

When musicians learn a new song, they can learn the song from memory while practicing it, forming a so-called "associative chain", where each part reminds them of the next part (Chaffin et al., 2015). If a musician is depending only on motor and auditory chains learned during training, the song must be remembered as a whole chain, which in performance situations is problematic when forgetting one part since then there is no other memory system to rely on and a musician must start from the beginning (Chaffin et al., 2015). This is avoidable if forming associative chains is combined with deliberate memory training (Chaffin et al., 2015). According to Chaffin and colleagues (2015), deliberate memory training makes the motor and auditory chains "content addressable". Content addressable means that when asked for example "What are the lyrics in the fourth verse?" a singer is able to remember them without singing the whole song to remember the fourth verse. After learning a song using deliberate memorization, when performing, a musician can rely on the mental map created with it and be able to cope in a situation where the association chain fails (Chaffin et al., 2015). Combining these two ways seamlessly is indeed one of the hardest tasks while performing. As Chaffin and colleagues state, "One of the main challenges in memorizing for performance is to integrate the two retrieval systems" (p. 567).

In music performances, various memory systems support musicians in different ways when remembering the music. Next, I will go through the most important memory systems considering the performance situations of singers. Auditory memory is the memory system which helps memorizing the music but can also help with memorizing the lyrics (Chaffin et al., 2015; Lindsberg & Groop, 2014). According to Lindsberg and Groop (2014) some singers record their rehearsals to listen to their own singing. They describe how this is a form of self-imitation that helps memorization. Especially in the acquisition of foreign language texts, these authors

contend that imitation plays an important role, because the aim is to achieve the authenticity of the pronunciation of the language. In this way, it is possible to quickly memorize a vocal work in a foreign language, for example, by listening to a record (Lindsberg & Groop, 2014). Musicality has been found to be closely linked to the ability to imitate and acquire a foreign language (Christiner & Reitner, 2013).

We talk about motor memory when we talk about the song being in the fingers or in the singer's case in the mouth or in muscle memory. As Chaffin and colleagues (2015) describe:

Perhaps the most important feature of motor memory for musicians is that it is implicit (unconscious). Musicians know that they can play a particular piece (declarative knowledge), but the knowledge of how to play can only be exhibited by actually playing (procedural knowledge) (p. 562).

Due to motor memory being unconscious, relying only on it can cause anxiety and uncertainty for musicians.

Structural memory helps the musician get a framework for memorized music (Chaffin et al., 2015). The song is divided into parts based on melody, harmony, and meter, from which the musician can create a mental map for the song (Chaffin et al., 2015). In the case of singers, the lyrics also play a big role in structuring the material (Lindsberg & Groop, 2014). It is easier to remember the lyrics if you understand the song through a story. To support memory, it is possible to develop your own mental images based on the content of the text (Lindsberg & Groop, 2014). Many singers say that they see images or colors in their mind that are related to the content (Lindsberg & Groop, 2014). Visual memory can also help when performing, and some singers have the habit of writing the text on paper, so that it is drawn into both motor and visual memory (Lindsberg & Groop, 2014).

Emotional memories are easier to remember than material that does not evoke emotions (Chaffin et al., 2015). For singers analyzing and understanding the lyrics helps the memory, because this creates a connection to emotional reactions and personal experiences (Lindsberg & Groop, 2014). A text that contains a strong emotional reaction is easier to interpret and to remember than an abstract text (Lindsberg & Groop, 2014). When singing in a foreign language the singer must

strive to understand every word to be able to connect the words to emotional reactions (Lindsberg & Groop, 2014). The tempo of the song and nuances of intensity can be used expressively to interpret the emotional content of the text and they also support the memory (Lindsberg & Groop, 2014).

4 Methods

This chapter presents the methodology and research methods of the study. In Section 4.1, I discuss my chosen methodology and revisit my research questions. In Section 4.2 I discuss data generation and in Section 4.3 data analysis. In Section 4.4 I discuss my researcher positionality, and finally in Section 4.5 I discuss the ethics of the study.

4.1 Methodology

In this study I analyzed professional singers' strategies on memorizing lyrics and performing from memory. I therefore adopted a qualitative research approach. According to Saaranen-Kauppinen and Puusniekka (2006) qualitative research includes different traditions, approaches, and data collection and analysis methods for studying people and their lives, so it is not the study of any specific discipline or just one type of research. Common to the whole spectrum of qualitative research is the study of the living world. Through using approaches of qualitative research, I was able to take a deeper look into the topics of my study. The goal of my study was to find answers to the following research questions:

- What different strategies do singers use to memorize lyrics?
- What kind of strategies do singers use to remember song lyrics while performing on stage and what coping mechanisms do they use if they forget the lyrics?
- How does the language of the song influence the memorization of lyrics and remembering them during performance?

To answer these questions, I conducted interviews with two singers who are specialized in singing in a language that is not their native language.

4.2 Data generation methods

The data of my study consists of two semi-structured interviews (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006). In a semi-structured interview, the ways of asking questions vary and there are no ready-made answer options (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006). I chose this data collection method, because I wanted to gather

information from other professional singers about how they work with lyrics. The research participants were two professional singers working in Finland. For this study, I wanted to interview experienced singers who have performed regularly over ten years. Besides performing regularly one of the interviewees is a singing pedagogue. Both have sung in Finnish, which is their mother tongue, and have excellent skills in English which they use in their everyday lives as well as write lyrics in English. Their skill level in English could be estimated to correspond to level C2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. An important aspect when choosing the interviewees was that I wanted to interview singers who sing frequently in a language other than their mother tongue or English. Interviewee A sings in Portuguese and in other languages she does not speak, and interviewee B sings in French and in Spanish. Their skill levels in Portuguese, French, and Spanish could be estimated to correspond to level B1-B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. With only two interviews, the size of this study was small, and it means that some things are not possible to be concluded from this small group of participants. In possible follow-up research, this issue can be reconsidered, and the interviews conducted more widely (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The interviews took place in early June 2022 and mid-July 2022. One interview was conducted in person in a location agreed upon with the participant and another one was conducted in a WhatsApp video call. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted 80-90 minutes long. The interview guide can be found in Appendix I.

4.3 Data analysis methods

When analyzing the material, I transcribed most of the interviews. Since the interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews, the conversations sometimes strayed from the research focus, so I chose to omit from the transcription any parts I deemed irrelevant to the study. According to Leavy (2017), the first step in the analysis of the material is precisely the transcription of the material, after which the transcribed material must be arranged, and the way of arrangement depends on the extent of the material being processed. In my analysis, I organized the issues discussed in the interviews into subject areas according to the questions in the interview guide. By doing so, I aimed to make it possible to compare the topics

brought up in the interviews with my own experiences and previous studies (see Chapter 2), and to be able to examine the relationship between them in the results.

4.4 Research Positionality

I have developed a personal interest in this topic since it is clearly related to my studies and my career. I have experienced that singing the lyrics from memory while performing can cause stress for many singers, myself included, and that's why I wanted to investigate professional singers' work on memorizing lyrics. As a professional singer myself who often sings in Spanish, which is not my native language, I wanted to study the topic with the emphasis of professional singers' approaches to foreign language repertoire. I am a close colleague of both research participants. The closeness provides a fruitful environment for an interview since the interviewees can freely and openly talk about their experiences and we have already built a mutual trust. Since we are all at similar career stages, we form a homogenous group. Having interviewed research participants at different careers stages (i.e. singers with decades of experience) could have potentially led to different findings to emerging.

4.5 Ethics

The research participants signed informed consent forms prior to the data collection (see Appendix II). The consent forms followed the guidelines of the national advisory board on research ethics in the human sciences (TENK, 2012). In order to conduct the study as ethically as possible, I thought about the following aspects regarding the interviews. I anonymized the interviewees by assigning them the names interviewee A and B, even though they were willing to be named in the study. I decided, however, that since naming the participants would not bring anything additional to the study, I would omit their names. I did so already in the transcribing phase. The interviewees participated entirely of their own free will and had the right to opt out of the study at any stage.

I audio recorded the interviews on my phone, which is password protected. The interviews are not stored anywhere else (e.g., in cloud services). I will delete the interviews from my phone after publication. The personal data of the interviewees will not be processed, and the interviews do not contain any sensitive information. I conducted the interviews in Finnish because both of my interviewees and myself speak Finnish as our mother tongue. The written report is in English, so after transcribing the interviews, analyzing them, and initially writing the Results chapter in Finnish, I translated it into English. Finally, I sent the Results Chapter to the interviewees so that they could check if I had understood correctly what they meant and if they thought the translation was successful.

5 Results

In this chapter, I present the results of my research. The chapter is organized in relation to my research questions. In Section 5.1 I therefore present the interviewees' processes of learning the lyrics. In Section 5.2 I then examine how they remember the lyrics while performing. Finally, in Section 5.3 I present the coping mechanisms they use when they forget the lyrics while performing.

5.1 The process of learning lyrics

The interviewees use different strategies to memorize lyrics. Both interviewees said that they learn the lyrics and the melody together and not separately. While learning the melody neither of them sing it without lyrics but interviewee B adds that she first focuses on learning the melody, for example by repeating the words of the first verse, before learning all the words. The interviewees opinion was that through learning melody and lyrics together the two are better linked. Both said they learn the lyrics first by singing it through, i.e. learning by motor memory (see Chapter 3.2), and only then deliberately if necessary. For interviewee A, it was important to write the lyrics by hand and make notes on them, if necessary, for example if two words are sung together, she writes them directly together or marks an arc between them. When writing by hand, interviewee A said she is able to remember the lyrics better. Interviewee A also sings in languages she does not speak at all, so she writes down the words phonetically and always likes to check the pronunciation with a native speaker. She said that it is important to learn the lyrics so smoothly that they do not feel awkward even when singing quickly. Interviewee A also described using the feeling arising from the lyrics as a memory aid, remembering that a certain feeling comes at a certain point. She also said that she sometimes makes cause-and-effect associations that make a frame for a song and results in it being easier to remember the lyrics in a situation where there are similar verses and only some words change. Interviewee B stated that the genre affects her way of learning lyrics more than the language of the lyrics. Interviewee B paid attention to alliterations and rhyming words when learning the lyrics. She also studies the poetic meter, the rhythm and emphasis of the words, and the relationship of the lyrics to the music. Both interviewees said that they use "close reading" (*lähiluku*, in Finnish) as an important

tool for working with lyrics. This means that they go through the song phrase by phrase by emphasizing different words and emotional expressions and thinking about how they want to interpret each phrase. Doing so helps them to memorize the lyrics better. As an example, interviewee B gave the phrase "I love you", which she initially sang with an emphasis on each word in turn (**I** love you, I **LOVE** you, or I love **YOU**) and finally decided which message she wanted to convey with the emphasis she chose.

Both interviewees stated that the timing of the final memorization of the lyrics depends on the rush and the material. Both felt that learning the lyrics from memory was faster when singing in Finnish and in English. Interviewee A said that being in a rush affects the order in which she uses different methods when learning lyrics. If she knows the language and has a recording of the song, she first learns the lyrics by singing along with the recording and only then writes them down herself but in a rush, she writes the lyrics by hand right away. Interviewee B said that she starts singing the lyrics from memory as early as possible. She already tries to sing from memory in rehearsals, except if it is a cover song that she has not had enough time to practice in advance, in which case she takes the written lyrics to rehearsals and learns them from memory only for the gig.

5.2 Remembering lyrics while performing

Both interviewees explained that singing the lyrics from memory depended on the nature of the performance. The distinction seemed to be between one's own gigs and so-called "party gigs". At their own concerts, the interviewees wanted to know the songs very well and sing them from memory to be able to focus on the expression of the song. However, they said that they sometimes rely on a cheat sheet that is hidden, for example, on the floor next to the set list, so that the audience cannot see it. On the sheet, they write the beginnings of verses and passages that are hard to remember, for example.

In a "party gig", when the performance is ordered for a private event, interviewee A said that she usually keeps the lyrics on the side on an iPad just in case, but that she does not necessarily look at them. She clarified that she often knows the lyrics from

memory so that she only glances at the sheet at the beginning of the phrases and remembers the rest, but sometimes because of her busy schedule learning songs, it happens that she has to look at the lyrics for the entire verse. This, according to her, annoys her. To be able to just quickly look at the lyric sheet on the iPad, she uses different colors to mark the beginnings of verses. Interviewee B said that she mostly sings from memory. A situation when she might use a lyric sheet on stage would be, for example, a wedding when there is a specific song request or perhaps a wedding dance, which she is probably only going to sing for this one wedding and does not need to remember it after the gig. In such situations she said that she places the lyrics right in front of her because she thinks that the most important thing is that the song should be sung correctly, just as the wedding couple wanted the song to be. She further pointed out that the audience is then usually focusing on watching the couple's dance and not so much on watching her. According to her, the only problem with using the lyrics in such situations is if the song sounds like it is being sung from a sheet, if it seems like she is not making contact with the audience, or if she is not singing it as well as she could.

Both interviewees try to remember the lyrics using muscle memory (i.e. motor memory, see Chapter 3.2). As Interviewee A describes, it is important to practice the lyrics so that she knows how the words feel in her mouth, that the words come from muscle memory and that she does not have to think about what comes out of her mouth. In addition, both interviewees are alert during the transitions, for example when the band plays the intro or interlude, both interviewees focus on what they are supposed to sing next. Interviewee A adds that she visualizes the lyric sheet with newer songs to recall the order of parts in a song. In addition, when singing, she thinks about the next phrase in advance, that is, when she is already singing the first phrase, sometimes she can think about the beginning of the next phrase at the same time. When I asked if this ever confused her, she said that it usually does not. Interviewee B also is of the opinion that she feels that she has a flow-based memory, in which case she tries to get into a state of flow when performing, where the lyrics come naturally without thinking. Interviewee B said that the most important thing in terms of remembering the lyrics on stage is that she speaks to the audience between the songs until she is ready to start the next song. In other words, she does not start or let the band start a song before she is ready to perform and focus on the song. She

also described how as an audience member at other's gigs, she has noticed that it can be confusing for the singer if the band starts a song when the singer is not yet ready. Interviewee B told that the more music she has absorbed, the more individual words she forgets, because the phrases are not as thoroughly in the muscle memory as when there were fewer songs and they were repeated more, so as her library expands, the problems change. For example, she sometimes remembers the meaning but not the single words. This happens especially in a foreign language.

5.3 Coping mechanisms when lyrics are forgotten on stage

When the lyrics were forgotten on stage, the interviewees had similar coping mechanisms they used to save the situation, without the audience necessarily noticing that they had forgotten the lyrics. One strategy they both mentioned was to take a break and indicate to the band to play a solo or to continue longer in the part they are already playing, this way it could look like it was intended. Also, both interviewees mentioned singing the lyrics of the previous verse or singing the same lyrics twice, as well as singing without words, including scatting, humming, or singing with relevant syllables such as "ay ay" in Flamenco or "trallallaa" in Finnish folk songs. Both interviewees said that the language of the song affects whether they are able to produce replacement words when they forget the lyrics, and that they are able to do so in Finnish and English, but not in any of the other languages in which they sing. Interviewee A described coming up with replacement words when forgetting the lyrics more than interviewee B. Interviewee A has also noticed at recent gigs that sometimes she might also sing something totally gibberish if the right words do not come out of her mouth. Usually, however, she said that she remembers the whole phrase if she remembers the beginning of it. Interviewee A mentioned that for her the worst thing is if there are lyric sheets on stage and she forgets the lyrics and has to check them, and the audience notices that she is looking at the lyric sheet. Therefore, she prefers to come up with her own lyrics when she forgets the right ones.

Interviewee B said that she repeats the lyrics in her mind until the last moment before going to the stage so that they come from muscle memory. She described getting nervous especially if the song has a lot of words and they are fast. In such songs, she

worries that the song will fall flat if she forgets the lyrics, because in those songs, the rhythm and forward movement of the lyrics is what matters. In those kinds of intensive songs where there are no breaks, she thinks beforehand what she can do if she forgets a certain phrase. She feels that in songs like this she must plan in advance how to get through if she forgets the lyrics. Often, because she has already sung the songs in the practice session without a lyric sheet, she already knows which parts are the hardest to remember or phrases that are so similar to other phrases that she could easily mix them up. She decides in advance if it is better to take a break somewhere in the song, or if that would just confuse her even more. Interviewee B said that performing in Spanish and French makes her more nervous about remembering the lyrics, because those languages are not as fluent as Finnish and English, which give her more options when forgetting words. Interviewee B told how when singing the songs that she has composed herself, if she forgets the next phrase, she just leaves it out completely and tries to remember the following phrase after that:

Tai jos lähtenyt fraasiin ja unohtaa mikä on seuraava niin jätän pois ja koitan etsiä seuraavaan fraasiin, aina se seuraavakaan ei löydy, mut aika usein löytyy, silloin sinne jää vain paussi eikä kukaa huomaa jos pitää pokan.

[You cannot always find the next phrase either, but quite often you can find it, leaving only a phrase-long pause in the song and no one notices if you do not show it with your face.]

Another thing interviewee B has done when forgotten the lyrics is to interrupt the song. She has started the song again saying, for example, “Otetaas tää nyt uudestaan” [“Let's take this again”] or “Mikä tää biisi on mitä me ollaan tekemässä?” [“What is this song, which are we doing?”]. She told how when she asks a question out loud, for example “How does this start?”, she invites the audience to join in and the audience can respond. According to her, this can create a fun situation.

After forgetting the lyrics, even if one manages to cover up the mistake, it can be difficult to get back into a good performance mood. Interviewee B described the mental process in that situation and how she copes with it.

Jos tulee virhe, pahinta on jos keikan aikana alkaa jännittämään enemmän ja kyseenalaistamaan osaako tehdä hommansa eli koitan olla menemättä sinne

eli jos tulee virhe mieltii vain et toi oli tossa, yksittäinen asia ja mä keskityn tähän musan tekemiseen nyt ja flow pääsyyn takas.

[If there is a mistake, the worst thing is if during the gig you start to get more nervous and question whether you can do your job, so, I try not to go there, so if there is a mistake, I just let it go and think that it was a single thing and now I focus on making music and getting back to flow.]

6 Discussion and conclusions

In this final chapter I will discuss the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and the similarities and the differences in the reviewed literature. I will also discuss the limitations of the study and avenues for further research.

Considering the interviews in relation to the theoretical framework of this study there were many similarities found. There were many strategies for memorizing the lyrics in Lindsberg and Groop's article (2014) about singer's memory which were consistent with the means discussed in the interviews. For example, writing the lyrics on paper by hand, listening to a recording of the song, attaching emotions and an interpretation to the lyrics, and making a storyline to structure the song. Many of the strategies that came up in the interviews were intertwined with work on the interpretation of the text, which was said to aid remembering the lyrics. Further research could be made about the work related to the interpretation of the lyrics and how that work affects memorization and remembering lyrics while performing.

Similarities in the findings of Lindsberg and Groop (2014) and the interviews conducted for this study are particularly relevant for answering this study's third research question, which was *How does the language of the song influence memorization of the lyrics and remembering them during performance?* Lindsberg and Groop (2014) indicated that imitation is a key tool to learn foreign texts since the aim is to achieve authenticity in the pronunciation of the language and that it is therefore possible to quickly memorize a vocal work in a foreign language by listening to a record, for example (Lindsberg & Groop, 2014). One interviewee similarly discussed listening to the song and singing along with a recording before starting to work on the song in other ways. Some other basic tools when starting to learn a song in a foreign language that were mentioned in the interviews were translating the text, writing the lyrics down phonetically, and checking the pronunciation from a native speaker. When singing in a foreign language, the importance of understanding each word in order to connect the words to emotional reactions was emphasized by both Lindsberg and Groop (2014) and the interviewees. The problem discussed with the interviewees related to understanding every word when singing in a foreign language was that sometimes, even after translating the

words, one might realize after a while that one no longer remembers the exact translation for a certain word. Interviewees talked about how their own mother tongue is an emotional language for them and every word gets more meaning and emotion. When singing in a mother tongue, therefore, they can memorize lyrics faster and with more ease, and replace any forgotten lyrics spontaneously. This finding aligns with Chaffin and colleagues (2015), according to whom emotional memories are easier to remember than material that does not evoke emotions. That is why it is logical that a song sung in one's mother tongue in which every word has a stronger meaning is easier to remember. On the other hand, according to two studies by Ginsborg (2000, 2002), knowing the semantic meaning of the lyrics is not as important for memorizing them as it is for interpreting a song. Thus, the singer does not necessarily need to focus on the semantic meaning of the lyrics to remember them (Ginsborg, 2002).

Further consistencies were found related to how musicians can learn a song by memory by forming a so-called "associative chain" while practicing it, so that each part reminds them of the next part (Chaffin et al., 2015, see also Section 3.2). Looking at the two interviews, it can be concluded that the interviewees use this strategy a lot. Both interviewees try to remember the lyrics using motor memory. Interviewee A said that it is important for her to practice the lyrics so that she knows how the words feel in her mouth, that the words come from muscle memory, and that she does not have to think about what comes out of her mouth. Interviewee B was of the opinion that she feels that she has a flow-based memory, which is why she tries to get into a state of flow when performing, where the lyrics come naturally without thinking. Like in the case of interviewee B, there were also some musicians in Hallam's (1997) study who consciously chose to rely only on automation and avoided analytical thinking on stage, although as they themselves said it required courage and self-confidence.

Depending only on motor memory and associative chains can lead to problems for singers, since doing so in performance situations will require them to start from the beginning if they forget one part (Chaffin et. al, 2015). To avoid this situation, associative chains can be combined with deliberate memory training in which a musician makes the motor and auditory chains "content addressable" (see Section

3.2). After learning a song using deliberate memorization, a musician can rely on the mental map they created through deliberate memorization when performing and be able to cope in a situation where the association chain fails (Chaffin et al., 2015). Some forms of deliberate memorization emerged in the interviews. Interviewee A described sometimes making cause-and-effect associations to create a frame for a song, which results in it being easier to remember the lyrics in a situation where there are similar verses or when only some words change. Interviewee B paid attention to alliterations and rhyming words when learning the lyrics. She also studies the poetic meter, the rhythm and emphasis of the words, and the relationship of the lyrics to the music. This way of analyzing lyrics is related to structural memory training. Structural memory helps the musician get a framework for memorized music and involves dividing the song into parts based on melody, harmony, and meter so that the musician can create a mental map for the song (Chaffin et al., 2015). In the case of singers, the lyrics play a big role in structuring the material and therefore in order to support memory it is possible to develop mental images based on the content of the text (Lindsberg & Groop, 2014).

The findings from the two interviews in this study are also consistent with findings from earlier research that has shown that for professional singers memorizing words and music together is clearly a more effective strategy than memorizing them separately (Ginsborg, 2000; Ginsborg & Sloboda, 2007). Neither of the interviewees described singing without lyrics while learning the melody. The interviewees said that through learning melody and lyrics together the two are better linked. When considering learning of lyrics, Ginsborg's (2000) singers used strategies similar to those of the interviewees. The lyric learning of both the interviewees and Ginsborg's (2000) singers included studying the meaning of the text, translating it into the mother tongue if necessary, and memorizing the lyrics phonetically. In Ginsborg's research (2000) the best memorizer started memorizing early and tested their memory throughout their practice sessions. Similarly, interviewee B explained that she already tested herself in the band practice to see if she could remember the song from memory. According to Ginsborg (2000) in a performance situation, when thinking about memorization, singers were more worried about forgetting the words than the melody, so their memorization strategies focused primarily on the lyrics rather than the music. The lyric learning was reported to have three stages: 1) initial

study, 2) learning, and 3) deliberate, rather than implicit, memorization (Ginsborg, 2000). I am particularly interested in this third stage of learning lyrics. Therefore, a possible avenue for further research could be to investigate with a larger sample of singers what strategies they use in deliberate memorization and how these strategies could be more effective and systematic. It would also be interesting to compare, for example, the memorization strategies of actors with monologues to singers with lyrics and explore if there are ways for these groups of artists to learn from each other.

In addition to the similarities identified above, there are also a number of ways this research adds to the existing literature. An important issue in this study, that did not come out much in the earlier research I reviewed, is the coping mechanisms on stage if the words are forgotten and the lyrics are not in a language that the singer speaks fluently. The aspect of forgetting lyrics on stage was raised only in the work of Ginsborg (2002), which described how successful memorizers knew the semantic meaning of the text well enough that they were able to replace the correct words with alternative words when they were forgotten and thus able to continue the performance. The premise of that study was therefore that the singer sings in their mother tongue or in a language in which they are skilled. This strategy of replacing forgotten lyrics with alternative words during a performance was also mentioned by the interviewees in this study and by Lindsberg and Groop (2014). However, this strategy cannot work when the singer does not know the language to a sufficiently high degree. This is one of the reasons I chose to interview singers who often sing in a language that they do not speak fluently. In such cases, strategies, such as repeating a different verse even though the singer knows it is not the correct one, or singing with syllables such as “la, la”, were offered by both Lindsberg and Groop (2014) and the interviewees.

One difference between this study and previous research investigating singers' memorization was that the earlier research that I reviewed studied classical singers, whereas the singers interviewed in this study work in the fields of popular music and different musical traditions. For this reason, some of the described strategies for practicing lyrics differed. For example, in one article the singers were encouraged to learn lyrics by speaking them first without a melody but with its rhythm to create a

basis for memorizing the lyrics (De Young, 2017). In this case, in order for the singer to be able to sing a completely new song with the rhythm of the song, without knowing the melody, the singer would have to have the song in notated form (e.g. sheet music), which the singers I interviewed often do not have. According to this study, while classical pieces can be learned by first practicing the lyrics, traditional songs are practiced by ear, in which case the words and the melody are learned at the same time.

To conclude, previously identified approaches professional singers use to memorize lyrics and remember the lyrics in the moment of performance, such as combining associative chains with deliberate memory training are essential. It is important to note that this study has limitations. One of the most significant limitations was the small number of interviewees. With only two interviewees, it is not possible to draw strong conclusions or make generalizations. For this reason, an avenue for future research would be to extend this study by conducting interviews with a bigger and more diverse group of singers. In addition, the study raised many additional questions for possible future research. The previously mentioned deliberate memorization of lyrics and an interdisciplinary study with singers and actors would both potentially offer important contributions to the field. Many strategies that arose in the interviews were intertwined with work on text interpretation which helps remembering the lyrics. Therefore, the interpretation of lyrics and its effects on memorization when performing would be another interesting area for further research, as would the effects of stage fright among singers on memory.

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Appendixes

Appendix I. Haastattelukysymykset [Interview questions]

- Opetteletko sanat ja melodian yhdessä vai erikseen ja jos erikseen niin kumman ensin?
- Opetteletko sanoja analyytisesti tai automaatiolla samalla kun opettelet melodian?
- Onko sinulla tietoisia prosesseja sanojen muistamista varten? Mihin kiinnität huomiota sanoja opetellessa?
- Vaikuttaako sanojen kieli tapaasi opetella sanoja?
- Missä kohdassa harjoittelua opettelet sanat ulkoa jos aiot esittää sen ulkoa?
- Oletko koskaan unohtanut sanat lavalla?
- Jos olet, miten olet toiminut niissä tilanteissa?
- Jännitätkö sanojen unohtamista lavalla?
- Mietitkö etukäteen ennen keikkaa miten tulet muistamaan sanat lavalla tai mitä teet jos unohdat?
- Millaisia käytännön keinoja sinulla on sanojen muistamista varten esiintymistilanteessa?
- Vaikuttaako sanojen kieli toimimiseen sanojen unohtuessa?
- Miten laulun kieli vaikuttaa esiintymisjännitykseen?

Appendix II.

TUTKIMUSLUPA

Tällä lomakkeella pyydän lupaa haastatteluaineiston keruuseen. Kerään aineistoa maisterintutkintooni kuuluvan lopputyön toteuttamiseen osana opintojani Taideyliopiston Sibelius-Akatemiassa. Tutkielmani tavoitteena on tutkia ammattilaulajien lähestymistapoja sanojen ulkoa opettelemiseen ja ulkoa esiintymiseen. Kerään haastatteluaineistoja kesäkuussa ja heinäkuussa 2022. Aineistoa käytetään tutkielmassa, joka valmistuu vuonna 2022.

Ainoastaan tutkimuksen vastuullinen tutkija Laura Maria Rinta käsittelee aineistoa eikä tutkimusraportista voida yksilöidä tutkimuksen piiriin kuulunutta henkilöä, ellei tutkimukseen osallistunut tätä pyydä. Tutkimussuostumuksista syntyy väliaikainen manuaalinen rekisteri (GDPR, PDA 10§, 24§), joka tuhoaan välittömästi aineistonkeruun toteuttamisen jälkeen.

Voit vetäytyä tutkimuksesta ja pyytää käsikirjoituksen luettavaksesi tutkimuksen kaikissa vaiheissa.

Pyydän ystävällisesti allekirjoittamaan tämän lomakkeen ja palauttamaan sen projektin vastuulliselle tutkijalle Laura Maria Rinta, lauramaria.rinta@uniarts.fi

Annan suostumukseni haastattelun keräämiseen, tallentamiseen ja tutkimuskäyttöön.

Laura Maria Rinta, lauramaria.rinta@uniarts.fi

Paikka ja aika (osallistuja)

