Pixlar o Ljud: a year of building an audiovisual community in Malmö

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1. INTRODUCTION

Pixlar o Ljud is a monthly meetup and a showcase event for artists and musicians who use programming and technology as a creative tool. It runs in Malmö, in southern Sweden. We started it in September 2025, and a year later we have held ten meetups and two showcases, with a third showcase scheduled for September 2026.

This is an account of what we've learned over the past year. We're not researchers and this is not a study. We just noticed something missing, started a thing to fill the gap, and have now been doing it long enough that we figured it might be worth sharing our experiences.

For those who don't speak Swedish, "pixlar o ljud" means both "pixels and sound" and "pixel noise", depending on how you read it.

2. WHAT WE SET OUT TO DO

We started out by writing down a description of what we thought was missing and what we could do, practically speaking, to solve it. Our diagnosis was that there are plenty of talented people working with music and live visuals around the Öresund region, but no ongoing events bringing those people together to share what they know. Our solution was two things: a monthly meetup where practitioners could work alongside each other, and a concert series where they could perform, with collaboration across disciplines warmly encouraged.

The same document also listed a collection of "stretch goals" - things we might eventually do: mentorship pairing experienced people with newcomers, a shared library of tools and tutorials, recording and livestreaming performances, partnerships with schools and universities. A year in, none of those exist yet and that's fine. Dividing things we knew we could do immediately from things that we thought might be cool one day was a useful separation, so we didn't feel bad about not doing everything at the same time.

One significant thing arrived that wasn't in the document at all. Partway through the year people asked for somewhere to talk between events, so we set up a chat server. More on that below.

3. THE MEETUP

The meetup happens monthly at STPLN, a venue and community space in Malmö that gives us a room with some tables and chairs in for free. The meetup is free to attend. We usually get between ten and twenty people showing up, a mix of regulars and new faces.

The advertised format is: "bring a laptop, your headphones, and a project you would like to work on". The actual format settled in the first couple of months and hasn't changed since - the first hour is people arriving and getting situated, chatting, and working on their own projects. Then a low-key show and tell, going round the tables, where anyone can say what they have been working on lately (at the meetup or elsewhere). Finally, there's another hour or so of work.

What people actually do in those hours is more varied than the description suggests. Some genuinely sit and work with headphones on, not interacting much. Others chat or jam together. Some people watch tutorials for gear they have just bought, or demo a technique or tool to people sitting nearby.

The middle section is probably the most useful from a community-building point of view. Going around the tables makes it difficult to attend entirely passively - you don't need to have made anything, but you do have to say something, and that turns a room of individuals working in parallel into a room where everyone has at least some idea of what everyone else is doing. People often move around the room after the show-and-tell section, as it sparks new connections and conversations.

During the meetups, we sometimes ask people how they'd like to see the community expanded. Early on, we got a lot of requests for a digital space where people could interact between events. This was originally conceived as a chat room (implemented on the decentralised Matrix protocol), but has

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actually become more of a bulletin board where people asynchronously ask questions and post requests rather than a real-time chat space. It seems to be serving the community, but not in quite the way we originally thought.

One thing that surprised us is how broad “tech art” turns out to be, and how comfortably those practices sit next to each other. Someone making something fun in Ableton isn’t far from someone working with guitar pedals, who isn’t far from the modular synthesis people, who aren’t far from people building things with Arduinos. We’ve had people watching tutorials for a synthesizer sitting next to someone writing code for one. It’s not about “skill levels”, because that implies a single axis - it’s more about overlapping “skill multiverses”.

Our mix of faces is fairly consistent. We have some regulars and some new arrivals each time. We pushed the marketing hard at the start because we were building something out of nothing, and we’ve pushed it less since, partly because attendance has held up without it. We’ve only skipped two meetups so far - in January, when we ran a showcase instead, and in July when more or less everyone (including us) was on holiday.

4. THE SHOWCASES

Twice so far we have run an evening of performances at a small independent cinema in Malmö called Hypnos Theatre. Hypnos charges for the space, but we’ve built up a relationship with a musicians’ organisation called Musikcentrum Syd, who cover the venue hire cost for us (about 3,000 kr each time).

Most acts are a pairing - a musician with a visual artist. This was an aspiration in our original proposal document, and it has turned out to be the most distinctive thing about the events, as we try to balance sound and visuals equally. Pairings come about in three ways. Some artists are obvious matches. Some approach us already wanting to work together. The rest we put together ourselves, considering whose style would complement whose. Not everyone needs pairing; some applicants already work across both sound and image, though several of those have also performed just one side of it for us - only music, or only visuals.

So far we’ve only offered performers a stage and an audience, but increasingly both audience and performers are asking for more - recordings of the performances (sound and video), live streams, photography and other documentation. We do as much of this as we can (we’ve intermittently done audio recordings and photography, so far, with the help of volunteers), but the constraints on our time during showcase events (see below) mean that we’d realistically need volunteers from the community to expand our ambition on this, and that’s not something we’ve formally asked for to date.

People have also asked us to provide other kinds of performance spaces. Right now our space is a theatre-style setup, with a big screen, a stage in front, and cinema seating for the audience. Some people would like a more dancefloor-friendly space, others would like a more gallery-like space, suitable for installations rather than performances. We’re investigating those possibilities, but it’s early days.

5. APPLICATIONS TO PERFORM

Performers are selected through an open call, though we only allow people to perform who’ve attended at least one meetup (though they can apply without having attended a meetup if they intend to do so). We don’t select for talent or audience appeal - we select for people with less performance experience, or who want to push themselves further or experiment with new artistic forms or approaches.

We don’t currently pay performers or charge them money to perform. Entry for spectators is free. Applications to perform at the showcase events come through a Google form. January drew eleven applications for seven slots, June ten for five, and September eight so far.

After the first showcase we noticed that some people were interested in the community and meetups, and others were interested in the stage, and those weren’t always the same people. A few people came to one meetup, applied to perform, did the same thing they do at every concert, and then never came to another meetup. So for the second showcase we added a question to the form: “Pixlar o Ljud is about experimentation. How will your performance involve experimenting or trying out something new that you haven’t done before?”

We worried this might reduce the applicant pool a bit, but it didn’t - the number of applications barely moved. Instead, people began thinking bigger and offered us more. January’s applications, before the experimentation question was added, were one-line descriptions of existing sets: “sound art, ambient music”; “I do live coded visuals”.

In June however, after implementing this new policy, people began to write much more about what they wanted to do, and stretch themselves much further. One applicant, who had never performed live at all, wrote that he was signing up “to hold myself accountable”. Several described technical setups that were still under construction at the point of applying. It turns out that when we asked people to describe how they would experiment, they began to create experiments.

The second thing the applications reveal is artistic progression. One duo proposed an installation for January - an Etch-A-Sketch style control system wired into a datamoshing video setup, placed in the foyer so that guests could mix images on their way in. In June, they had gained enough confidence to perform on stage for the first time, using homemade software. For September they are bringing a refined version of that software plus a live video stream from a festival happening outside the venue.

Another applicant proposed live vocal looping in June, describing it as something she had practised but never done on stage. A few days beforehand, she changed her mind - she wasn’t ready to do that, and would play a more traditional set. However, she then applied again for September, saying in the

application form that she had not felt confident enough to use it the first time, and that this show felt like the moment to take the step.

A third person had never performed live when he applied in June. He was accepted, and performed his set flawlessly. When applications opened for September, he'd expanded his ambitions considerably - writing that he wanted to learn to write custom GLSL shaders for the occasion.

We've seen at least one collaboration form here and then continue without us: The New Uncanny, Patch Hofweber and Singular have teamed up independently of our events, playing together in Stockholm. Over the year we've also watched several artists move towards working more professionally with creative tech art. One person, for example, was working as a tech with aspirations of working as an artist, and he's now pushing himself much more in that direction.

We've struggled to achieve demographic diversity in our showcases. Most of our applicants are male, aged 25-45, and white, reflecting the wider community of practitioners. We've taken a low-key approach to addressing this so far, by going out of our way to encourage people who don't fit this profile to apply to perform, and ensuring that when they do they get a spot on the lineup. We ask people at meetups who else they know who might enjoy it, and we go to other events and invite people we meet directly. There's certainly more we can do on this, but it also reflects a wider community problem and we can't fix that alone.

Finally, two smaller things we did not expect. First, we originally thought that the showcase would be a graduation from the meetup, but actually it seems to be a separate way in. We get people who apply to perform first and then become a part of the meetup community afterwards. Second, while our applicants are hungry to perform, they realise that there is a scarcity of slots to do so and that others may need those slots more than they do. More than one has volunteered, unprompted, to give up their slot to someone who has not performed before.

6. MONEY, OR THE LACK OF IT

The project runs on as close to no money as we can manage. Our meetup venue, STPLN, is free to hire. The rental fees for our showcase venue, Hypnos, are covered for us by Musikcentrum Syd. We charge nothing for entry and nothing to perform, and we pay performers nothing. At an early stage in the process we applied for a grant from the local municipality, but didn't get it.

This is more of a reflection of reality, rather than a principled stance. We would like to be able to fund this project, and any income would go to performers first so they can be compensated for their work. But we'd rather do that properly and fully than distribute a small amount of money between many people, so our plan is to run Pixlar o Ljud for a while, work out what the highest-impact way we could spend money would actually be, and then look for grants or sponsorship for those specific things rather than for the project in general.

A risk in not paying performers is that lineups drift towards people who can afford to spend the time unpaid (this may be related to the diversity concerns above). So far nobody has asked us for a fee and decided not to play when told there wasn't one, but it is possible that people simply aren't applying if they can't justify it financially. We suspect that this problem is diminished somewhat by Sweden's relatively-generous social security system, compared to other countries, but we wouldn't claim the effect is zero. Hopefully our performers get something out of playing, even if that something isn't money.

What the project does cost is our time. We do things as minimally as we can, but for a meetup we still need to book the venue, send out emails to people about it happening, edit our website, put it up on local listing sites, and arrive early to unlock and set up. Showcases are much more work: we set up the application form and advertise it, we decide together who's going to play and how people will be paired, one of us liaises with the artists and figures out their technical requirements, while the other does marketing, listings, venue coordination, and emails. On the night one runs the visual tech while the other engineers the sound and introduces the acts, recording where possible.

Split between two people, the project has remained just about sustainable enough that we're planning another season, but it is unpaid work (and so is writing this paper!).

7. WHAT WE WOULD TELL SOMEONE STARTING A LOCAL AV COMMUNITY

Write down what you're committing to and can do immediately, and what you are only hoping you might achieve over time, and keep those things separate. Being ambitious and not meeting those ambitions makes it easy to feel like a project is a failure when actually it's just succeeding slower than you hoped.

Ask people to stretch themselves. We asked a single question about experimentation in the application form for the showcases and people raised their game. It costs nothing, and it keeps people pushing themselves forward and innovating.

Build in mechanisms that make it harder to be passive. For us, that's represented by our practice of show-and-tell during the meetups, going round the tables and getting people to say what they're working on.

Let the community tell you what it needs, and respond to those needs to the extent that you can. Since starting Pixlar o Ljud, we've created a digital chat space, and begun to investigate alternative styles of performance venues. We've also begun to document performances.

Ask for help. If you can't do something yourself, it's a good idea to ask around and keep asking until you find someone who can help. This is how we were able to get the hire costs for our performance venue covered, how we've been

able to document performances, and how we get our meetup venue for free. People love helping out other people. Just be sure to give your helpers a shout-out at every possible opportunity.

8. WHAT WE STILL DON'T KNOW

We still don't know whether any of this adds up to more than the sum of its parts. A year isn't long, and our first showcase was seven months ago. While we can see individual artists going further each time they apply, we can't yet see whether the scene as a whole is getting bigger, better connected, or more capable than it was - only that some specific people in it are, and that some of the pairings we're making are proving durable.

We also don't know what we don't see. We don't see the people who never come to a meetup, never apply to perform, and never tell us why they're not doing those things. Short of a more formal study of the local AV community, that's difficult for us to solve.