

COMPOSING MUSIC – FROM INCEPTION TO THE CONCERT HALL or “A LABOR OF LOVE”

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Composer

Com pos er - noun; a person who writes music, especially as a professional occupation

I. Why write music?

- A. to express emotions (happiness, despair, anxiety, anger, etc.)
- B. to capture a mood (beauty, frustration, tranquility, chaos, etc.)
- C. to teach something (a certain bowing, a rhythmic or melodic pattern, etc.)
- D. to celebrate an occasion (wedding, graduation, Holiday, etc.)
- E. to honor a person (a tribute, birthday, an elegy, etc.)
- F. to share an inspiration (travel, nature, a place, love, etc.) sometimes music just flows out for no conscious reason or inspiration
- G. to elicit an emotion from the listener
- H. to evoke an image
- I. to adapt or arrange something someone else wrote (be careful, it must be Public Domain. Otherwise, you need written permission from the copyright holder under penalty of law)

II. How do you write music?

A. The Process (many different approaches)

1. compose at the piano, on your instrument, at the computer, with midi keyboard, in your head
2. need some study of music theory and knowledge of musical symbols
3. classes in composition will help with the mechanics, but your melodies, harmonies, rhythms, etc. have to come from you
4. rules are meant to be broken (is there a right and a wrong?)
5. start with a rough draft, like writing anything else, constant revisions, like a painting
6. considerations
 - a. structure or form of the piece (ABA, etc.)
 - b. length (60-110 measures, 2-5 min. for most educational music)
 - c. key or keys
 - d. ability level of the performing group
 - e. melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic complexities
 - f. number of players on each part in the group (balance)
 - g. range and sound of the instruments you are writing for
 - h. purpose of the piece
 - i. the audience
 - j. would I want to play it?

B. Getting Started

1. which comes first, the title or the music?
2. consider the grade level (see General Guidelines for keys, rhythms, bowings and grade level)
3. create your musical ideas and get them down on paper (keep paper near bed, waking up with a melody or musical idea can easily fade away) or record them to hear later, "Save" your musical ideas.
4. use the elements of music (melody, harmony, rhythm, form, tempo, style, voicing, musicality, etc.). For me, melody is number 1.
5. expand on your musical ideas using compositional devices (such as contrary motion, imitation, sequence, augmentation, diminution, fragmentation, repetition, retrograde, inversion, modulation (key change), meter change, theme and variation, counterpoint, fugue, canon or round, ostinato, counter melodies, etc.)
6. think about using performance techniques for variety (arco and pizzicato, col legno, change octaves, change dynamics, add a solo for contrast, etc.)
7. bottom line is what sounds good to you
8. my golden rules: melodies for all, technically accessible, sounds harder than it is, would I want to play it?

III. Marketing (Getting your music out there)

A. Self-Publish (how much time, expense, and effort can you afford to self-publish?)

1. copyright your piece (Library of Congress)
2. website and online sales
3. booth at conventions
4. advertise in music journals
5. reading sessions at conventions
6. donate music
7. enter composition contests
8. network at national ASTA conventions
9. do a clinic at your state convention
10. perform your music at conventions
11. try and get your music reviewed in local, state, or national publications such as the ASTA journal, the Instrumentalist, etc. Think big!

B. Submitting for publication (see List of Publishers)

1. helpful to introduce yourself at publishers' booths at conventions
2. cover letter with short bio
3. one publisher at a time
4. 1-3 pieces at a time
5. mail a hard copy or email an electronic file (only the score)
6. preferred software is Finale and Sibelius
7. include a recording (quality live recording vs. midi recording)
8. edit for bowings, articulation markings, tempo, dynamics, etc. before submitting

9. waiting period (can be 3-6 months) depending on when their review committee meets
10. acceptance or rejection notification through regular mail or email
11. note – publishers may ask you to change the ending, beginning, or something else.
12. also, grade levels can vary among publishers

C. What are publishers looking for?

1. music that will sell
2. something innovative
3. must sound good
 - a. audience will enjoy listening
 - b. kids will enjoy playing
4. fits their catalogue
5. specific grade level
6. all parts same grade level
7. interesting, playable parts
8. has teaching merit

!V. Once it's accepted, what now?

A. They will send you a contract

1. sign and return
2. they will now own the copyright
3. you can no longer sell it yourself
4. they will engrave it from your file with their editing
5. you will get a final proof to check over for wrong notes, bowings, etc.
6. you send back any corrections, either hard copy or email on computer
7. you write the descriptive blurb, they may edit that
8. you hope they record it well for their advertising demo

V. Royalties

A. They market it and send you a check

1. royalty checks are issued once or twice a year depending on the publisher
2. included is a summary of what was sold
3. 10% of selling price is standard (5% for international)
4. they send you a tax form (1099-MISC) and you pay taxes on the income
5. join ASCAP or BMI or SESAC (all free)
6. educational music performances (free concerts) vs. commercial performances (aired on TV or radio) get less royalties
7. most composers have other sources of income (teaching, public or private, conducting an orchestra, mentoring, doing clinics, adjudicating, etc.)

VI. Rewards of Composing

A. Creative satisfaction

1. hearing your music performed in the concert hall

2. receiving emails from all over the world thanking you
3. people expressing what your music meant to them either as a performer, teacher, or audience member
4. leaving a musical legacy

B. Extra income

VII. Commissions

A. Basic information

1. sign a contract
 - a. receive one half the agreed on price upon signing
 - b. receive one half at delivery
2. price based on
 - a. length of piece
 - b. grade level
 - c. instrumentation
 - d. composer's reputation
 - e. what the commissioning group can afford
3. composer retains all rights
 - a. copyright
 - b. right to get piece published
 - c. royalties
4. commissioning party
 - a. gets right of first performance (premiere) usually within a year of the piece's completion
 - b. the score and all parts will have a dedication above the title (includes name of the commissioning group, premiere date and event) and that will remain when published

B. More specific information

1. refer to Meet the Composer publication – Commissioning Music guide www.meetthecomposer.org

RECOMMENDED CLINICS

Copyright Rules, Pam Phillips, www.phillipsfiddlers.com
(can view handout)

How to Commission a New Work for your Ensemble, Dr. Steven L. Rosenhaus,
srosenhaus@earthlink.net

PUBLISHERS OF STRING MUSIC (there are many more not listed)

Alfred (includes Belwin Mills, Highland/Etling, Warner Brothers)
Carl Fischer Music
FJH Music Company, Inc.
Grand Mesa Music Publishers
Hal Leonard Corporation (now includes Boosey & Hawkes, G. Schirmer, Shawnee Press)
Kendor Music, Inc.
Kjos
Latham Music
LudwigMasters Publications
RBC Publications (now includes Young World Publications, Wynn Music)
Tempo Press (affiliated with Luck's Music Library)
TRN Music Publisher, Inc.
C. Alan Publications
Wingert-Jones Publications (affiliated with JW Pepper)

- I. Google the company, go to their website for information on submitting your work
(most have a string editor or someone to contact, or just call and ask)

- II. Get to know:
 - the type of music they publish
 - their distribution (local, national, international)
 - how they market, (advertise in journals, email newsletters, reading sessions
at music clinics, booths at conventions, etc.)
 - how they grade the music (Grade I vs. Beginning Level, etc.)

Bats 'n Bones

CONDUCTOR SCORE

Duration - 3:45

Susan H. Day (ASCAP)

Spookily (♩ = 120)

Violins
Viola
Cello
String Bass
Percussion (Castanets)

Violins
Viola
Cello
String Bass

Teaching

- * 1st finger slides
- * pizz.
- * accents
- * tremolo
- * terraced dynamics

Composing

- * sequence
- * something unique (castanets represent bones)

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Violins
Viola
Cello
String Bass
Perc.

Violins
Viola
Cello
String Bass
Perc.

Spirit of Colorado

Susan H. Day, ASCAP

Musical score for measures 1-18. The score includes staves for Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. Handwritten annotations include "Theme" and "Answers".

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Teaching

- * expressive playing
- * solos
- * divisi double stops
- * slurs

Composing:

- * painting a picture (Indians, cowboys, railroad, majestic mountains)
- * contrary motion
- * question/answer

Musical score for measures 19-37. The score includes staves for Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. Handwritten annotations include "Imitation Spirit of Colorado", "Contrary motion", and "Solos Octave Lower".

Hungarian Variations

For String Orchestra and Solo Violin

CONDUCTOR SCORE

Duration - 5:30

Susan H. Day (ASCAP)

Expressive ($\text{♩} = 120$)

opt. 8/16

theme

intro to theme

Solo Violin
Violins
Violas
Cello
String Bass

Solo Vln.
Vlns.
Vla.
Cello
Str. Bass

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Teaching

- * solo violin with orchestra
- * bow distribution on slurs
- * Bb to C# interval

Composing

- * theme and variation
- * Var. 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.
- * themes rotate around sections
- * augmentation

skipto

Variation 1
X little faster ($\text{♩} = 120$)

Solo Vln.
Vlns.
Vla.
Cello
Str. Bass

Var. 1
Vlns.
Vla.
Cello
Str. Bass

Var. 2
Solo Vln.
Vlns.
Vla.
Cello
Str. Bass

Var. 1
Vlns.
Vla.
Cello
Str. Bass

Var. 2
Solo Vln.
Vlns.
Vla.
Cello
Str. Bass

over

