

COMPOSER, CONDUCTOR & COMMUNITY

CREATING A HEALTHY MUSICAL ECOSYSTEM THROUGH COMMISSIONING

DYLAN MADDIX & CAIT NISHIMURA

ABOUT US



Dylan Maddix

Conductor, Educator & Trumpeter



Cait Nishimura

Composer & Educator

COMPOSER, CONDUCTOR & COMMUNITY

OVERVIEW

- What is Commissioning?
- Problems & Solutions
- Why Commission?
- Benefits to Conductor & Ensemble
- Benefits to Composer
- Benefits to Community
- Resources



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WHAT IS COMMISSIONING?

- Commissioning is a collaboration with a composer who is paid to create a new piece of music.
- The commissioning ensemble(s) or individual(s) often have exclusive performance rights and can make requests about instrumentation, duration, style, and more.



PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS

Problem

Financial concerns

The assumption that commissioning is unaffordable

Solution

- Form a consortium or split the commission costs with others
- Apply for grants and other funding
- Community fundraising (including donations)
- Sponsorship
- Join the CBA's Howard Cable consortium

Problem

The misconception that commissioning is only for the elite, the “top ensemble”, or professionals.

Solution

- Anyone can commission!
- Amazing, well-known pieces have been commissioned by junior ensembles, middle schools, community bands, undergrad students, and beyond.



"Imagine what it must have been like for band director Gerald Brown the first time he and his students played the first strains of their new commission, some piece called The Hounds of Spring, by some guy named Alfred Reed."

— Colin Clarke, Conductor, Toronto Youth Wind Orchestra

PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS

Problem

Composer Availability

The composer can't accommodate your preferred timeline

Solution

- Ask in advance
- Be flexible on timing and duration.
- Consider other composers and ask for recommendations.
- Don't take it personally!

Problem

Putting Composers On A Pedestal

Solution

- Composers are people too.
- Learn about the composers as people (listen to podcast interviews etc).
- Composers want to connect with the community!

PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS

Problem

The composer I want to work with hasn't written for this instrumentation before

Solution

- Ask them anyway! The composer may be enthusiastic to try something new.
- They may be able to recommend another composer who specializes in your request!

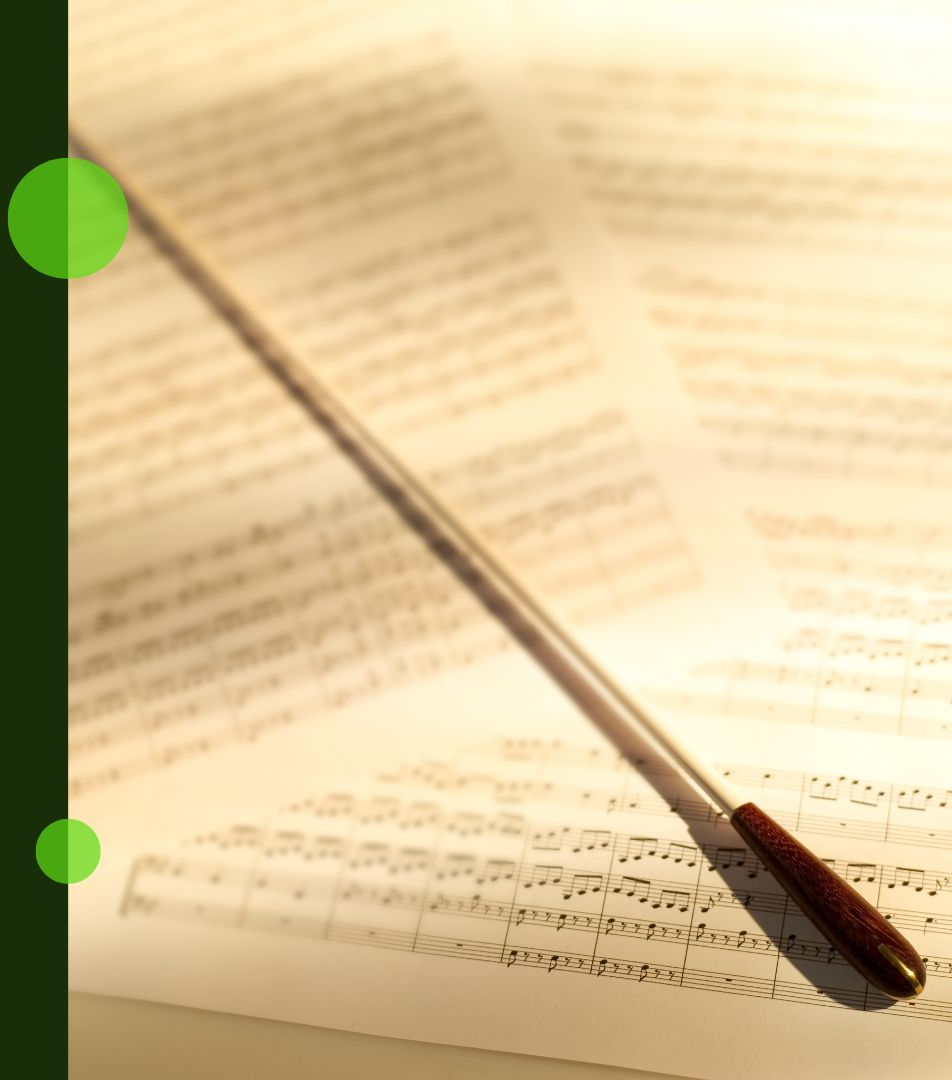
WHY COMMISSION?



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BENEFITS TO ENSEMBLE & CONDUCTOR

- Motivate, connect, and empower
- Involvement in the creative process
- Increased quality of music making
- Ownership of performance
- A “tailored” piece
- Who is in your ensemble?
Representation matters



Conductor Perspectives

"Experiencing the level of focus and engaged energy that happens when a composer first enters the rehearsal hall to work with the ensemble. The whole sentiment of, "Wow, this is REAL. We are bringing a new piece of music to life for the first time" is incredibly powerful!"

- Melanie Brooks, Director of Bands at Winona State University

"It's mostly about the students for me. Having them, as students, be active consumers for living composers, teaches so much about art and society. And normalizing diversity by commissioning equity-deserving artists is equally impactful....Also, my coolest friends are composers!"

- Cynthia Johnston Turner - Dean of Music, Wilfrid Laurier University

"For myself and my students, seeing our name on the title sheet of the piece helps us feel innately connected to the piece. It puts both the conductor/commissioner and the band in a place of ownership; therefore we are intrinsically invested in its' success. We are all committed to the piece and its successful performance, long before the first note even sounds."

- Melissa Doiron - Music Director, Charles P Allen High School, Halifax, N.S



“Commissions are extremely motivating for musicians, regardless of age or ability. It is important for them to connect to a composer and to be part of a living thing. Being able to show them how the energy, beauty, trauma, joy, feel or sound becomes even more powerful if we can connect to the person who felt those things and turned them into music.”

— Wendy Zander McCallum, Director of Bands, Brandon University



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BENEFITS TO COMPOSER

- Paid work for living composers
- Opportunity to contribute to shaping the musical future
- Opportunity to create meaningful work for and with the support of collaborators
- Personal and artistic growth
- Connection with community

Composer Perspectives

“Every time I compose I become more self aware. This is helpful for me as I improve as an artist.”

- Marie A. Douglas, composer

“Commissioning is the primary means by which new art is brought into the world, and that is process that is of deep value to everyone -- composers, musicians, audiences, and indeed culture as a whole.”

- Kevin Lau, composer

“The commissioning process ROCKS. In trying to meet the needs of a particular ensemble, there’s generally been a very soulful bond between myself and the commissioner. That kind of support has been irreplaceable in my life as an artist, and there’s nothing like the feeling of hearing a piece come alive because of this kind of collaboration.”

- JoAnne Harris, composer

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BENEFITS TO COMMUNITY

- Creating a musical landmark in your community's history
- Commemorating and processing community events, tragedies, celebrations, shared experiences
- Making connections between music and life events
- Actual expansion of community (new people coming to the concert)
- Programming intentionally to make meaningful connections is good, but when the music was created FOR the community it's even more impactful



Community Perspectives

“Being able to perform the first performance of any piece of music is exciting but knowing that you are part of the commission and more importantly the collaboration, adds an entirely different level of ownership in your performance.”

“This process has had a most positive impact on my motivation to learn and perform music.”

“Not being able to compose myself, I tend to put composers on a pedestal as it were. Meeting Cait helped me see her as one of us.”

- New Horizons community band members (ages 18-88)

“The wind band community has led the way with the performing and commissioning of new works for a long time now. Commissioning new works is an important part of keeping this cornerstone of the wind band genre alive and well.”

- Gareth Jones - Adjunct Professor at the University of Calgary & Artistic Director of Alberta Winds

Non-Musical Involvement From The Community



Planet B - Catherine Likhuta

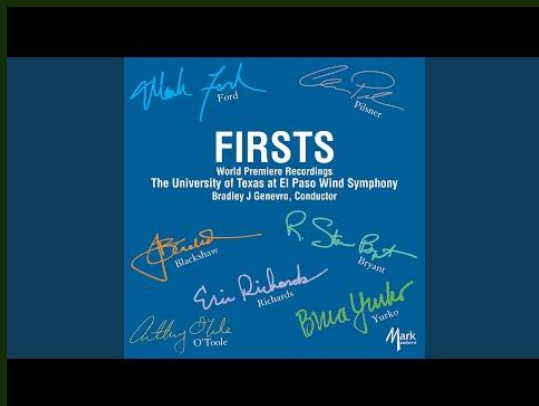
- Commissioned through consortium
- Grade 4 band
- Utilizes art from elementary school students
- Backpacks of school supplies donated to community



"One of many things that I value the most about commissions is that it usually starts with someone really enjoying my music. That initial "liking me for who I am" encourages me to be myself when writing a piece for them. And that's the best feeling - being supported to be yourself, both as a person and an artist. It allows you to create something truly authentic."

— Catherine Likhuta, composer, Australia

Non-Musical Involvement From The Community



Peace Dancer - Jodie Blackshaw

- Commissioned by the UBC Conducting Symposium
- Grade 5 band
- inspired by the text of the same name by Roy Henry Vickers (Squamish Nation)
- Healing community





"When the ensemble director invites the composer inside to create a commission for their ensemble, collectively they are able to create something new that is greater than the sum of each individual part. New music, new purpose and new, everlasting memories."

— Jodie Blackshaw, composer, Australia

Collaborating with living composers (with or without commissioning)

Benefits to collaborating with living composers

- Opportunity for connection
- Deepen understanding and context for the music you're working on
- Demonstrates career pathways for aspiring student musicians
- Increased motivation, ownership, energy from ensemble
- Long lasting musical memories



Composer Kevin Day working with the Arizona State University Wind Symphony

Collaborating with living composers (with or without commissioning)



Suggested ways to work with composers

- Invite them to a concert
- In person or virtual residency
- Share a concert program or recording
- Ask for rehearsal feedback by email
- Zoom visit - either listen to a rehearsal or do student Q&A
- Pre-recorded audio or video greeting



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RESOURCES

The Ins & Outs of the Commissioning Process by Jason Caslor and Pete Meechan - *Canadian Winds Journal*
To subscribe: info@canadianband.org

Canadian League of Composers Commissioning Rates
<https://www.composition.org/commissioning-rates/>

Commissioning: a how-to guide for newbies by Jodie Blackshaw
<https://www.jodieblackshaw.com/blog/commissioning>

Then, Now, Tomorrow: Collaboration in Writing Music for Student Players by Belinda Reynolds & Ashley Killam
<https://newmusicusa.org/nmbx/then-now-tomorrow-collaboration-in-writing-music-for-student-players/>

Grants
Canada Arts Council
<https://canadacouncil.ca/funding/grants>

British Columbia Arts Council
<https://www.bcartscouncil.ca/program/>

SOCAN Foundation
<https://www.socanfoundation.ca/grants/>

Municipal Grant Organizations



THANK YOU

www.bandroompod.com/commissioning