

COMPOSE YOURSELF

Four classical composers share the secrets to managing your own composing career.

In the Royal Academy of Music's David Josefowitz Recital Room, four established composers with wide-ranging backgrounds gathered to talk about how best to manage a career as a composer in the modern world. Their discussion ranged from organising performances and recordings to digital distribution, publishing and self-publishing, networking and maintaining a web presence.

Dr Shirley Thompson

Dr Shirley Thompson is a renowned and award-winning English composer of Jamaican parentage who serves as Reader in Composition and Performance at the University of Westminster, London. Dr Thompson's compositional output consists of large conceptual works including symphonies, ballets and operas, as well as music for TV, film, and theatre.

- Say yes to everything you're offered and then work out how you'll do it – it's important artistically to push yourself into the unknown.
- I'm my own concert promoter with my own ensemble and I've produced my own merchandise (CDs, videos, and t-shirts) using the more progressive, modern popular music model – generating revenue from products other than a recording.
- Now is the best time to use digital platforms to generate audiences – use sites like YouTube and SoundCloud to broaden your audience.
- It's good to learn to share the creative process and not to restrict yourself to just concert music – this is important from both a practical and an artistic viewpoint. You should be aware of the arts in general, and look for opportunities on artsjobs.org.uk
- You need to build relationships with performers and have a network of players in place who perform your work. The people that play my work are people I know from my school and university days.





Alexander Campkin

Described as 'fresh and attractive' by Gramophone, Alexander's work has been performed or broadcast in over thirty countries and features on 20 CDs, one of which was Classic FM's Christmas CD of the Year. Alexander has received over 90 commissions from organisations including The Royal Opera House, The London Mozart Players, The Royal Ballet Sinfonia, Aldeburgh Music and The BBC Performing Arts Fund.

- Don't think: "I'm going to be discovered". It doesn't happen that way. Composers need to be pro-active – don't sit back and wait for things to happen.
- It's important to network with people who are going to perform your music.
- Creating digital recordings and distributing them can be very easy and is cheaper than producing CDs. (Information about Horus Music and Composers Edition, BASCA's associated digital distributor and sheet music publisher respectively, can be found at: <https://basca.org.uk/members-area/displaybenefits/#distribution-publishing>)
- To produce extra content when performing a concert, ask your players for permission to make a commercial recording.

Alexander Campkin on 'How to set up your own publishing company'

- Choose a name. There's no need to trademark it, as long as it's original and you cannot find it anywhere else.
- Typeset the music using software such as Sibelius, Finale or Dorico.
- Have it proof-read.
- Include a copyright notice and duration within the score.
- Get an ISMN from the Music Publishers' Association. (Information can be found here: <http://www.mpaonline.org.uk/content/international-standard-music-numbers-ismns>)
- Generate a barcode.
- Distribute it yourself electronically using an e-commerce feature on your website or via a third party digital distributor
- That's it!

- The composer as entrepreneur isn't a new concept – Mozart and Beethoven did it like this too.
- Travel as much as possible and meet as many people as possible.
- I was initially published by a couple of music publishers who didn't do much promotion, so I took my rights back and set up my own publishing company.
- Start with a performer; then apply to Arts Council England/ Creative Scotland for funding; once you have a performer and two performance dates you can get funding to effectively self-commission.
- For an orchestral recording, it's better to get a salaried orchestra so that you can fit into a quiet spot in their schedule. It'll be cheaper than hiring a non-salaried orchestra for three days at Musicians' Union rates.
- Seek out young/student film directors to approach for collaboration. Places to find them, for example, include the University of Westminster; the National Film and Television School, the Royal College of Art and Bournemouth Film School.
- Be versatile: if you conduct it, edit it and hire the musicians yourself – you split the fee between fewer people.



John McLeod

For over 40 years, John McLeod has been at the forefront of contemporary Scottish music and is still one of the UK's busiest and most prolific composers. His orchestral and vocal music has been commissioned, performed, and recorded in many countries by leading orchestras and has also been featured at international festivals including the London Proms and Aldeburgh. In June 2016, he was appointed CBE in The Queen's Birthday Honours.



Soosan Lolavar

Soosan Lolavar is a British-Iranian composer and educator who works in both electronic and acoustic sound, and across the genres of concert music, contemporary dance, installation, film, animation and theatre. Her work has been performed at venues such as the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, V&A, National Maritime Museum and broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

- Apply for everything on offer – you must also get used to having a lot of rejections.
- When applying for funding, use the term 'we' to make it sound like you're a part of a big team, even if there's just one of you. You could also involve lots of institutions as 'project partners'.
- Check the remit of the place you're applying to. For example, the Arts Council requires you to prove a certain level of public engagement.
- Check your budget and get other people to check it – if it doesn't add up, the application goes straight in the bin.
- It's important to find your compositional voice – what do you have to say?
- Time management is extremely important – when I'm doing creative projects, I only answer emails between 9am and 10am in the morning and avoid them for the rest of the day. I also always favour calling someone over emailing them.