

Paying professional musicians – Research into the amateur music sector's engagement of professional musicians

Executive Summary

Background

Making Music is frequently asked by its members, of which 86% are performing amateur music groups (vocal or instrumental), how much others pay the various kinds of professional musicians they engage. The results of this survey provide some useful indications, as well as information on contracts and payments.

Furthermore, we have been in discussion with the Musicians Union (MU) about creating an agreement on advisory rates for amateur groups engaging professional musicians. The survey results offer an informed starting point for those discussions.

In addition to the musicians referred to in this survey, Making Music's 400+ amateur promoter members present professional musicians in an average of 6 concerts per promoter per year, but data for these engagements are not included in this survey.

Context

Amateur music groups overall are estimated to be worth £100m to the economy with Making Music members alone spending around £18.7m per year on professional musicians (Making Music Treasurers Survey 2013), the same amount as reported in the previous survey in 2010.

However, in 2013 the total number of musicians engaged had fallen by 10% to 34,000. It therefore seems that groups' incomes have not grown, so if artists become more expensive, groups engage fewer of them.

In addition to engaging professional artists, groups spent around £1.7m per year with music publishers and commission around 400 new pieces per year.

Main findings

Numbers

98% of respondents engage professional musicians, 8% of those only a conductor and/or accompanist.

87% engage soloists to sing/play with their group

76% engage conductors

97% of instrumental groups engaged orchestral musicians in the last 3 years

82% of instrumental groups engaged an orchestra leader in the last 3 years

21% of instrumental groups engaged section leaders in the last 3 years

79% of vocal groups engaged an ensemble or orchestra in the last 3 years

The numbers of individual musicians engaged averaged 26 a year, but ranged from 1 (presumably just conductor) to 250. Of those that engaged more than one or two, the central range was between 5 and 40 musicians per year.

Entire ensembles were engaged by vocal groups an average of 4 times, with an average 22 musicians per engagement and an average cost of over £2,700 per engagement.

Whilst to some extent respondents will have been self-selecting, this explains the astonishing numbers of musician engagements discovered by the Treasurers Survey.

Clearly, the amateur music sector contributes considerably, and significantly, to the sustainability of professional music careers and to the professional music sector.

Rates paid

We asked respondents about soloists, choristers, orchestral musicians, percussionists/harpists separately, musical directors/conductors, accompanists, orchestral leaders, and section leaders, and the full report lists results in each category in tables, including averages, ranges, lowest and highest fees.

Some noteworthy results:

- The range always starts at £0, for all roles
- It seems percussionists/harpists command higher rates; however, in the case of amateur groups, these fees tend to include transport costs which are routinely incurred by these instrumentalists
- By comparison with the last Association of British Orchestras/MU agreement that Making Music was included in, Making Music members often pay more than that agreement, particularly when engaging entire ensembles, probably through ignorance of the terms of the agreement
- Over 50% of respondents also offered additional benefits to the musicians they engaged, from bouquets of flowers or bottles of wine to food between rehearsal and concert, free tickets etc.

Types of contracts

- Conductors were most frequently on annual contracts, though a sizeable proportion of accompanists and even orchestral leaders were, too.
- The other most cited type of engagement was for a concert with rehearsal immediately preceding. This is used occasionally for conductors and accompanists, more frequently for orchestral leaders and most often for section leaders and soloists

How are rates determined by groups?

In the case of individual musicians, including conductors and accompanists, groups will most frequently (86%) decide how much they can spend and then negotiate accordingly.

For entire ensembles, the conductor (61%) would generally do the negotiation, within a prior agreed budget that s/he would have advised on. For the other third of ensemble engagements, groups take advice from fixers or agents as to the rates and then decide whether they can afford them.

Comments throughout the survey suggest that **if professional musicians don't agree to the rates offered or ask for fees the group cannot afford, groups would generally change their programme (rather than increase their offer)**. Groups' budgets are limited by their own membership subscriptions and the income from their events which generally only just break even, without any public funding or guarantees against loss. Furthermore, overwhelmingly constituted as small charities (two thirds of our members have a turnover of below £14,500), they are not able to take financial risks. Amateur music groups therefore have to programme within their budgets.

Respondents

The response rate was 15%, 414 responses (representing amateur music groups, not individuals). Of these, 67% are assumed to be vocal and 33% instrumental groups, reflecting the make-up of Making Music membership.

What does 'professional' mean?

'Professional' means different things to different people in different contexts, and this emerged clearly from the survey. 'Professional' might encompass:

- The full-time musician earning their entire living from performing
- The part-time musician earning part of their living from performing (e.g. music teacher or part-time worker in music industry)

This would be the assumed understanding of the word. However, a definition of 'professional' might also encompass:

- The professionally trained musician who now has a full-time job doing something else (e.g. full-time music teacher / working in other role in music industry / became an accountant instead, but still performs in their spare time)
- The full time music or peripatetic teacher who does not perform professionally but likes to still play, and does so in an amateur orchestra
- The amateur who has come up through the ranks and plays/sings/conducts well enough to be in demand
- The recent music college graduate who is trying to build up a career
- The current (pre) music college student trying to build up experience

Any of these might undertake their roles with an amateur music group for no payment at all, for a small payment, for a full fee, for expenses only, or anything in between.

Some representative comments by survey respondents

"I would like to emphasise that the fees paid to musicians, conductor and accompanist are those which our society can afford. In certain cases, our conductor and accompanist are able to help us by introducing us to musicians who are starting their careers and are willing to perform at the fees which we can afford to pay."

"Funds are always tight so we use many local soloists - either our own orchestra members, or local music students. The audiences appear to appreciate this, and we are able to keep our costs down. Percussion is almost always the most expensive extra."

"I have tried to answer the survey accurately but the varied nature of what we do means that few of the answers fit the question exactly."

"Even though we are 'amateur' musicians we have great respect for those who make their living through music and would never ask for their time and talent for nothing - or for a fee that might be considered unacceptable."

"Some professional soloists choose what they want to play or trial and agree a reduced fee."

"Soloist rates - no average given as rate depends on whether or not soloist is school or college student, young inexperienced professional or more mature experienced professional."

Some brief conclusions

A simple description cannot do justice to the variety of roles and the breadth of engagement of the amateur music sector with professional musicians.

There is the variety of roles: conductor, accompanist, accompanist for concert only (e.g. organist), soloist for a vocal piece or a concerto, chorister or orchestral musician to supply or beef up a section for a concert (tenor, harp, percussion, bassoon)...

There is the variety of types of engagement: individuals for one concert only, individuals regularly for concerts, for rehearsals only, as part of an ensemble for a concert only, as an individual as part of an amateur group on a medium- to long-term basis (e.g. accompanists, conductors, section leaders...), plus there are one-off engagements for tutors or workshop leaders, and commissions for professional composers, as well as fees for arrangers or producers of voice tracks etc..

Publishing this survey on a regular basis, therefore, is surely the right way forward to allow amateur music groups to benchmark their activity against that of other similar groups. Making Music will be looking at future versions of this research to drill down even further into useful detail to help support the many-faceted relationships of amateur groups with professional musicians of different kinds.