



# Commissioning

# Report

August 2014

## **Background**

Sound and Music conducted a Composer Commissioning Survey, which ran from 23rd June until 16th July 2014.

We gathered 466 responses from composers engaged in a variety of practice and with a broad range of experience, whom we thank for their time and input.

### **About the respondents:**

45% of composers surveyed had never been involved with Sound and Music before.

74% of the composers surveyed were based in the UK, while 13% were based in Europe and 13% elsewhere in the world.

The findings of the survey are laid out in this document as follows:

- 1// Summary
- 2// Workload
- 3// Earnings
- 4// Perception
- 5// Types of Composer

# 1//Summary

This survey offers an insight into the current state of commissioning for composers and highlights key areas that prompt further discussion.

## **Commissions are not a significant income source for a lot of composers.**

66% of composers stated that they do not find commissions to be a significant proportion of their income. Given that the respondents had an average of 2.65 commissions in 2013 with an average fee per commission of £1,392 it is easy to see why.

## **But, there is a lot of a variance on the scale of pay for commissions.**

The top 1% of composers surveyed earned 25% of the total income from commissions captured by this survey. Annual income for 2013 from commissions ranged from £1 to over £100,000 including the single highest paying commission at £60,000.

## **The conditions for commissions are worse than before.**

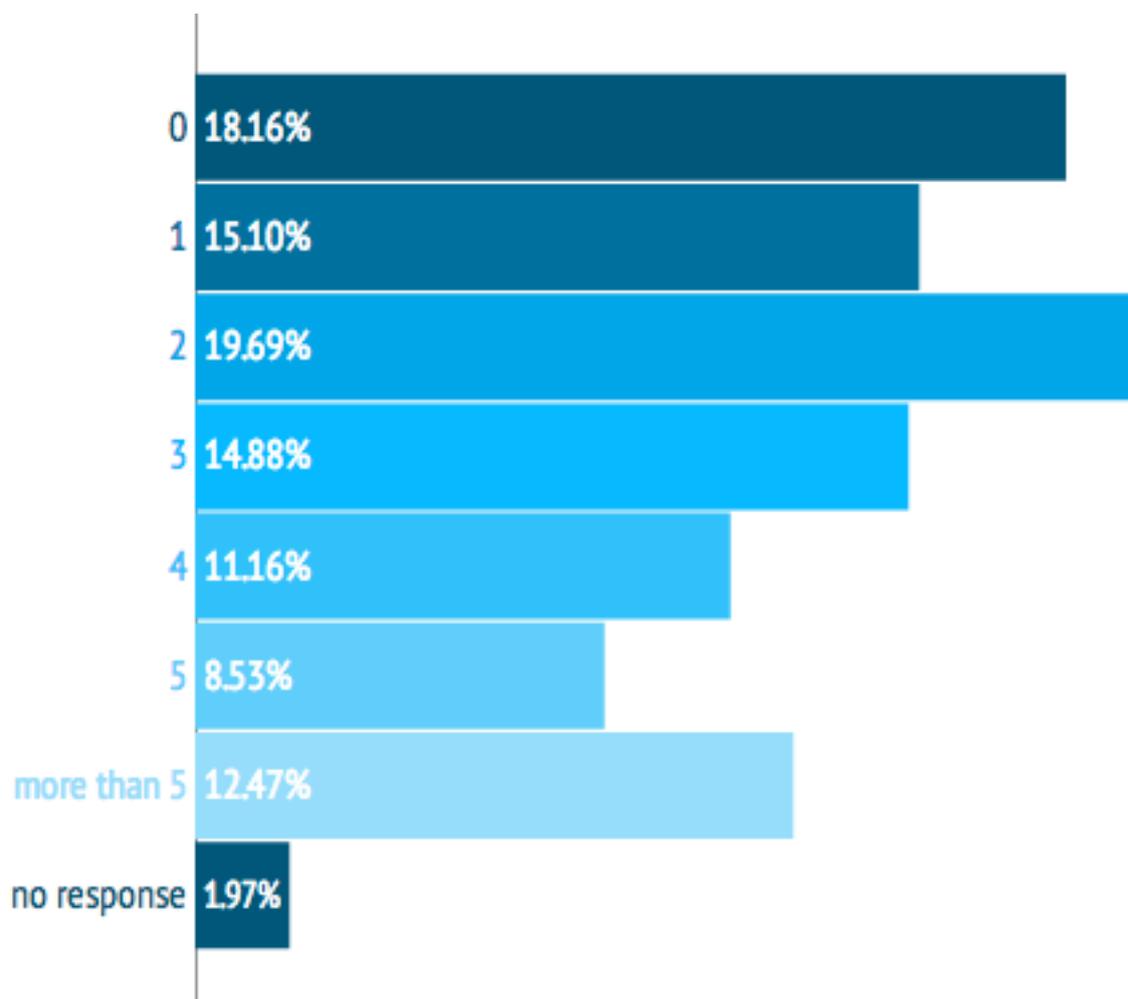
49% of composers feel that there is less rehearsal/preparation time for new works. Sound and Music will be looking to explore the impact this might have on the type of work produced.

## **Although there appear to be more commissions available, they appear to be paying less well.**

74% of composers received the same amount or more commissions in 2013 than in 2012 but only 15% earned more income. We also discovered that those who had been undertaking commissions for more than five years were likely to get more commissions but get paid less per commission.

## 2 // Workload

We asked respondents how many commissions they received in 2013 and there was a fairly even representation from those who had received no commissions to those that had received more than 5.



### 3 // Earnings

2.65



Average number of commissions in 2013

£ 1392



Average fee for those commissions

For those that had received commission(s) we then asked how much they had earned from them. For those that had received commissions the average number was 2.65. The total earned income from commissions for these composers was £1,018,074, making the average income for each composer £3,689 and the average per commission £1,392.

However, there were significant outliers at the top end of the survey data. We found that the best paid 1% of composers received over 25% of all commission income; once we excluded them from our sample, average commission income fell from £3,689 to £2,717.

Of those who answered, over 40% of composers stated that they had earned no income at all from commissions for 2013 but, for those that had been paid, income ranged from £1 to over £100,000.

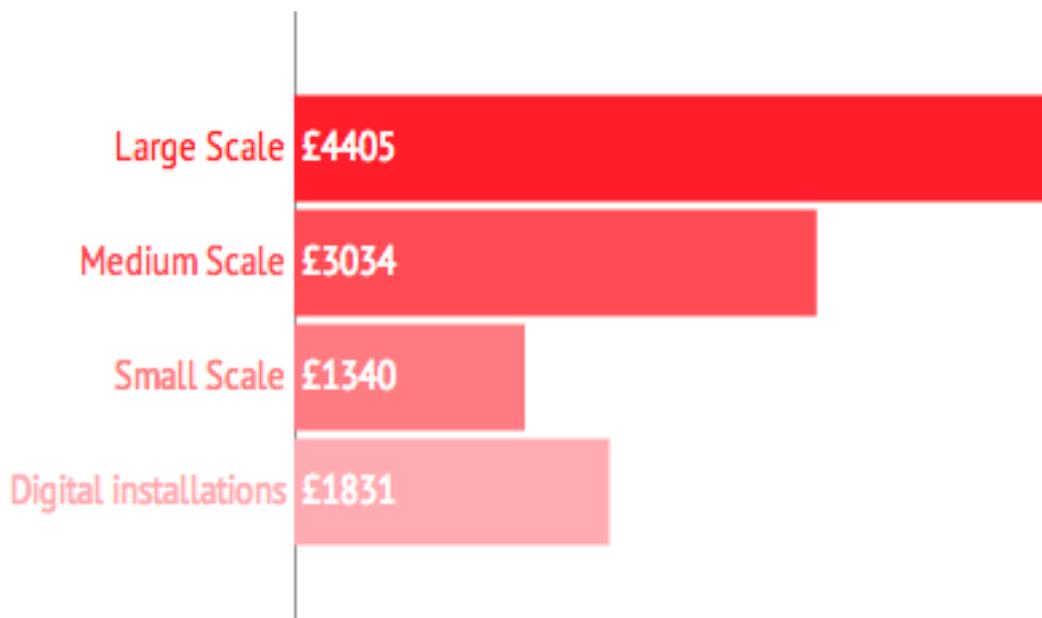
20% of composers turned down a commission opportunity in 2013. The most common reason cited was lack of time, followed by lack of interest or faith in the project, and then inadequate compensation.

*“I prefer to write music that I consider relevant to my own artistic needs, rather than churn out technical pieces for money.”*

Quote from survey respondent

Respondents were then asked about the highest fee that they had secured for a commission in 2013. The highest average payment was for large scale works (50+ musicians) at £4,405 but only 12% of responses counted a large scale work as their highest paid commission. For the largest portion of composers (42%) a medium scale work (>10 musicians) was their best paid commission, but this also had the lowest average fee at £1,340 per commission.

However there is much variance within the scales of work as the highest single commission of £60,000 was a medium scale work (10-50 artists).



Average earning for the top paying commission for composers in 2013

We also asked composers about their worst paid commission, and 63% stated that a small scale commission was the worst paid.

*“The most well-paid commissions I receive come from projects with at least some element outside of music. This suggests that non-music organisations frequently value the work done by composers than music organisations do. In these projects there is rarely the assumption that composers should do any part of their work for free, but within music organisations this is often the assumption”*

Quote from survey respondent

## 4 // Perception

We also asked composers about their experience of 2012 – 2013 and their expectations for 2014.

74% of composers stated that they had received the same amount or more commissions in 2013 than in 2012. Of this number 52% of composers received more commissions in 2013 but only 15% responded that they had earned more from commissions in 2013.

### **Diminishing expectations**

When asked about expectations for 2014, 74% expect to have the same or more commissions than 2013. Of that 74%, half (37%) expect to have more commissions, with the other half expecting the same as the previous year.

14% of composers expect to earn less from commissions than they did in 2013. Although this number is lower than 2013, it indicates that expected income per commission is in decline.

*“I think there are more commissions doing the rounds for smaller ensembles and fees, and probably fewer for very large ensembles.”*

**Quote from survey respondent**

### **Less money, less time**

38% of composers felt that fees are worse than they used to be, while 46% had no opinion.

49% of composers feel that there is less rehearsal/preparation time for new works. Sound and Music will be looking to explore the impact this might have on the type of work produced.

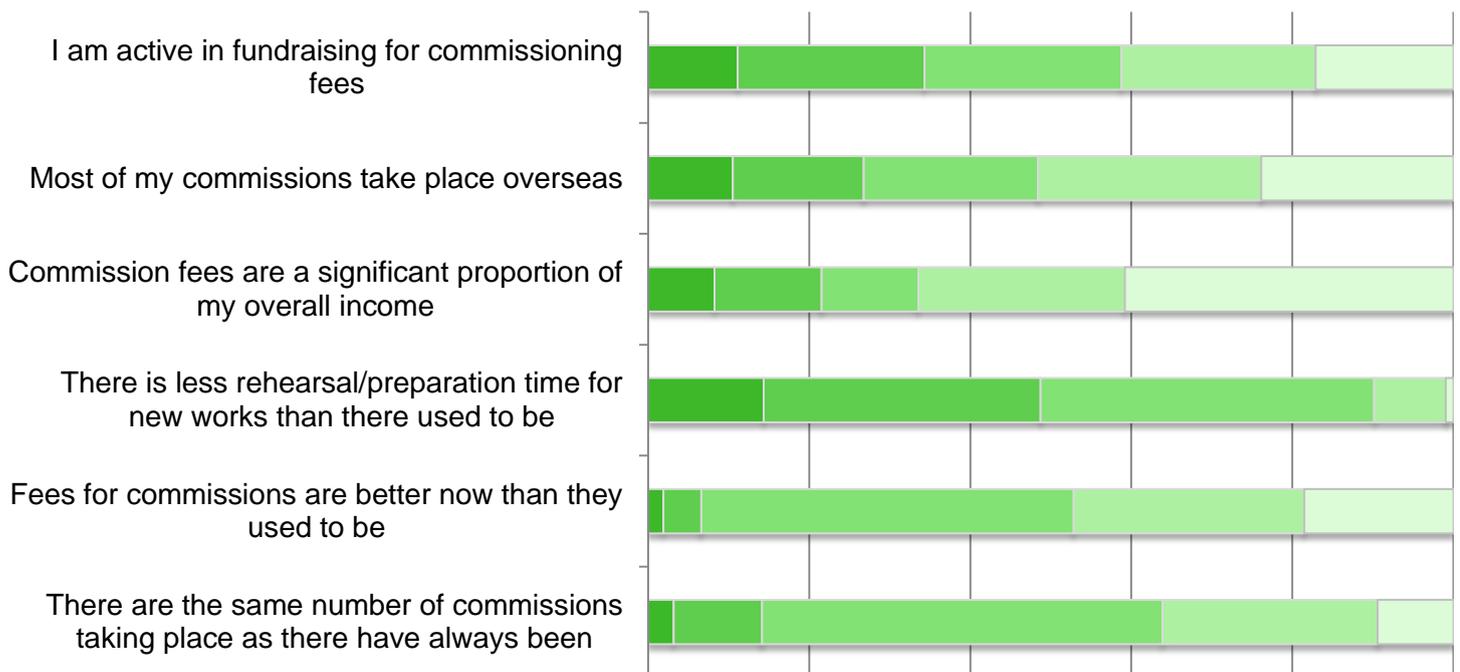
66% of composers do not find commissions to be a significant proportion of their income. This question in particular yielded a high response rate indicating a subject that many of the respondents feel strongly about.

## Opportunities

Most composers disagreed that most of their commissions take place overseas, which might indicate a possible avenue for securing new, better paid opportunities. However, it might also be indicative of a lack of demand for UK composers abroad.

The question 'I am active in fundraising for commissioning fees' saw a very broad spread of answers across the spectrum.

■ 1 - Strongly Agree ■ 2 - Agree ■ 3 - No Opinion ■ 4 - Disagree ■ 5 - Strongly Disagree



## 5//Types of Composer

### Career Stage

We found that established composers (defined as those who have been seeking commissions for 5 or more years) earned an extra £87 a year on average. But they also undertake more commissions per year, with an average of 2.95. This makes their average fee slightly lower than the overall £1,392, at £1,280.

We also found that the composers who secured the best fees for their commissions were not counted as established.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, composers who had an agent or publisher to handle the development of their commissions received significantly better than the general average commission income, at £15,000.

The 54 composers who stated that their work was listed in the British Music Collection had a 46% higher income from commissions than average. Sound and Music have recently re-launched the Collection website, which will open up this process and enable more composers to take advantage of it as a platform.

*“Commissions have always been forthcoming for the newest generation of composers. However, these tend to drop off as composers grow older! Naturally, publishers and agents are more successful at obtaining commissions for the composers that they represent. However, not all 'good' composers have agents. It would therefore be a good thing for there to be a reminder list of successful composers above the age of 40. Perhaps SAM could provide such a list, and be a point of reference for potential commissioning bodies.”*

Quote from survey respondent

## Genre

30% of individuals surveyed described their work as fitting into the contemporary classical spectrum.

Improvisers generally received less from commissions, while theatre, film and installations were better paid.

*“The commissioning of new music completely ignores and alienates serious tonal composers in the UK (and Europe). Opportunities which could provide a liveable income do not seem to exist and competitions with ever growing numbers of entrants cause disillusionment and stifle compositional ingenuity.”*

Quote from survey respondent

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Sound and Music have a number of opportunities available to composers throughout the different stages of their personal development, and we are committed to supporting new music and developing the audience for it.

Sound and Music have also developed the Composer's and Producer's Toolkits, which aim to provide support and advice for composers.