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How to Commission a New Work from Cathryn S Davis

Rates

An organization called Meet the Composer sets the industry's guideline for commissioning new work. These are their last published rates:

Guide to Commissioning Costs

Instrumentation	Under 10 min.	10-25 min.	Over 25 min.
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 (Concerto- add 20-30%)	\$9,500-26,000	\$14,000-66,000	\$30,000-103,000
Opera Music Theatre	One-Act \$20,000-116,000	Full Length \$56,000-465,000	

It usually takes me at least 20 hours to write, orchestrate, proof and edit one minute of music so I generally begin negotiations at \$1,000-\$1,500 per finished minute. (Please note that if the subject matter is dear to my heart, we can generally negotiate a price if the above fees are unobtainable.) I understand many factors play a role in determining the commission fee. Let me know if you have concrete plans to help the piece live on past the premiere or have plans to make a professional recording of the commissioned piece, add it to your touring program, perform it internationally, partner with other music groups or anything that ensures multiple performances. These details will help us negotiate a commission fee that works for both of us. Please note this does not include costs for printing scores.

Payment Schedule

I prefer to be paid half the commission fee when we sign the commissioning contract, and half upon delivery of the score, but you may need to default to your organization's fiscal year, grant

payment schedule, or donor specifications. Some prefer to pay the entire fee upon the piece's completion or 1/3 at the time of commissioning, 1/3 at the score delivery, and 1/3 at the piece's premiere.

Time Frame

I prefer to sign a commission contract about two years before the new work's first rehearsal (but I've been known, depending on your needs, to require less time). This gives me time to work the piece into my writing schedule for the upcoming season, obtain text permission if necessary, and write, orchestrate, edit and proof the music.

Special Considerations for Copyrighted Text

If there is a copyrighted text to be set to music, we will need to determine who will pursue permission for performance, possible publication and reprinting in any program. It's not uncommon to take 8-10 weeks to hear back from the writer or publisher of the copyrighted text. If you are commissioning new music with a copyrighted text, please consider this variable in your proposed schedule. Usually, any text after 1923 will be under copyright and could be difficult to obtain.

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 prefer), or half of the composer's profits and royalties from the finished piece. If the composer is the one who pays this fee or royalty to the copyright holder of the text, the commission party needs to consider this cost when negotiating the commission fee.

Getting to Know You

I enjoy getting to know musicians and imagining you performing the finished work as I'm working on it. If attending a live performance isn't possible, I may request a recording or your ensemble, recent programs, or ask to attend a general rehearsal before signing the contract, and certainly before beginning your piece. I may ask to analyze text or orchestral emotions over coffee (or adult beverages) with the conductor.

Legalities

If the commissioning party has a contract they like to use, I am usually quite happy to sign it. The contract should consider duration, performing forces and difficulty of the commissioned work, payment amount, schedule, degree of communication between composer and commissioner, and state what is and is not included in the commission fee. The commissioner's fee does not include the composer's travel to rehearsals, the premiere, guest lectures or community programs, interviews, workshops, etc., but I prefer to negotiate these fees at the same time as the contract, and sign a separate document if possible.

Like many composers, I keep the copyright for all my music (for later publication, distribution etc.) It's possible your piece may be part of a larger company's distribution but don't worry.

Your "Commissioned by" credit, as well as any dedication we mutually decide on, will be forever attached to the piece on the first page of music.

Other Requests

Whenever possible, I would love having a recording of the premiere. This need not be a professional recording, but something I can use to help promote the finished piece. If the performance hall, recording engineer, musicians, or presenting organizations has legal issues with making a recording available to me for this purpose, I will ask permission to bring a handheld recorder to a final rehearsal.

Our Continued Relationship and Performing Rights

I love to keep in touch after working with a commission party. If you perform your commissioned piece in subsequent seasons, please let me know. I enjoy letting friends and fans know of performances in their area.

Commissioning a piece of music from me gives you unlimited license to perform from your commissioned scores, but please don't forget that all living composers get paid for each performance through their particular performing rights organizations. Therefore, it's very important that your organization (or performance venue reports your programming to ASCAP, BMI and SESAC.) I am a member of ASCAP, which sends me a small (but appreciated) check every time one of my pieces is publicly performed. Here is their web address: www.ascap.com

Thank you for your interest in commissioning a new work! I look forward to working together.

Cathryn S Davis

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Below is a summary of questions I will want to ask you before we start:

Contact person and commissioning party:

Name of group/players to perform:

Instrumentation and voicing (how big of 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 along with who will be in charge of getting a copyright if needed?

Any specific timing directions (needs to be timed for a wedding procession etc.)

Deadline for final manuscript:

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 commission 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?