ALEXANDRA ULLSTEN works as a music and art therapist in pediatrics, neurological rehabilitation, oncology and palliative care at the Central Hospital in Karlstad, Region Värmland, Sweden. In 2010, Alexandra pioneered the implementation of neonatal music therapy in Swedish healthcare. With significant support from the medical staff and the leadership of the Karlstad NICU, the Central Hospital became the first hospital in the Nordic countries to offer a family-centred music therapy program for hospitalised infants and their parents. Alexandra is one of the “grandparents” of Rhythm, Breath, Lullaby NICU Music Therapy (RBL). She is also a member of the international research networks Pain in Early Life (PEARL) and Pain in Child Health (PICH).

The soothing, comforting and emotional regulating properties of a lullaby are well-known cross-culturally and historically. Lullaby singing may also support hospitalised infants during painful procedures. This doctoral thesis addresses neonatal pain management from a novel and groundbreaking perspective, studying the efficacy of live music therapy on infants’ pain responses during venepuncture. New research is needed to advance the non-pharmacological interventions in neonatal pain care, and music therapy offers active methods to involve parents in pain management. The results of the four papers included are further developed and synthesised in this thesis into a theoretical strategy; the Nordic NICU MT pain management strategy, featuring the parents and their singing voices as mediators for pain relief. The role of the music therapist in neonatal pain management is as a facilitator and an educator for the parents. The biopsychosocial parental infant-directed singing is presumably an applicable parent-driven non-pharmacological intervention, which promotes pain relief and attachment formation during painful procedures. Neonatal music therapy is still in its infancy in the Nordic countries, but the societal and healthcare contexts afford important prerequisites to further develop NICU music therapy as a truly family-centred approach. To sing is to communicate and singing belongs to all. A parent’s singing is love embodied in sound. This doctoral thesis will hopefully contribute to the important interdisciplinary endeavour worldwide of involving and integrating parents in neonatal pain management.