



GUEST SESSIONS

12

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

~400

TAPETOWN × LAKE WOOZOO



# TALENT ACROSS BORDERS

Building sustainable music careers and resilience across Europe

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Building sustainable music careers and resilience across Europe.

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A handbook from Talent Across Borders — a Tapetown (Aarhus) and Lake Woozoo (Groningen) partnership, supported by Erasmus+.

Talent Across Borders is a Denmark–Netherlands music exchange, run under Erasmus+ (KA210-YOU small-scale partnership) across 2025–2026, distilling twelve guest sessions and two live workshops into this field guide.



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TAPETOWN · AARHUS  
LAKE WOOZOO · GRONINGEN

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2026

# CONTENTS

|                 |                                                 |          |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <b>PART ONE</b> | <b>THE PROJECT</b>                              | <b>5</b> |
| 01              | Why this project exists                         | 6        |
| 02              | What we built, and why it looks the way it does | 12       |
| 03              | What happened                                   | 13       |

|                 |                                                           |           |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>PART TWO</b> | <b>WHAT WE LEARNED</b>                                    | <b>15</b> |
|                 | Twelve sessions, one per week                             | 16        |
|                 | The industry is not a wall, it is a web                   | 18        |
| 04              | What twelve conversations add up to                       | 19        |
| 05              | Nobody is waiting for you                                 | 23        |
| 06              | Getting booked: the view from the other side of the table | 26        |
| 07              | Touring without permission                                | 28        |
| 08              | Releasing music that stays alive                          | 31        |
| 09              | The long game: your head, your money, your years          | 33        |
| 10              | The rooms                                                 | 36        |
| 11              | What we found, and what the research says                 | 39        |

|                   |                                |           |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>PART THREE</b> | <b>FOR ORGANISATIONS</b>       | <b>42</b> |
| 12                | How to run something like this | 43        |
| 13                | What the project produced      | 45        |

|  |                    |           |
|--|--------------------|-----------|
|  | <b>A LAST WORD</b> | <b>46</b> |
|--|--------------------|-----------|

|   |                                        |           |
|---|----------------------------------------|-----------|
|   | <b>APPENDIX · TEMPLATES</b>            | <b>47</b> |
| A | The outreach email that gets read      | 47        |
| B | The two-year plan                      | 48        |
| C | The live-video checklist               | 48        |
| D | The outreach tracker                   | 49        |
| E | Reframes worth pinning above your desk | 50        |
| F | The guests, and where to go deeper     | 50        |

THREE PARTS · THIRTEEN CHAPTERS · SIX  
TEMPLATES

TALENT / ACROSS / BORDERS

# HOW TO READ THIS HANDBOOK

A note on where this comes from, because it changes how you should weigh it.

This handbook is not a research report, and it does not pretend to be one. Over a year, we sat down with twelve people who work at different points in the European music industry, venue directors, bookers, festival programmers, label managers, a psychologist, an artist manager, a collective founder, and we asked them, plainly, how it actually works and what they wish young artists understood. What you are reading is the distillation of those conversations, together with what we learned from running the project around them.

That has a strength and a limit, and you should hold both. The strength is that this is first-hand testimony from people who make these decisions for a living, and that a striking number of them, sitting in different chairs and different countries, arrived at the same conclusions without ever comparing notes. When that happens, it is worth more than any single expert's opinion. The limit is that twelve conversations are twelve conversations. This is not a statistically representative survey, our guests came largely from Denmark and the Netherlands, and much of the wisdom here is practical rather than proven. Where we lean on hard numbers, they come from published research, and we point you to it in the chapter called What We Found, and What the Research Says About It, and in the reading list at the end. Where a figure came only from a conversation, we have either sourced it properly or left it out.

Read it, then, as a field guide written from experience, not a study. Take what fits your situation, test it, and discard what does not. The most useful thing in these pages is rarely a single fact. It is the shape of how the whole thing works, seen from the inside by people who were once exactly where you are now.

TWELVE GUESTS · ONE YEAR

“

Take what fits your situation, test it, and discard what does not.

TALENT / ACROSS / BORDERS

BORL

4



PART ONE

AARHUS

GRONINGEN

01

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# THE PROJECT

WHY IT EXISTS · WHAT WE BELIEVE · WHAT WE BUILT · WHAT HAPPENED

# WHY THIS PROJECT EXISTS

**Nobody teaches you how to have a music career.**

You learn your instrument. Maybe you study production, maybe you go to a conservatory. And then you stand there with your songs and discover that the actual job is something else entirely: booking, touring logistics, release strategy, social media, funding applications, contracts, mental stamina. You have to do everything yourself, and worse, you have no network telling you what you don't even know to ask about.

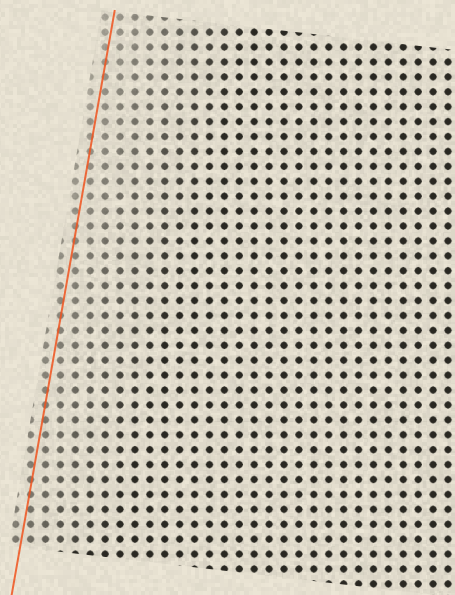
Here is the strange part. Most people in the music industry are helpful when you ask them. Bookers, label managers, promoters and managers answer questions, and they remember what it was like. The willingness is there; the difficulty is reaching it. If you are 22 and playing your fourth show in a rehearsal-space venue, you do not know any bookers, and you do not know that the booker at the venue you dream of playing reads 40 to 50 band emails a week and has around 80 slots a year to give. You do not know the arithmetic you are up against, and you do not know the person who could explain it to you.

Talent Across Borders was built to close that gap. We did not set out to run a course or a lecture series, but to build something simpler: a persistent, low-threshold community in which young artists and independent industry people share the same room, and a series of honest conversations in which the people on the other side of the table explain how it actually works. This handbook is where we gathered what those conversations taught, so that the knowledge outlives the project that produced it.

40–50 EMAILS / WEEK  
~80 SLOTS / YEAR

“

The willingness is there; the difficulty is reaching it.



6

The second idea in the project is in the name. Careers get stuck inside borders. A Danish band plays the same five venues at home and doesn't know that a Dutch band their size is facing the exact same wall, and that the two of them could swap: you book Holland, we book Denmark, we split Germany. That trade is how I toured when I was doing it myself, and it works, but it depends on knowing someone on the other side of the border, which is precisely what most young artists do not have. So TAB was set up as a Denmark–Netherlands exchange, with the explicit aim of making those connections ordinary rather than lucky.

The logic behind that is hard to argue with. Europe's borders are open, people cross them for a weekend without a second thought, and many of its music scenes resemble one another closely. Yet an emerging artist who stays inside a single country has a much harder time building an audience large enough to sustain a career, and touring abroad is one of the few reliable ways to widen it. That is far easier when you have a counterpart on the other side who knows their own venues and will share the work. For a continent this closely connected, an artist not crossing borders is a little like refusing to leave one city, and the whole point of TAB was to make leaving feel possible.

TAB is supported by Erasmus+ across 2025–2026, and run as a partnership between two organisations: Tapetown, a recording studio and music community in Aarhus, Denmark, and Lake Woozoo, a Dutch partner in Groningen. That a studio leads it is not incidental. A studio sits in the middle of the ecosystem: artists come through every week, and so do the people who record, release, book and promote them. We didn't have to build a network from zero. We opened the one we had, and Lake Woozoo opened the Dutch side of it, which is how a project run out of Aarhus ended up with half its guests and one of its two live workshops in the north of the Netherlands.

DK ⇄ NL EXCHANGE  
ERASMUS+ · 2025–2026

“

**You book Holland, we book  
Denmark, we split Germany.**

THIS CHAPTER

WHY THIS  
PROJECT  
EXISTS

7

## WHAT WE BELIEVE, AND WHY THIS HANDBOOK EXISTS

Before anything else, I want to set out the idea the whole project rests on, because everything that follows grows from it.

Most discussions of musicians and mental health concentrate on how to withstand the strain. Rest, boundaries, breathing, knowing when to ask for help. That work matters, and some of this handbook is given over to it. Over the years, though, I have come to believe that much of what wears young artists down begins further upstream, and that it has less to do with managing stress once it arrives than with a deeper sense that they have very little say in where their own career is heading.

When you do not understand how the industry works, your career becomes something that happens to you. You wait to be discovered, wait for an agent to call, wait for the algorithm to take an interest, and the waiting itself is corrosive, because it places your future in other people's hands and leaves you with nothing to do but worry about it. I believe that sense of powerlessness causes real harm, and that a good deal of what the mental-health statistics record is a generation of musicians who feel they are not the ones steering.

The premise TAB was built to test is a straightforward one. If you give a young artist a genuine understanding of how the industry works, together with peers to build alongside, you return to them a measure of control over their own future. An artist who understands how a booker reaches a decision, who knows that applying does not require an agent, who holds a rough two-year plan and has a few counterparts across the border to exchange shows with, tends to carry themselves more calmly, largely because their career has begun to feel like something they can act upon rather than something they must wait for. **Knowledge and network together produce agency, and agency, I am convinced, is where a great deal of resilience originates.** It is far easier to withstand a demanding industry when you believe you can shape your position within it.

—  
KNOWLEDGE + NETWORK  
= AGENCY

“

Your career becomes something that happens to you.

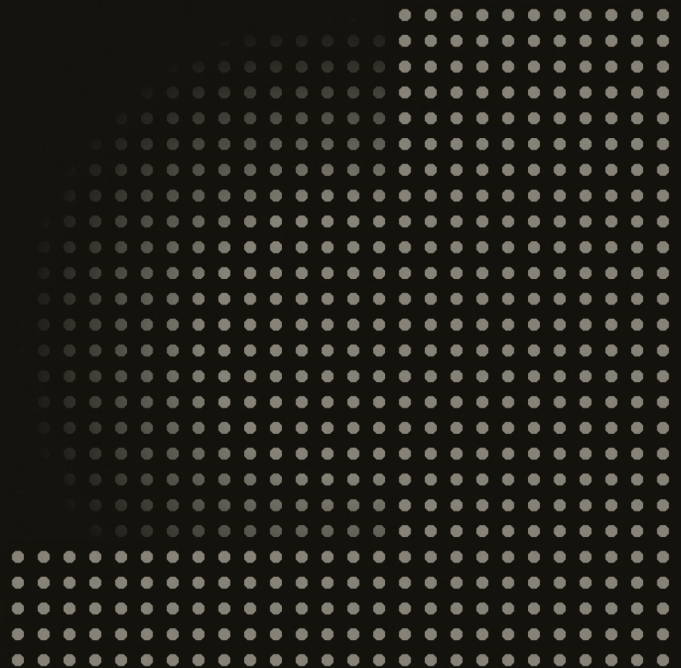






“Knowledge and network together produce agency, and agency... is where a great deal of resilience originates.”

TALENT ACROSS BORDERS · THE THESIS · PART ONE



This is what allows a handbook full of booking emails and release plans to serve, at the same time, as a handbook about mental health. Everything practical in Part 2 amounts, in its own way, to a measure of that control being handed back. I make no claim that knowledge softens the industry, because it does not, but it changes your relationship to the difficulty. A problem you understand and can work at steadily is one you can live with, where a difficulty that remains a mystery, and to which you feel subject, sits far more heavily.

I want to be candid about a conviction that runs underneath all of this, because it shapes the whole approach and it is easy to misread. There is a good deal of encouragement at the moment to sit with how hard things are, to dwell on the difficulty and study how it feels. I do not dismiss that. Feelings are real, and suppressing them helps no one. My concern is with what happens when the study of the difficulty becomes the whole of the response.

Any competitive field looks unfair from the newcomer's vantage point, and the natural instinct is to ask how the difficulty itself might be reduced. I understand that instinct, but in my experience it changes remarkably little, because the difficulty does not disappear so much as move. Music is the clearest illustration. Once anyone could release a record without a label, the barrier did not vanish; it relocated, and the new struggle became visibility inside an ocean of releases. This is simply the nature of a field in which supply so far outstrips demand, and music is an extreme case of exactly that. When there is far more supply than the ecosystem can absorb, it becomes difficult for everyone in it, and much of the behaviour that follows, undercutting, playing for too little, is not malice but survival. Most people are trying to do well inside a structure that is genuinely hard.

So the more useful response, to my mind, is to equip people to meet the difficulty rather than to argue it away, to move from "this is hard, therefore I cannot" toward "this is hard, therefore I will act." None of this excuses the parts of the industry that ought to change. Gatekeeping, exploitation and the conditions that should not exist deserve to be named and improved, and I have no wish to diminish their seriousness; we should always be working to make the industry a fairer place for everyone.

A STRUCTURE THAT IS  
GENUINELY HARD

“

This is hard, therefore I will  
act.

TALENT  
ACROSS  
BORDERS

10

But for the individual artist standing at the beginning, I believe the surer path, to both a career and a settled mind, is agency: the understanding, the tools and the means to steer their own course rather than to stand as an observer of their circumstances. In my experience, a person who feels more in control of their life is a happier one, and that is as much a claim about mental health as it is about careers.

There is one further conviction in these pages, and it may be the one I most hope carries. Almost everything here works better when people share. A young artist can begin to feel in control only because those ahead of them were willing to explain how things work, and a scene grows only because its members exchange shows, contacts and honest counsel rather than guarding them. Gatekeeping, I think, grows out of a scarcity instinct, the quiet fear that there is only so much to go round.

Nearly everything we saw pointed the other way. Knowledge held tightly is stored energy, and energy is of more use in motion than at rest; those who give the most tend, over time, to receive the most in return, and a scene through which knowledge moves freely lifts everyone within it, the giver included. The path through music is a hard one however you walk it, which is all the more reason to make friends along the way and to hold on to why you began, since that is what sustains the energy to keep going when it turns difficult. If there is a single disposition this project hopes to encourage, it is that one: that there is enough to go round, that helping the next person costs you nothing you truly needed, and that an open hand is, in the long run, both the more generous and the more durable way to move through a career in music.

So this handbook is written for two readers at once. The first is a young artist who never took part in our sessions, somewhere in Europe, who needs the knowledge itself. The second is anyone who leads, or hopes to lead, a project of this kind. If you are the first reader, treat Part 2 as your toolkit and Part 3 as a look behind the curtain. If you are the second, read it in the other order. You are meant to be holding the same book.



AARHUS # GRONINGEN

11

# WHAT WE BUILT, AND WHY IT LOOKS THE WAY IT DOES

The project has three components, and the order matters.

**The community is the spine.** A dedicated Discord server connecting artists and independent industry people, aimed at musicians roughly 15 to 30 years old. Over the year it grew to close to 400 members, from the two partner countries and well beyond.

**The sessions are the engine.** A run of online sessions with independent industry people: venue bookers, a showcase-festival communications lead, label managers, DIY-touring specialists, festival programmers, an artist manager. Plus two physical workshops with added focus on mental health and where the community meets in person.

**The matchmaking is the point.** A forum where members can meet to talk as well as post about themselves and what kind of contact or collaborator they are looking for, making it more simple and transparent to connect.

The format decisions were deliberate, and if you are an organisation thinking about running something similar, they are probably the most useful thing in this chapter.

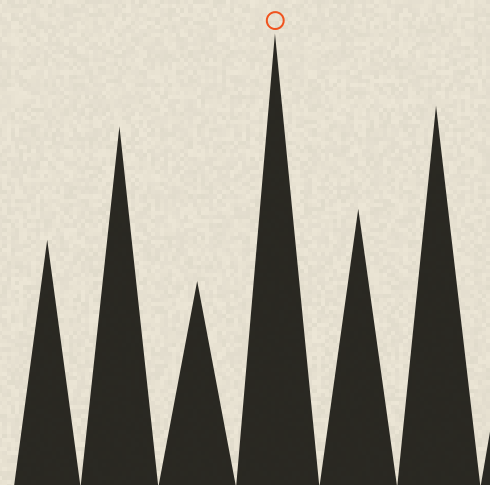
**Voice-only, no slides, no lecture.** Sessions run as conversations in a Discord voice channel, with nobody on camera. This came from a hunch that proved correct: guests reflect more honestly when there is no camera on them. Martin Aagaard, our first guest, said plainly that the format made it easier to think out loud. The informality proves it value here, and it is a large part of what makes people show up and speak freely.

**A chat, not an interview.** Sessions run as a conversation between colleagues, not a journalist interviewing a subject. I hosted the early sessions as someone who has also toured, written the funding applications and been broke in a van. Eryn, who took over hosting from inside the community, brought the opposite seat, just as useful: the young talent asking the questions everyone listening actually has. Either way, the guest aren't performing they're just talking.

COMMUNITY · SESSIONS  
MATCHMAKING

“

The matchmaking is the point.



# WHAT HAPPENED

Over the year the project ran a series of online sessions with people from every seat at the industry table, two physical workshops in Groningen and Aarhus (both livestreamed so nobody was shut out by distance), a matchmaking forum, and this handbook. The community around it grew to close to 400 people, which is the one figure worth holding onto, because it is the clearest sign of how much a resource like this was wanted.

But the value shows up better in stories than in figures.

**The network closed its own loops.** In session 5, Koen from Subroutine Records told us how he started as a volunteer at Vera in Groningen and built a twenty-year DIY-touring network from there. Two sessions later, Peter Dijkstra, who books Vera today, told the other half of the same story, including how he and Koen together carried the band The Homesick from a Frisian cassette release to a Sub Pop signing. For the young artists listening, this was the whole thesis made visible: the industry is not a wall, it is a web, and the people in it already know each other.

**The community fed the ecosystem it came from.** Green Tea Bitches, a band in the community, asked sharp questions especially in sessions 5 and 6, and later mentioned they were actively using this information to make better informed decisions in their career growth.

**A volunteer became the host.** Eryn's arc (member, volunteer, interviewer, host, and now someone with a music-industry career forming around this work) is the single clearest piece of evidence that the project does what it claims. TAB's stated goal is helping young people build sustainable careers in music. One of them built the start of it inside the project itself.

**Guests became contacts, not content.** Oscar O'Shea, our session 12 guest, manages artists out of Aarhus and was already doing live sessions with Tapetown before he ever joined us. Peter at Vera is now a direct booking contact in Groningen for the Danish side of the community.

~400 COMMUNITY MEMBERS

“

The industry is not a wall, it is a web.

13

TALENT ACROSS BORDERS



**Everyone we asked said yes.** We reached out through our own network, guest by guest, and person after person said yes, several of them unprompted suggesting others we should ask too. What came through in every conversation was the same thing: these are people who remember exactly how hard and confusing it was to find their own way in, and who genuinely wanted to hand what they'd learned to someone coming up behind them. I had this confirmed to me by a guest, Wytse, mid-session, when he said he had almost never met anyone in the industry who would not give advice if you asked them nicely. An industry that looks from a distance like a wall of gatekeepers turns out, up close, to be full of people who would gladly hold the door if you ask.

**And the room found it valuable.** People said the sessions were genuinely insightful, and that the laid-back, chat-between-friends atmosphere made what the guests shared feel more personal and more honest than a lecture or a panel ever does. A few said the conversations put the whole endeavour into perspective, because it turned out the path was often less mysterious than they had feared.

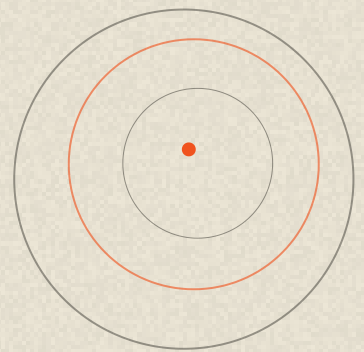
**The partnership held under pressure.** When Lake Wozoo's own studio, the planned venue for the Dutch workshop, was still mid-renovation as the date approached, the partners moved the event to Simplan, an established Groningen venue, and it went ahead as planned, with a warmer and more international room than we expected.

One more thing happened, and it is the reason this handbook exists. Across twelve conversations with people in very different seats, the same advice kept returning, unprompted and in much the same shape. When a series of people sitting in different chairs, in different countries, arrive at the same conclusions without ever comparing notes, it stops being opinion and becomes something closer to evidence. Part 2 sets out that evidence.

GRONINGEN → SIMPLON

“

...full of people who would gladly hold the door if you ask.



14

# 02

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## WHAT WE LEARNED

TWELVE CONVERSATIONS · WHAT THEY ADD UP TO · THE ARTIST'S TOOLKIT · THE EVIDENCE

# TWELVE SESSIONS

A host, a guest, and a chat full of musicians asking the questions they never had anyone to ask. Read the profiles in order and you will notice something: they keep appearing in each other's stories.

|                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>SESSION 01</p> <p><b>MARTIN AAGAARD</b></p> <p>Director, RADAR (Aarhus, DK)</p>                        | <p>Runs one of Aarhus's most important venues for upcoming music. Opened the series with the numbers every young band should know: 40 to 50 relevant band emails a week, roughly 80 slots a year. Frame a booking request like an investor pitch, not a plea.</p>                                                      |
| <p>SESSION 02</p> <p><b>JESPER BORUP</b></p> <p>Co-founder, Motiv (DK)</p>                                | <p>Twenty-plus years alongside artists, never as one. Ran the SOLO project for ROSA before founding Motiv, using art as a tool for better health. Got his own break by offering to book a festival for free: proof the door is marked volunteer.</p>                                                                   |
| <p>SESSION 03</p> <p><b>IVO SCHOT</b></p> <p>Subterranean Street Society (Utrecht, NL)</p>                | <p>Bassist, producer, studio owner, and for eight years organiser of an EU-funded exchange between Europe, Russia and Ukraine. The backbone of the mindset chapter: the boring 30 percent, compounding, and a TikTok experiment that went from zero to 14,000 followers in six months.</p>                             |
| <p>SESSION 04</p> <p><b>MILLE RAABY JENSEN</b></p> <p>Communications lead, SPOT Festival (Aarhus, DK)</p> | <p>SPOT is Aarhus's showcase festival, 200-plus acts a year, and Mille named the exact machinery TAB is built on: a Danish act to Groningen, a Dutch act to Aarhus. They book unsigned, unreleased, agent-less artists "if the talent is there."</p>                                                                   |
| <p>SESSION 05</p> <p><b>KOEN TER HEEGDE</b></p> <p>Subroutine Records / Yugo Futurism (NL)</p>            | <p>Label man (80-plus bands, around 160 releases) and Europe's quietest touring infrastructure in human form. Started as a volunteer at Vera in Groningen and built a network from Tallinn to Istanbul over twenty years. His session became the DIY touring chapter.</p>                                              |
| <p>SESSION 06</p> <p><b>BINA ROSENVINGE</b></p> <p>Label manager, Gateway Music (Aarhus, DK)</p>          | <p>Distribution and release strategy from the person who pitches playlists every week. Gateway sits under the Danish Musicians' Union, closer to the musician, sceptical of algorithm-chasing. Gave the line that deserves a poster: "once you're sick of your own product, that's when people start noticing it."</p> |

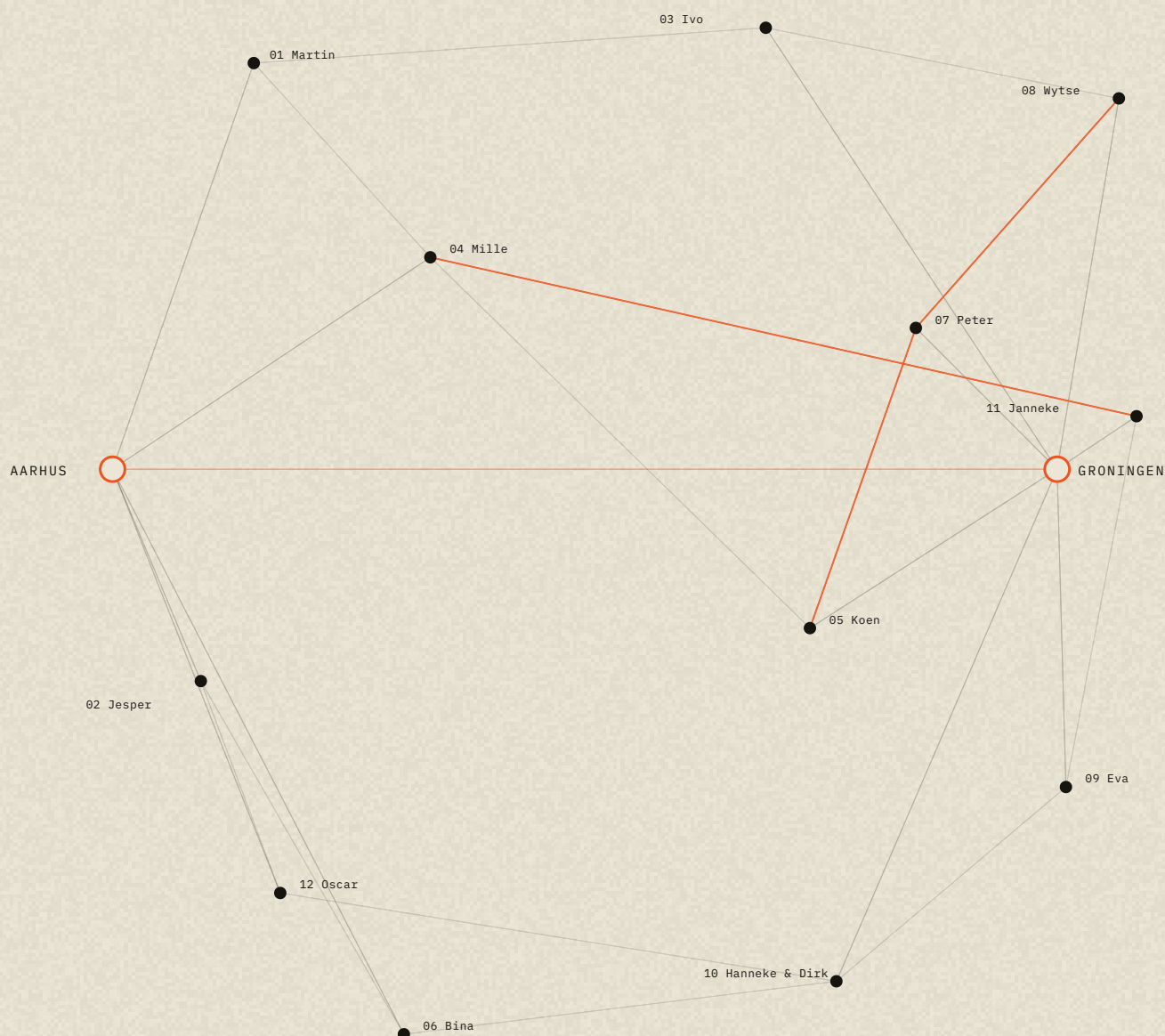
|                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>SESSION 07</p> <p><b>PETER DIJKSTRA</b></p> <p>Booker, Vera (Groningen, NL)</p>                                | <p>Music journalist turned promoter, roughly fifteen years in. Books Vera, the storied 450-capacity, volunteer-run venue. Managed The Homesick for a decade through a Sub Pop signing.</p>                                                                              |
| <p>SESSION 08</p> <p><b>WYTSE DIJKSTRA</b></p> <p>The Beatrix / Noord (Leeuwarden, NL)</p>                        | <p>Drummer and musician, founder of The Beatrix: a 150-capacity, all-volunteer venue in a former prison, flat €10 tickets. Gave the book its sharpest idea: the industry is linear, the community is circular. You can come back, because you made friends.</p>         |
| <p>SESSION 09</p> <p><b>EVA WATERBOLK</b></p> <p>Zeevonk Records (Groningen, NL)</p>                              | <p>Musician and founder of Zeevonk, a DIY label and collective, open and genre-free. Built from a feeling of loneliness into a collective that does the heavy admin together, at someone's home, over food, on a shared spreadsheet. Her advice ran on trust.</p>       |
| <p>SESSION 10</p> <p><b>HANNEKE DIJKSTRA &amp; DIRK BAART</b></p> <p>Simplon (Groningen) / EKKO (Utrecht, NL)</p> | <p>A double session, two programmers. Hanneke heads Simplon's Thursday UP night; Dirk books EKKO and Into the Great Wide Open. Together they gave the clearest answers in the series to how a booker decides, and when you're ready.</p>                                |
| <p>SESSION 11</p> <p><b>JANNEKE DE BOER</b></p> <p>Eurosonic Noorderslag / Explore the North (NL)</p>             | <p>Punk musician turned booker, the seat that sees the whole European funnel: around 4,000 applications a year for 250 to 300 slots. Confirmed you don't need an agent to apply. What she books for: not technical skill, but credibility.</p>                          |
| <p>SESSION 12</p> <p><b>OSCAR O'SHEA</b></p> <p>Okay Management (Aarhus, DK)</p>                                  | <p>The series came home: a 26-year-old working every side of the table, management, a label, festival booking, hospitality at Roskilde and Northside. Contributed the two-year plan, the strategy document he calls the new EPK, and the idea of the special sauce.</p> |

# THE INDUSTRY IS NOT A WALL, IT IS A WEB

Twelve guests, two host cities. Every guest is plotted against whichever city hosted their session and threaded back to it. The orange lines are connections the guests named themselves, unprompted, with no idea who else we had booked.

— NAMED IN THIS BOOK

— SAME HOST CITY



Koen and Peter, recruited independently, told the two halves of the same story: a volunteer at Vera became a booker at Vera. Wytse came up through the same room Peter did. Mille's exchange with SPOT is the same ladder Janneke climbs from the other end.



# WHAT TWELVE CONVERSATIONS ADD UP TO

We didn't plan this as research. We booked twelve guests, one at a time, from different countries, generations and jobs. Nobody saw anyone else's answers. And across a year of Sunday conversations, the same picture kept assembling itself, from different seats, in different accents.

This chapter is that picture: not the advice of any single guest, but the points the whole series agreed on. One person saying something is an opinion. A Danish venue director, a Dutch label man and a 26-year-old manager, none of whom have met, arriving at the same thing unprompted is closer to a description of how the world actually works.

Read the ten findings as career knowledge. But notice, as you go, how much steadier each one is quietly designed to make you feel.

## 1. The door into music is marked "volunteer"

Nobody in twelve sessions got in through a job posting. Wytse spread posters at fourteen to earn tickets and "basically never left." Jesper walked up to a festival boss and said: "I can do it. I'll do it for free." The industry's front door is unpaid, informal and held open by scenes, not companies. The practical takeaway: the way in is to show up and be useful where the music already happens.

## 2. Industry is linear. Community is circular.

The sharpest idea of the series, from Wytse. The music industry picks new talent every year and drops last year's. The music community lets you come back, because you made friends. Peter's ten years with The Homesick is the linear story in full: found by Sub Pop, dropped, and what survived was everything community-built.

FINDINGS THAT REPEATED,  
UNPROMPTED

“

The music community is circular: you can come back, because you made friends.

THE INDUSTRY IS NOT A WALL, IT IS A WEB

THE

19

### 3. Nobody is waiting for you, and that's the good news

Every guest said a version of this; Wytse said it best: “Nobody’s looking for you. You actually need to do everything yourself. And not all parts of it are fun, but it’s also empowering.” Oscar turns persistence into a system: expect a 5 percent reply rate, keep a sheet of who you contacted and when, film the show on an iPhone if that’s what you have, and send it afterwards. And ask for feedback on every rejection, because “then it doesn’t feel like a loss anymore.”

### 4. The other side of the table is drowning. Help them.

Martin at RADAR gets 40 to 50 relevant band emails a week for about 80 slots a year. Janneke’s festival gets 4,000 applications for 250 to 300 slots. So every practical pitch rule the guests gave is really one rule: reduce the booker’s work. A subject line that earns the click. A specific ask, never “can we play your venue?” And the one investment every booker independently begged for: a real live video, early.

### 5. Have a plan longer than the next gig

The most common shape the bookers see, in Hanneke’s words: “we want to release our album, then play Noorderslag, and then blank.” Oscar industrialised the fix into the two-year plan, part dream, part concrete, singles and target festivals in order. He calls it the new EPK. It proves the one thing every booker said is missing: an overview of your own career.

### 6. The network is personal, and it trades in favours, not fees

Big agencies literally ask Koen to send them an Excel sheet of his Balkan contacts. It doesn’t work, because the sheet isn’t the network; twenty years of growing together is the network. Start as a fan, ask for warm introductions, use showcase festivals as pressure cookers, and trade across borders: you book Holland, we book Denmark, we split Germany.

### 7. Money: respect it, and don’t ask your art to pay for everything

Nobody in twelve sessions promised anyone a living. In Denmark roughly one musician in ten lives from music alone, and the guests treated that as a design constraint, not a tragedy. Peter: play everything, but never lose money doing it. And funding responds to one reframe: stop asking for a handout and start pitching an investment.

### 8. The only real differentiator is the thing you refuse to negotiate

Every selector in the series was asked what makes an act stand out. None of them said technical skill. All of them, in different words, described identity. Oscar calls it the special sauce, the family recipe no one else can cook. Bina added the release-side corollary: never bend the music to the algorithm, because AI will out-algorithm you anyway.

REPLY RATE TO EXPECT

~5%

“

You have one chance, that’s bullshit. You have many chances.

**9. The boring 30 percent is where the edge is**

Ivo's number: about 30 percent of the work is stuff you won't enjoy, the musical equivalent of doing taxes, and the edge lives exactly there, because most musicians won't do it properly. Talent loses to the person willing to walk twenty times faster. The compounding math runs through every session, from Ivo's fifteen-year pedalboard to Oscar's contact sheet.

**10. Nothing is worth your mental health**

The series opened and closed on this, and it wasn't a disclaimer; it was engineering. Ivo: no goal in life is worth your mental health. Koen's whole touring method, info sheets, free days, shared driving, is mental-health engineering disguised as logistics. And Martin's structural half: the venue shares responsibility for the tempo of its scene, not just the bookings.

**WHY ALL OF THIS IS REALLY ABOUT RESILIENCE**

Stand back from the ten findings and consider what they share, because it is the point of the whole handbook. None of them is a shortcut. What each one does is take a part of a career that felt beyond the artist's control and turn it into something they can work on.

Taken together, these findings arrive, every time, at the same idea: agency, the sense that a person can make something happen for themselves. Two artists may meet the same run of rejections, and the one who understands how the field works, and has people to move through it with, tends to experience those setbacks as problems to be worked at, while the other experiences them as a judgement on their worth.

This is why we never treated TAB's career half and its wellbeing half as separate concerns. To us they were always the same concern approached from two directions. It is only that the knowledge-and-network side is rarely recognised as mental-health work, and it is, I believe, the side that does the most to keep a young artist standing over the long run.

I want to be honest about the limits of what we can claim. TAB ran for a year, and the actual learning window was only six to eight months. What a project of this length can realistically do is plant something, and to share what it knows and learns, so the ground becomes more fertile for everyone coming after.

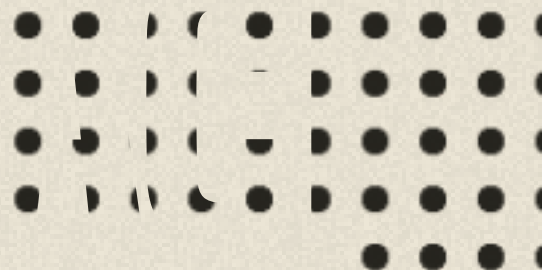
The most instructive thing we got wrong: we assumed if we provided enough value and got enough young artists who clearly wanted this into the same room, they would naturally begin talking to one another. Mostly, in the open channels, they did not. That hesitation is the same one, seen from another angle, that keeps an artist from writing to a booker. Communities cannot be hurried into trust.

IVO'S PEDALBOARD,  
ONE PEDAL AT A TIME

**15 yrs**

“

Talent loses to the person willing to walk twenty times faster.



21

# WHERE RESILIENCE COMES FROM

**KNOWLEDGE  
+ NETWORK**

**AGENCY**

**RESILIENCE**

**MENTAL  
HEALTH**

TWELVE GUESTS, A COMMUNITY

A CAREER YOU CAN SHAPE

SETBACKS BECOME PROBLEMS,  
NOT VERDICTS

THE OUTCOME UNDERNEATH ALL  
OF IT

## THE ONE-PARAGRAPH VERSION

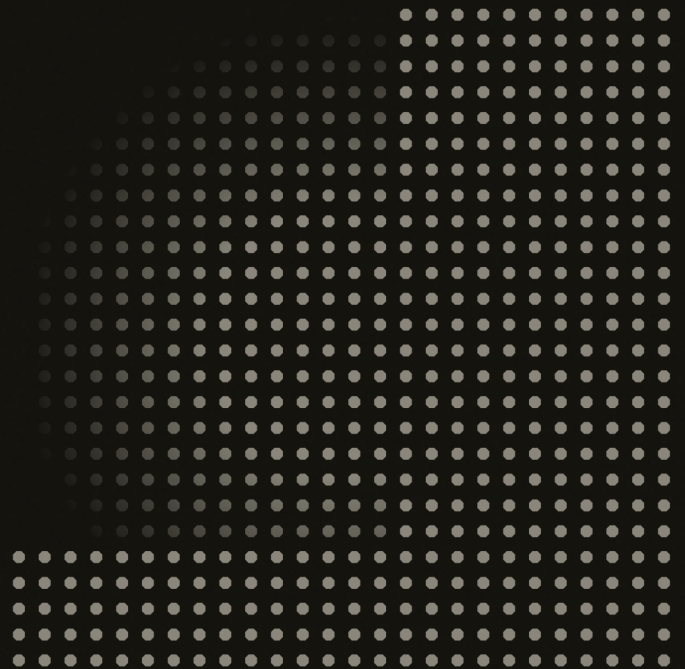
Get in the room by being useful; the door says volunteer. Build in the community, use the industry, and never confuse the two. Nobody is waiting for you, so run your own pipeline: a two-year plan, personal pitches that reduce a drowning booker's work, one good live video, feedback on every rejection, a 5 percent reply rate priced in. Grow a network that trades favours across borders, because the Excel sheet isn't the network. Don't lose money playing, don't ask the art to pay every bill, and pitch funding as an investment with a return. Protect the thing about you that isn't for sale, do the boring 30 percent that everyone else skips, and keep enough hummus in the van.



“Nobody’s looking for you. You actually need to do everything yourself. And not all parts of it are fun, but it’s also empowering.”

— WYTSE, THE BEATRIX / NOORD

TALENT ACROSS BORDERS · PART TWO





# NOBODY IS WAITING FOR YOU: TWELVE THINGS EVERYONE TOLD US

Twelve sessions, guests from every seat in the industry. Different countries, generations, jobs. And the same handful of points kept surfacing, unprompted. This chapter is that advice.

## 1. Just start. Do the thing before you're ready.

Ivo Schot never advertised himself as a composer. Every paid job he got came from work he had already made for the fun of it. Jesper Borup got his break by offering to book a festival for free. Make the thing, show it to as many people as possible. If it works, you might get paid.

## 2. Frame funding as investment, not a handout.

Jesper described the change that turned his own funding around: not “my band deserves money” but “we have achieved X, we want to achieve Y, here is the value that comes back.” Think as an investor would.

## 3. The boring 30% is where the edge is.

Ivo calls the admin “the musical equivalent of doing taxes.” About 30 percent of the work is stuff you don't enjoy but that gets results, and that is exactly where the advantage lives, because most musicians won't do it properly.

## 4. Compounding is massively underestimated.

One hour a day, every day, accumulates into something most people never reach. Ivo's pedalboard took fifteen years, one “oh, that's cool” pedal at a time. Touring obeys the same arithmetic: two hundred emails might get you ten shows, five get you none.

## 5. Work with as many people as you can. It snowballs.

Work with as many artists as you can, because something will eventually pan out. Record your friends' first records cheaply, do it well, and they will tell everyone. Play the show with five people in the room; four more shows can grow out of a night like that.

TIKTOK FOLLOWERS,  
ZERO TO

14,000

“

Make the thing, show it to as many people as possible.

**6. Social media: only the authentic version works.**

Ivo's band resisted social media, then went all in: zero to 14,000 on TikTok in six months. What worked was filming themselves hanging out at lunch, one raw fifteen-second moment. "It's like doing your own advertisement in a world where everybody's shouting at everybody."

**7. Nothing is worth your mental health. Know thyself.**

No goal in life is worth your mental health. The honest question is not "what should I do" but "what kind of person am I." Sleep, exercise, eat, don't drink too much. Getting to the top is closer to an Olympic sport than anyone admits.

**8. Don't force your money to come from your art.**

Art and money, as Ivo put it, are not good friends. If money stresses you, earn it somewhere else, enough that you stop thinking about it. In Denmark roughly 10 percent of musicians live solely from music, and a hobby can be professional.

**9. Find what's unique about you.**

Nobody can tell you where to go, because nobody is you. You might play like John Mayer for five years first. Nobody will love you for playing like John Mayer. They will love you for playing like you.

**10. Explain your band in one breath.**

Ivo's example: "a mix between Mumford & Sons and Nirvana. Good songwriting and loud guitars." Ten words, and you already know if you want to hear it.

**11. Exchange beats going it alone.**

A Danish band and a Dutch band team up: one books the Netherlands, the other Denmark, and they split Germany.

**12. Merch is the cheapest brand-building you have.**

T-shirts, buttons: the cheapest way to turn a fan into walking advertising. Think without borders, because there are none in music.

DANISH MUSICIANS LIVING  
SOLELY FROM MUSIC

~10%

“

They will love you for playing like you.

BORDERS

B

25

## GETTING BOOKED: THE VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TABLE

Across the series we uncovering something very meaningful for young artists starting up: a run of people who receive the pitches in various ways from artists. Seven different people in different positions across different countries. Nobody compared notes. And they said strikingly consistent things.

### **Personalise the outreach or get ignored**

Janneke spots the mass email instantly: “we’re touring this summer” sent to a booker who does no summer festivals. “It is really like applying for something,” she says. “I don’t speak with robots.” Ask for something specific: “we’d fit as support for this act in your spring program,” not “can we play your venue?” Wytse’s upgrade: build the pitch email like a small newsletter, with a player and one live clip.

### **Invest in a good live video early**

A booker cannot see everyone live. So what sells you is a quality live registration, and it is also what the venue uses to promote your show once you are booked. One video, both problems. Janneke’s clarification: a proper live session counts. You don’t need an audience in the frame.

### **“Ready” comes fast for supports, slow for headlines**

Support slots and multi-band nights come quickly. Your own headline or release show is the hard step. Dirk and Hanneke’s warning: don’t make the release show or the showcase slot the end goal. You get maybe one or two headline shots at a given venue. Plan five to ten steps ahead.

26

### The two-year plan

Oscar's signature tool, and the single most actionable idea in the series. He calls it the new EPK. Write a dense two-year strategy: the releases, the tours, the festivals you want, in order. Then use it: tell the booker this slot is the top of the iceberg of an album run, and half a year later send a short update. It proves the one thing every booker said is missing: an overview of your own career.

### Find your special sauce

Oscar's version: the artists worth signing have something that is not up for negotiation, a sound, a poetry, a stance that is theirs. Janneke's version: what she looks for is completeness and credibility rather than technical proficiency. "Do I believe this performance?" Wytse's version, bluntest of all: on a selection profile, lean into the stupid. Don't shape yourself into what you think the committee wants.

### Persistence, tracked like a pipeline

Wytse: be persistently annoying. Keep applying, and above all, ask for feedback on every rejection. Oscar puts numbers on it: expect around a 5 percent reply rate, so keep a sheet of who you invited, who answered, who you followed up with. Use every gig as a reason to update your contacts.

### Agents help, but they are not a gate

Janneke was categorical, and this kills a myth: Eurosonic books independent artists. You do not need an agent to apply. "Not every artist is a branding manager and I don't expect anyone to be." Mille confirmed the same from the Danish side: SPOT books acts who haven't released music or played live yet, "if we can see that they have a vision."

### Local scene first, then out

Start locally. Team up with similar artists and co-promote a night together. Then aim at a showcase festival near you before you attempt an international tour, because bookers scout all of them.

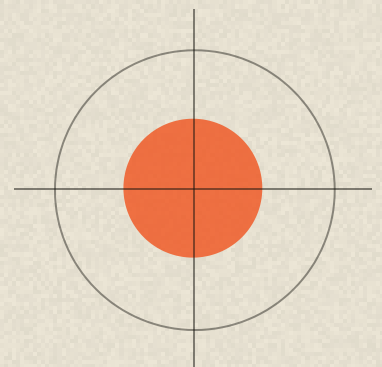
### Community, not industry, is the sustainable route

The music industry is linear. The music community is circular: you can come back, because you made friends. Nobody is waiting for you. Every guest said it warmly, and they meant it as encouragement.

The music industry is linear. The music community is circular: you can come back

“

Keep applying, and above all, ask for feedback on every rejection



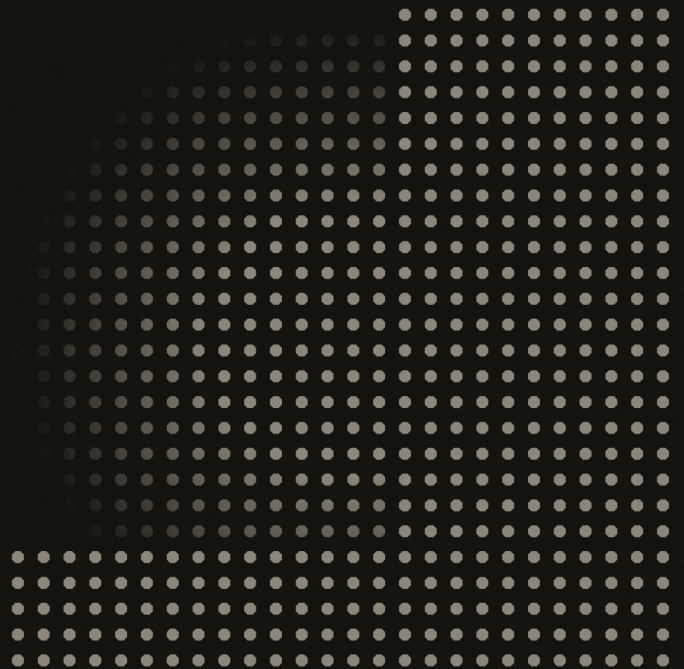
27



“One and one is free.”

— DIRK BARTH, ON TWO ACTS PAIRING UP FOR A NIGHT

TALENT ACROSS BORDERS · PART TWO





# TOURING WITHOUT PERMISSION

Nobody in twelve sessions had a booking agent when they started touring. Koen put the question in its correct order: get one because you don't want to do the work, never because you think you need one. So this chapter assumes you're doing it yourself.

## Start a year in advance, then calibrate

A feasible tour in the Netherlands or Germany needs about a year of lead time. But a year is a rhythm, not a law: email North Macedonia or Kosovo a year out and it doesn't connect, that's far too early for how those scenes work. Every region has its own clock.

## The tour is part of the release

Koen's Christmas tree. Don't finish the album, release it, and then think about touring. Start booking the moment recordings exist. Announce the single with the tour already up, and then every new asset decorates the same tree.

## Drops in the lake

You don't find a network, you grow one, in widening circles. Be a fan first: go to shows, meet touring bands, put on a show for one of them in your own city. Big agencies literally ask Koen to send them an Excel sheet of his Balkan contacts. It doesn't work that way. The years are the network.

## The Tomek, Tomek, Tomek rule

In 2012 Koen was a month out from a tour and couldn't land Berlin. He mentioned it to a Polish organizer named Tomek. Within half an hour he was chatting with two more organizers, both also named Tomek, and Berlin was solved. Any DIY organizer in any city knows who does shows in every city around them.

LEAD TIME FOR A  
FEASIBLE NL/DE TOUR

~1 yr

“

A tour is part of the release,  
not separate from it.



29

**Trade across borders**

A Dutch band that can play five Dutch shows but no German ones, and a German band with the opposite problem, is just an exchange waiting to happen. Dirk scaled it up: two acts who aren't ready to headline alone become one viable night together. One and one is free.

**Go where the passion is**

The stereotype says Central and Eastern Europe is underdeveloped touring territory. Koen's booking sheet says otherwise: the band he represents plays bigger, more professional venues for better fees in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece than in Germany. Wytse toured the Balkans sleeping on promoters' couches, unpaid, and calls it the best thing his band did, because "it's a music community instead of a music industry... there's way more possible."

**Respect the geography**

The romance stops at logistics. Ex-Yugoslavia means non-Schengen borders, mountains, and distances Google Maps lies about. Koen's cautionary tale: a Dutch band booked Vienna, Warsaw, Berlin, Copenhagen in four days, and the tour collapsed before it finished. Route with one or two long-drive days maximum and free days in between.

**Preparedness is self-care**

Make an info sheet for every show: address, who's organizing, phone numbers, where you sleep, whether there's food. Share the driving. Put one person on groceries in the morning, so the tour doesn't run on greasy gas-station food: "it makes everything a little bit easier if there is enough hummus in the van for everyone."

**Showcase festivals are the pressure cookers**

The fastest way to compress years of network-building into days. Check the delegates list beforehand, write to people before you arrive, invite them to your show, and have coffees. Koen, on SHARP in Bratislava, run by a group of mostly women in a politically hostile funding climate: "the festival, in every sense of the word, is a protest."

**Never lose money playing**

Peter's rule closes the chapter because it governs all of it: play as many shows as you can, but don't drive somewhere to lose 200 euros and not even get a proper meal. "You're better than that. You're worth more than that."

TOMEK FOUND  
WITHIN

**30 min**

“

The sheet isn't the network.  
The years are the network.

TALLE

30

# RELEASING MUSIC THAT STAYS ALIVE

Bina Rosenvinge pitches playlists for a living. Her opening statement is worth taking seriously: playlist pitching should never be your strategy. Because they're a bonus on top of the only thing that compounds, which is people who actually listen to you.

## Don't rush. The math forbids it.

The most common release mistake is speed. People need time to even notice a song exists. Spotify allows one editorial pitch at a time, with roughly a five-week deadline, and you can't pitch the next track until the current one is out. Release fast and you literally burn pitch slots. Rather two months than one between singles.

## The release and the tour are one thing

A tour is part of the release, not separate from it. Book from the moment recordings exist; announce the single with dates already attached. A release should have something physical attached, a show, a session, anything outside the digital space, because a song that only exists online only competes online.

## Post until you're sick of it

The best marketing advice Bina ever got: "once you're sick of your own product, that's when people are going to start noticing it." The algorithm shows each post to a fraction of your followers. A song doesn't die because launch week was quiet. "If someone hears it in a year, it's still a new song to them."

SPOTIFY EDITORIAL  
PITCH WINDOW

**~5 wks**

“

Playlist pitching should never be your strategy.

**The waterfall, and the cheaper trick**

Single one comes out alone; single two carries track one behind it; then the EP. Same ISRC codes, so play counts carry over. Bina's limit: maximum three tracks. The cheaper trick: keep a playlist of your own music on your artist profile, new single on top, and share the playlist link instead of the single link.

**Choose a distributor by model, not by brand**

Distribution itself is a commodity: "just moving files from my computer to Spotify." What differs is the business model and the humans. Find a local distributor with actual people, and, most valuable of all, a pitcher who develops an instinct for where your track can land.

**Shopping to labels: don't spend the news**

If you want a label push later, don't release publicly first. Once a song is "out," the news value is spent. The standard move: a closed SoundCloud link, clearly marked unreleased, sent privately.

**Borrow ears that don't work in music**

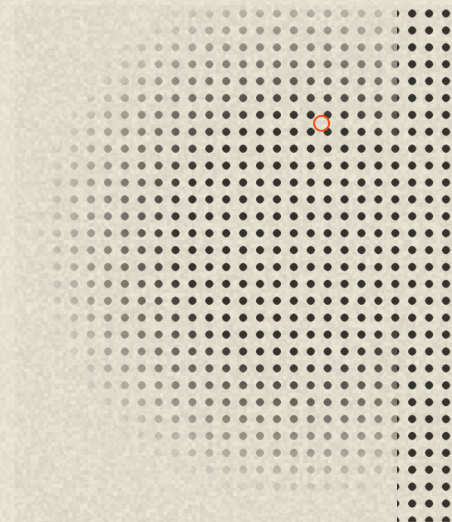
You are the least reliable judge of your own singles, because you hear the recording session, the argument in the van. Play the record for civilians and ask one question: which one would you play again? "They don't listen to it with their work ears."

NEW SPOTIFY LISTENERS  
FROM ONE TIKTOK RUN

**10,000**

“

Once you're sick of your own product, that's when people start noticing it.



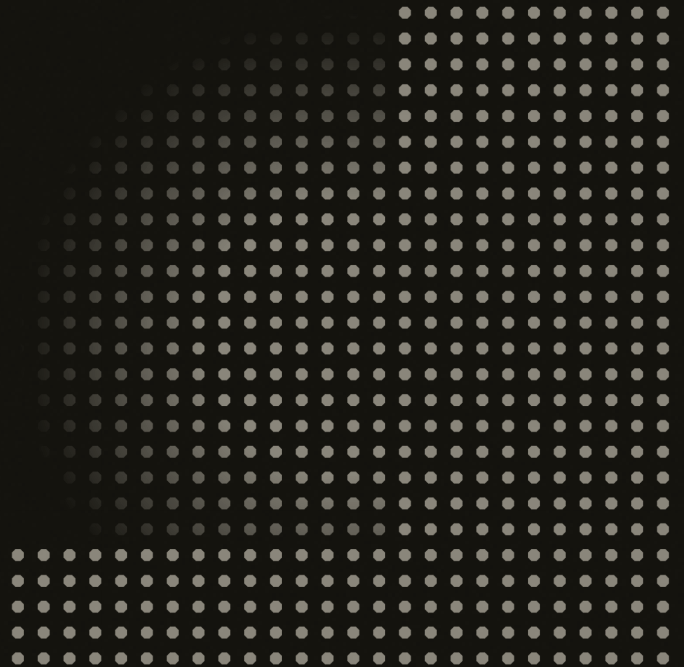
**32**



“There’s not any goal in life that is worth  
your mental health.”

– IVO SCHOT

TALENT ACROSS BORDERS · PART TWO





## THE LONG GAME: YOUR HEAD, YOUR MONEY, YOUR YEARS

Most music-industry advice treats career tactics and self-care as separate topics. Our guests didn't. Denmark sits near the top of the World Happiness Report; 91.9 percent of the Danish population is thriving. Among Danish musicians it's 58.6 percent, and for musicians under 40, 22.8 percent are classified as suffering. A musician is roughly four times more likely to be in poor mental health than the average Dane. The pressure you feel is structural, measured, and shared.

### No goal is worth your mental health

Ivo said it flatly: "there's not any goal in life that is worth your mental health." If you want to reach the top, treat the pursuit like an Olympic sport: sleep, eat properly, exercise, don't drink too much. Koen's whole touring method is mental-health engineering disguised as logistics. He didn't invent it for wellness reasons. He invented it because tours that ignore the body collapse.

### Know thyself, and stop comparing

People are wired differently. Ivo is lucky: his brain handles ten parallel things. The honest question is never "what should I do," it's "what kind of person am I." Janneke's pyramid: the bottom plays for the joy of it, the top lives from music full time, and the middle, the almost-breaking-through, is doing both jobs at once, which she calls the most difficult position to be in.

### Don't force your money to come from your art

Ivo: art and money are not good friends. If money stresses you, earn it somewhere else, enough that you stop thinking about it. Jesper: in Denmark, roughly 10 percent of musicians live solely from music. A hobby can be professional. "I don't know who it is telling people that it can't."

MORE LIKELY TO HAVE POOR  
MENTAL HEALTH THAN AVERAGE DANE

4x

“

There's not any goal in life that is worth your mental health.

ACROSS

TALENT

34

**Compounding: the only magic anyone admitted to**

Ivo's pedalboard, the one young musicians ask him how to build, took fifteen years, one "oh, that's cool" pedal at a time. There was no shortcut available at any price. The fix: one hour a day. One hour of songwriting, or emails, or posting, every day, accumulates into something most people never reach.

**Persistence has a technique**

Wytse's phrase: be persistently annoying, as long as you don't get bitter. And ask for feedback on every rejection, because "then it doesn't feel like a loss anymore." Jesper, fifty years old, on the old guard's mantra: "You have one chance, and that's bullshit. You have many chances."

**You are allowed to change**

Reinvention isn't failure; it's the method. Bowie ran a character per album, Gaga and Sabrina Carpenter burned through versions of themselves before one landed. "You are troubleshooting a version of yourself." You'll probably play like John Mayer for five years first. Nobody will love you for playing like John Mayer; they'll love you for playing like you.

**Say it out loud, and don't do it alone**

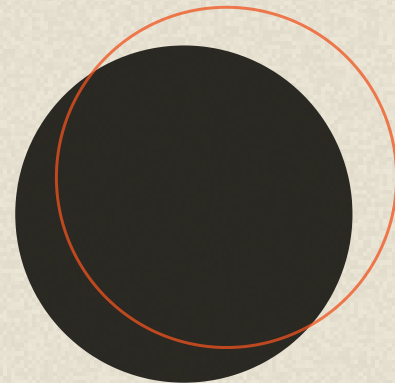
Martin: the venue shares responsibility for the tempo of its scene, not just its bookings. And the structural cure: don't carry it alone. Jesper's organisation began as frustrated freelancers meeting monthly just to vent, and "after all the frustrations were out of the body, then came the creativity." Nothing is worth your mental health. Everything in this book is worth doing with other people.

DANISH MUSICIANS  
THRIVING

**58.6%**

“

**A hobby can be professional.**



35



# PLEASE KEEP PLAYING.

— LOUISA HOFF, PSYCHOLOGIST AND ARTIST, TO A ROOM OF YOUNG MUSICIANS

TALENT ACROSS BORDERS · PART TWO

# THE ROOMS

## The first room: Groningen

For a year, TAB lived in headphones. Then, on 7 June 2026, we rented an afternoon at Simplon in Groningen, put name stickers on the bar, and found out what the community looks like standing up. Instead of a fixed agenda, each talk opened with a vote. People don't know what they want until the conversation starts. Design for that.

Janneke de Boer, in the room, got more concrete than any email exchange could make it. Eurosonic applications open in March and close September 1: "you click the little button, and then you fill out the form. That's it." Around 4,000 acts apply, 800 to 900 Dutch. No cover bands. Send email, never Instagram DMs: "my Instagram is personal, for me that's a no-go."

Her line for classmates who wanted to be the next Coldplay but had never seen a local band play: "you have to be an audience first." The gut feeling bookers are famous for is not a gift; it's thousands of nights in rooms like this one. Her parting advice: message the artists you look up to and ask for feedback, and if the thing you need doesn't exist in your town, build it. "For me, it started with what I was missing in my own hometown. So I built it. And it worked out really, really well."

We put a clinician in the chair. Louisa Hoff was a psychologist and mindfulness trainer for four years before she crossed over and became a working artist herself. Creative work and admin are different brain functions, and they collide. Her fix: time-block. Block creative hours, block business hours, and block time to play: walks, meditation, anything that starts the creative motor without a deliverable attached.

You do not need to be reachable 24/7: "answering it as a psychologist, I'd say no. You need that downtime to regenerate." Saying no is a pricing decision: "you also teach people how to treat you." The most useful tool of the afternoon, from the audience: judge every offer on three criteria, money, people, fun, and take it if at least two are yes.

Burnout has mechanics, and the crash is optional if you read the gauges. It starts with small flags: irritability, low mood, poor sleep, tension headaches. Her advice, verbatim: "feel the feels. Do not try to rationalize it. Dance it out. Express it out in your favorite way. That's actually very healing."

EUROSONIC  
APPLICATIONS / YEAR

**~4,000**

“

You click the little button, and then you fill out the form. That's it.



37

She closed with the physiological sigh, done together with the whole room: inhale through the nose, a second short inhale on top, then one long exhale through the mouth. It works on the vagus nerve, and it works before a show. Her last words to a room of young musicians were four: “please keep playing.”

#### The second room: Aarhus

Nine days later, on 16 June 2026, the second workshop happened at RADAR in Aarhus. Before there was Talent Across Borders, there was TAL, a Danish wellbeing project Tapetown started with RADAR. TAB grew directly out of that work. The Danish mental-health project is not a sibling of TAB. It is TAB’s parent, and it is still going, harder than before, backed by 1.6 million kroner from Tuborgfondet.

Viggo Hejgaard runs TAL together with RADAR, and sits on a vast amount of knowledge about young musicians and mental health. He brought that knowledge and some of its numbers with him for this event. Denmark ranks near the top of the World Happiness Report: 91.9 percent of the population is thriving. For Danish musicians it’s 58.6 percent. For musicians under 40: 22.8 percent are suffering, 35 percent struggling. These come from When Music Speaks (2023), the largest study of musicians’ mental health ever run in Scandinavia.

#### Mental load: write it down

What if you’re willing to not make much money from music? Take the money pressure off the table and three loads remain. Write everything down and sort it into three places: a todo list, a calendar, and a worry list. A worry you’ve written down is a worry your brain is allowed to put down.

#### Demands and resources: know your balance

Stress isn’t produced by pressure alone; it’s produced by the gap between demands and resources. Demands are internal and external; so are resources. Notice that the external resources column is short, and it is exactly what a community like TAB is for.

#### Mindsets: use the right one on purpose

A creative mindset generates ideas: open, imaginative. A performance mindset achieves goals: focused, disciplined. You need both and they cannot run at the same time. His practice: give the session a headline, then two or three focus points.

LOUISA: YEARS IN  
CLINICAL PRACTICE

4

“

You have to be an audience first.

BORDERS  
ACROSS  
TALENT

38



## WHAT WE FOUND, AND WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT IT

We built Talent Across Borders because we thought artists needed knowledge. But the thing that kept showing up underneath it was not a knowledge gap. It was a confidence gap. Artists want contacts in other countries. What stops them is not knowing whether the person on the other end is looking for the same thing they are. That uncertainty is the actual barrier.

### 1. The appetite is real, and the missing thing has a name

When artists across four cities were asked what their local ecosystem lacks, the top answers were marketing skills at 53%, business management at 45%, and knowledge about national and international contacts at 42% (Sound Diplomacy, *Bridging the Sound Gap*, 2024). Artists rated their creative infrastructure at 3.3 out of 5. They rated intermediaries at 1.8. The bottleneck is not making the music. It is every step between the music and a room full of people.

### 2. Why nobody sends the email

A 2023 study in *Poetics* interviewed twenty-eight musicians: for a musician, the economic relationships and the personal relationships are the same relationships. The most useful thing I think TAB proved, and it is embarrassingly simple: the barrier is not access, it is permission.

### 3. If it feels impossible, it is hard for professionals too

A 2026 survey of more than 330 managers across over 30 countries found the early-career stage is the hardest and least supported part of the whole business. When those managers were asked which skills matter most, managing wellbeing ranked near the very top, above marketing.

### 4. There is no shortcut, and here is what that looks like

Nothing indicates a shortcut exists. Time, effort, and being genuinely interested in other people. Independent reporting puts ESNS 2025 at 271 acts from 36 countries out of roughly 4,000 applicants. Say it plainly: the biggest showcase door in Europe takes about seven applicants in a hundred, and it is free to apply.

ECOSYSTEMS LACKING INTL.  
CONTACTS KNOWLEDGE

# 42%

“

The barrier is not access, it is permission.

TALENT



# 39

### 5. What actually works is narrowing

Every guest who had genuinely crossed borders described the same movement, and none of them called it strategy. Narrow, then repeat. A region or a scene, not a continent. A study by SIGIC for ESNS, Liveurope and Live DMA found that what converts showcase visibility into actual bookings is coordinated follow-up. Visibility alone does not do it.

### 6. The layer beneath it all

The Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark and Norway appear prominently in both the visibility and booking datasets – Denmark and the Netherlands being the focus-countries of this project. Ruth Koleva's research found South-East European artists made up 3.4% of acts across six major European showcase festivals. If Danish and Dutch artists still hesitate to write to someone only two countries away, the missing layer may not be national policy alone. It may be teaching young artists to dare to reach out, build connections and become more resilient.

### 7. Wellbeing was never the soft half

We expected wellbeing to be the one people politely sat through. At the physical workshop in Groningen, given the entire music industry to choose from, the room chose pressure, boundaries and sustainability. *When Music Speaks* (2023) found 58.6% of musicians thriving against 91.9% of the general Danish population. There is no version of this where wellbeing is the soft add-on. It is the thing holding up everything else in this book.

### 8. Reading TAB against what the EU already asked for

The Council of the EU conclusions of 13 May 2025 on supporting young artists read close to a specification of what we ran: dedicated matchmaking sessions (our forum), multidisciplinary networks of cooperation (our Discord), informal and non-formal learning (voice-only, no slides), and recognising mental health (both physical workshops). Point 41 says the Council will take stock of implementation by 2029.

### 9. The layer that gets left out

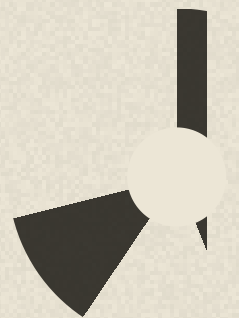
The large, visible parts of European cultural infrastructure work better than people say. What gets left out is the simplest layer, the one that does not photograph well: a persistent, low-threshold room where an artist in Aarhus can hear a booker in Groningen think out loud for an hour, and then feel allowed to write to her. Build the room where people meet. The rest of the infrastructure already exists.

ESNS 2025  
ACCEPTANCE RATE

~7%

“

Nothing indicates a shortcut exists.



40

# THIS HANDBOOK IS ONE VOICE IN A LARGER CONVERSATION

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| YOUNG ARTISTS & EU POLICY     | Council of the EU conclusions on supporting young artists and cultural and creative professionals (May 2025) · OMC report on the Status and Working Conditions of Artists (2023) |
| THE SKILLS & CONTACTS GAP     | Sound Diplomacy, <i>Bridging the Sound Gap</i> (2024)                                                                                                                            |
| HOW MUSIC MOVES ACROSS EUROPE | SIGIC study for ESNS, Liveurope and Live DMA (2026) · the European Talent Exchange results                                                                                       |
| WHO GETS LEFT OUT             | Ruth Koleva, <i>Geographical Underrepresentation and Diversity within the EU Music Ecosystem</i> · Live DMA live-sector research                                                 |
| MUSICIANS' WELLBEING          | <i>When Music Speaks</i> (2023) · <i>Voices of Culture, Youth, Mental Health and Culture</i> (2023)                                                                              |
| THE DANISH PICTURE            | The annual <i>Dansk Musikliv i Tal</i> reports · <i>Kvinderne i Musikken</i> · <i>Musiklivets Talentrapport</i>                                                                  |

We keep a fuller, sourced version of this list, updated as new work appears, alongside the project. Take it and go deeper than we could here.

# 03

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## FOR ORGANISATIONS

HOW TO RUN ONE · WHAT IT PRODUCED · A LAST WORD

# HOW TO RUN SOMETHING LIKE THIS

## The shape of the thing

If you run a cultural organisation, you are probably asking one question: could we do a version of this? The answer is yes. TAB was a one-year, cross-border partnership, supported by Erasmus+. You do not need a ten-partner consortium. You need one good partner who genuinely knows their local scene.

## Important administrative lesson

Running the online community took far more time than we planned; the team put in roughly twice the effort the project assumed. Sustaining a live community, especially in its early phases, is a task that can easily be underestimated; it needs continual tending, more like a garden than a fence.

## Voice-only, no slides, no cameras.

People reflect more honestly without a camera on them, and the threshold to listen drops to nothing. You can join while doing the dishes.

## Interactive, not lecture.

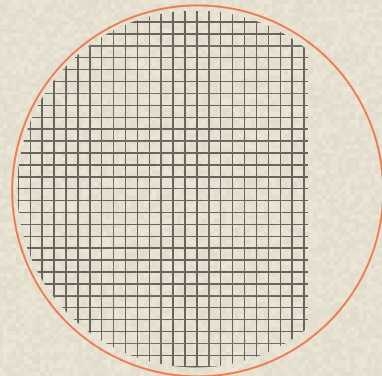
At the physical workshops we let the room decide, by a show of hands, what it wanted to discuss. A lecture leaves you with an audience; a conversation leaves you with a community.

EXTRA EFFORT THE  
COMMUNITY TOOK

2x

“

People reflect more honestly  
without a camera on them



43



**Welcome every level, and mean it.** When an early-stage question comes up, name it as a good one and answer it properly. Almost everyone feels less knowledgeable than the room sometimes, including the people doing well.

**Digital and low-footprint.** Coordination happened online, so no travel was needed just to meet. The handbook is digital. The environmentally responsible choice was also the practical one.

#### **How we reached people, and ran it without meeting**

Recruitment ran on two fronts: a clear visual identity where young musicians already spend their time, and, more importantly, personal direct invitations leaning on networks both partners already had. The first brings people who have never heard of you. The second brings the first handful who make the room worth staying in. Two countries, coordinating almost entirely online: frequent contact whenever something came up, plus larger check-ins roughly every three months. You need people who talk often and pay attention to the real thing.

#### **What went wrong, and what it teaches**

The community needed constant tending: launch one and expect it to run on its own, and it will go quiet within a fortnight. And people will show up, and still not speak: we gathered hundreds of young artists who clearly wanted this and assumed they would talk to each other. Mostly, in the open forums, they did not. That hesitation is the same one that keeps an artist from writing to a booker. You cannot rush trust.

#### **The partners and speakers, and why this is the part to copy**

The people we asked wanted to help. Person after person said yes, several of people invited to speak suggested us others we should bring on too. From the outside, the industry can look like a wall of gatekeepers; up close, it is full of people who remember how hard the beginning was.

FORMAT DECISIONS,  
FREE TO COPY

6

“

These things tell people,  
before a word is spoken, who  
the room is for.

HOW TO RUN SOMETHING LIKE THIS

HOW TO  
RUN  
SOMETHING  
LIKE  
44

# WHAT THE PROJECT PRODUCED

The point of doing this, and the reason to write it down, is what a project like this leaves behind. Here is what TAB produced.

## A community, and a real appetite for it

The online community grew to close to 400 members over the year, from well beyond the two partner countries. The demand is real, and it is larger than any single project can meet. The community does not switch off when the funded period ends; it stays.

## A clearer view of the problem itself

The difficulties artists face are remarkably similar across the whole spectrum, and usually far simpler than people make them. The people who get somewhere tend to have done it by continuing, patiently, with something they genuinely cared about, rather than by chasing what they imagined others wanted.

## A network that made real connections, and capacity for the next thing

Guests became contacts, not content. A booker in one country became a real door for artists from the other. A volunteer became a host and started a career. Running TAB also taught the organisations behind it how to coordinate an international project and sustain a community, capability that has already shaped new project ideas.

## Resilience, the outcome underneath all the others

TAB set out to do two things, teach young artists how the industry works and support their mental health via building resilience, and what we saw is that those were never two things. That shift, from powerlessness to agency, is where resilience comes from, and it protects wellbeing more durably than any single wellbeing or resilience technique.

## Proof of a simple model, that can easily be replicated.

TAB is evidence that the simplest layer of cultural infrastructure, a persistent, low-threshold, cross-border community with real industry people inside it, can provide the foundation of knowledge and understanding that most young creatives are looking for to create a sustainable career for themselves. The room where people meet is the piece most often missing, and its not always so difficult to build.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS,  
WELL BEYOND TWO COUNTRIES

~400

“

The demand is real, and larger than any single project can meet.

45

ACROSS

ACROSS

Whatever brought you to this handbook, an artist at the start of something or an organisation thinking about building one of these, I will leave you with the one thing I most wish someone had said to me at the beginning of my own career.

You will not always know where you are heading, and that is all right. If you keep moving in the direction that genuinely pulls you, you will make progress even when you cannot yet see it, and the shape of the path tends to become clear only in hindsight. All the value in these pages was gathered through life by people who kept going.

I hope it makes your own road feel a little less lonely, and a little more possible.

**- Rasmus Bredvig, Tapetown**

# THE OUTREACH EMAIL THAT GETS READ

The chapters explain the thinking. This appendix hands you the artifacts. Copy them, fill them in, make them yours. The bookers were unanimous about what works. Build your email to this shape:

|    |                                                                                                                                      |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A1 | <b>Subject line that earns the click:</b> specific, not “booking request.” Name the thing (a genre, a notable support slot, a city). |
| A2 | <b>One or two lines on who you are,</b> with where you are based.                                                                    |
| A3 | <b>A specific ask, not an open one.</b> “We would fit as support for [act] in your spring programme,” not “can we play your venue?”  |
| A4 | <b>Links, never attachments:</b> your music, and above all a live video (a YouTube or similar link).                                 |
| A5 | <b>Proof you can draw a room:</b> where you have played, and how many tickets you sold.                                              |
| A6 | <b>Short.</b> If it scrolls, it is too long.                                                                                         |
| A7 | <b>Follow up once, after about a week.</b> Things get buried; a single follow-up reads as professional.                              |

Wytse’s upgrade, for when you want to stand out: build the email like a small newsletter, with an embedded player and one live clip, using a free tool such as Stripo or Mailerlite. Most bands send a wall of text. Almost nobody sends something that looks designed.

And never use an Instagram DM to reach a booker. Email is the channel.

## THE TWO-YEAR PLAN (OSCAR'S "NEW EPK")

A single document that works as your pitch to bookers, your case to funders, and your recruiting tool for a manager or agent. Part dream, part concrete. Sketch it like this:

|    |                                                                                                                                               |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B1 | <b>The project in one line.</b> What you are, in a sentence someone can repeat.                                                               |
| B2 | <b>The next 24 months, in rough order, with rough dates.</b> Releases, tours and target cities, the festivals you want, any milestones.       |
| B3 | <b>The story it tells.</b> Each slot or release should read as the top of an iceberg, one visible step in a plan clearly underway beneath it. |
| B4 | <b>How you will update it.</b> Every few months, a two-line note when a step lands: "the first two steps came through; the ball is rolling."  |

## THE LIVE-VIDEO CHECKLIST

The single investment the bookers begged for. It gets you the booking and then sells the tickets. It does not need to be expensive; it needs to be honest.

|    |                                                                                                                 |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| C1 | Good sound and a clear image. Not a phone clip from the back of a room.                                         |
| C2 | An accurate picture of what you do live. A proper live session counts; you don't need an audience in the frame. |
| C3 | Length does not matter. Truth does.                                                                             |
| C4 | Host it somewhere linkable (YouTube or similar), so it can go in an email as a link.                            |
| C5 | Make it early. If you spend money on one thing this year, the bookers themselves say spend it here.             |



# THE OUTREACH TRACKER

Persistence works when it is a system rather than a feeling. Keep a simple sheet, and let the numbers guide you. Expect roughly a 5 percent reply rate.

| WHO | VENUE / FESTIVAL | DATE CONTACTED | REPLIED? | FOLLOWED UP? | NEXT STEP |
|-----|------------------|----------------|----------|--------------|-----------|
|     |                  |                |          |              |           |
|     |                  |                |          |              |           |
|     |                  |                |          |              |           |
|     |                  |                |          |              |           |
|     |                  |                |          |              |           |
|     |                  |                |          |              |           |
|     |                  |                |          |              |           |
|     |                  |                |          |              |           |
|     |                  |                |          |              |           |

Use every gig as a reason to update the people on the sheet rather than only to invite them; film the show, even on a phone, and send it afterwards, “you weren’t there, this was a great night, next time.” If the column for next spring is not filling in, the sheet is telling you to change the plan.

## REFRAMES WORTH PINNING ABOVE YOUR DESK

|                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A booking or a grant is an investment you are offering, not a favour you are asking. “We have achieved X, we want to achieve Y, here is what comes back.” |
| Reduce the other person’s work. A drowning booker can say yes to a concrete, easy request.                                                                |
| Trade across borders. One of you books home, the other books their home, you split the territory between.                                                 |
| Protect the one thing about you that is not up for negotiation. Everything else is learnable.                                                             |
| Do the boring 30 percent, because almost no one else will.                                                                                                |
| Ask for feedback on every rejection, so a loss becomes a sharper plan.                                                                                    |
| Keep enough hummus in the van.                                                                                                                            |

## THE GUESTS, AND WHERE TO GO DEEPER

A one-line index of the twelve conversations behind this handbook lives in the chapter The Conversations. The wider body of research we drew on, and recommend you read, is gathered in Where to Read More at the end of the research chapter. Both are worth your time.

You can find the full transcriptions of the online conversations on [www.talentacrossborders.com](http://www.talentacrossborders.com)



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