

## **Commissioning Music – a mini guide!**

Many Groups would like to have a piece of music in their repertoire that is theirs, specially written for them, however it can be daunting to know how to go about it and so here are some thinking points!

*New works can attract publicity, reviews and even recordings, they can include other performing groups so that a new audience is reached, they can showcase a particular aspect of your groups music making and finally it marks your group out as forward thinking and top of the pile when it comes to grant applications for innovative programming and other funds.*

**Commissioning is not a new idea**, many of the great concert works we already listen to and perform were at one time commissions, and there are Film scores, Operas, Jingles and Theatre Music being commissioned all the time.

*Anyone may commission, effectively you are simply paying a Composer to write you a piece of Music for a specific reason or event, maybe to celebrate the centenary of your group, or the opening of a New Concert Hall, or as a gift, or to mark a special occasion whether that be sombre or cheerful, some organisations commission works for charitable purposes others, who may not even be musical groups, commission works for groups they support or are involved with, to perform*

**How do you choose a composer ?** – you may already have a Composer in mind, someone whose music you have enjoyed performing in the past, or you can contact publishers so ask for samples of music so that you can decide that way, the publisher will always be able to put you in contact with the composer, Composers write in many different styles, and maybe certain elements of music are important to you, the commissioner, for example, strong melodies, Modern Rhythm's, New types of notation, or music for Children or limited vocal resources – all of these things may influence your final choice and its important for a satisfying commission to ensure that you tell the composer about these things

*The Composer will need to know the timescale , when do you need the piece for rehearsals, when is the first performance etc, so that there is enough time to complete the work!, they will also need to know the combination of Instruments/Voices etc that you intend to use, The composer may also like to know what other pieces are to programmed alongside the work, or if the piece is for a special occasion – full details about that.*

**If the music is to be Choral or Vocal** then there are also special considerations regarding the text to be set, will it be chosen by the Composer or the Commissioner, will it be in copyright ( in which case it will need permissions) or in the Public Domain.

*Maybe the text is coming from a local poet or even a group member, they will own the copyright to that text and so draw up letters of agreement for its use,*

**So having Chosen the composer and decided on the performance forces,** dates and venue for the premiere performance – what is needed now is a cost and a way of funding! – although there are guidelines for composers as to what should be charged, these are only guidelines, for example a household name composer may charge well above the rate recommended, just as a composer who particularly likes the idea of writing a certain piece may charge less.

Funding may come from Arts Councils, Awards for all, The Lottery , a Gift, or other sources or you could work on the old subscription basis where many people put in a small amount into a pot and together the commission is funded, much 18<sup>th</sup> century music was funded in this way

*The standard charging guidelines are based on a 'per minute' basis, and then to this is added the complexity of the work and the number of forces involved, so a song for voice and piano will obviously work out less than a Orchestral work, some Composers include the actual preparation of the parts, others do not, so a contract will be needed if only to cover all eventualities, on the signing of this contract the Composer normally receives 50% of the fee, the remainder being payable on the delivery of the completed work*

**Who does the music belong to and what rights does the Commissioner have ?**

Generally speaking ( but again check with a contract), The commissioner has the right to be credited as the commissioner on all editions of the score, has the right to receive a set number of scores, the right to the first performance and or recording, some or all of these may be included and are negotiable.

*The Composer generally retains the copyright and the rights to submit the work to publishers, or to self publish the work, and obviously the composer will register the work with his performance collecting societies so that ongoing royalties can be collected ( the main source of a composers income), though the royalties may be waived for the first performance and also music for use in divine service does not attract a performing royalty.*

Well that's it – there is your basic guide to commissioning but advice should be sought and some composers may want to be closely involved with your group, others may not , and as a composer myself there is also my own fixed price menu Commissioning structure –and to boot a couple of free samples of works of mine!