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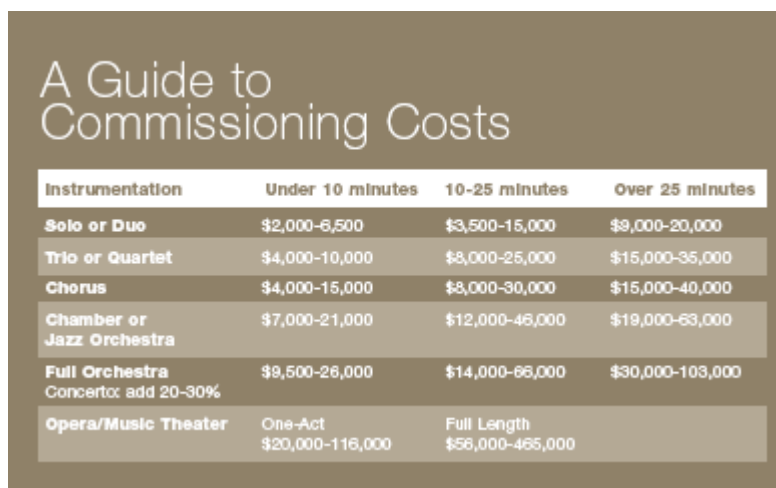
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How to Commission a New Work from Abbie Betinis

There are a lot of things to think about when commissioning a new piece of music. To make the process as enjoyable as possible, I've outlined some important points below.

Rates

An organization called Meet the Composer sets the industry's guidelines for commissioning new work. Their last published rates (from 2004) are as follows:



A Guide to Commissioning Costs

Instrumentation	Under 10 minutes	10-25 minutes	Over 25 minutes
Solo or Duo	\$2,000-6,500	\$3,500-15,000	\$9,000-20,000
Trio or Quartet	\$4,000-10,000	\$8,000-25,000	\$15,000-35,000
Chorus	\$4,000-15,000	\$8,000-30,000	\$15,000-40,000
Chamber or Jazz Orchestra	\$7,000-21,000	\$12,000-46,000	\$19,000-63,000
Full Orchestra	\$9,500-26,000	\$14,000-66,000	\$30,000-103,000
Concerto: add 20-30%			
Opera/Music Theater	One-Act \$20,000-116,000	Full Length \$56,000-465,000	

It takes me at least 15 hours to write, proofread, and engrave one minute of music. I do my own printing, engraving, and part extraction, so that cost is covered in the commission fee. Tell me what your budget is, and we can negotiate a commissioning fee.

Some commissioning parties prefer to pay the entire commissioning fee upon the piece's premiere. Others prefer to pay half at the time of commissioning, and half upon delivery of the score. Still others pay one third at the time of commissioning, one third at the score delivery, and the final third at the piece's premiere.

Time frame

If possible, I like to know that you are interested in a new work about a year before its first rehearsal. This gives me time to set up a composition schedule for the piece, do any research necessary, get text permission, etc. If it is to be a texted work, the specific text should be decided soon after. (I do enjoy the time to completely internalize a text before setting it.)

If there is a copyrighted text to be set to music, it is my responsibility as the composer to pursue permission for performance, possible publication, and reprinting in any program. (I do not automatically ask for recording privileges, but can include that at your request.) It can sometimes take a while to hear back from the writer or publisher of the copyrighted text. In fact, a turnaround time of 8-10 weeks is not uncommon in certain

situations. If you are commissioning new music for a copyrighted text, please do take that additional time into account.

I may request a recording of your ensemble, or enjoy coming to a general rehearsal before getting started on your piece. (I find it helps me best suit a piece to an ensemble to imagine them performing the finished work.) The deadline to the conductor depends on the ensemble's rehearsal needs, but I do find a little leeway most wonderful.

Legalities

If the commissioning party has a contract they like to use, I am usually quite happy to sign it. I can also provide a standard commissioning contract. The contract considers duration, performing forces and difficulty level of the commissioned work, payment amount and schedule, degree of communication between composer and commissioner, and states what is and is not included in the commissioning fee. (The commissioning fee does not cover the composer's travel to the premiere, guest lectures or community programs, interviews, etc.)

I keep the copyright for all my music (for later publication, distribution, etc), but you, as the commissioning party might like to give me a timeframe in which you would like to have sole performance rights to the piece (often 1-2 years from premiere date). In that period, I can advertise the piece, but cannot distribute it or authorize anyone else to perform it without your permission. Your commissioning information is forever attached to the piece, both on the cover and first page of music (even if it gets picked up by another publisher later), as well as any dedication you might request. Most of my music is self-published through what I call "Abylon Press," which means I currently print and distribute all my own music. However, I now have a few pieces published with larger publishing houses, and as I continue to submit my pieces for wider publication and distribution, someday your piece may be reaching a larger audience.

There is sometimes a hefty fee involved in obtaining text permission. Writers and publishers either ask a flat fee for use of a copyrighted text (which I find preferable), or half the composer's profits from the finished piece. In my experience, it is usually the composer who pays this fee or royalty to the author of the text.

Other requests

I do request one recording of the piece. This need not be a professional recording, as it is for my own archives, and will not be sold. It may be distributed, however, strictly by me, and only for my own promotional use. If the performance hall, radio, or other premiere venue has legal issues with making a recording, I like to bring my mini-disk recorder to a final rehearsal to record the piece.

I am a member of ASCAP and do report my premieres and subsequent performances to that performing rights organization. It is helpful to me if the venue of the premiere pays regular ASCAP dues (most halls do), but not necessarily required. Because ASCAP does send me a small check every time one of my pieces is publicly performed, if you know of any subsequent performances of the piece after the premiere, please do let me know about it so I can update my file with ASCAP.

Thank you for your interest in commissioning a new work!

Sincerely,

Abbie Betinis

The following is a bit of a worksheet for formulating the details of the proposed commission.

Contact person/commissioner:

Name of group/players to perform:

Instrumentation and Voicing (exactly how big a group will play/sing? Are parts doubled, or is there one on a part?):

Proposed length of finished piece:

Payment schedule and amount:

Desired difficulty level:

Desired text (if applicable), author, and source of text:

Any specific timing directions (congregation needs to sing the last verse, needs to be timed for a wedding procession, etc):

Deadline for rough draft:

Deadline for final version:

Date, time, and place of premiere, and any subsequent performances:

Is the composer's presence required at the premiere?

Any other dates for which you need the composer present (rehearsals? pre-concert talk?):

How should the commissioning information read?

How should the dedication read (if applicable)?

If you hadn't commissioned this piece, what music might you have programmed in its place?