The Purpose and Process of Commissioning New Music for Low Brass Instruments: A Guide

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The Purpose and Process of Commissioning New Music for Low Brass Instruments: A Guide

Michael Waddell

DMA Document submitted to the College of Creative Arts at West Virginia University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts in
Low Brass Performance

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Abstract

The Purpose and Process of Commissioning New Music for Low Brass Instruments: A Guide

Michael Waddell

The euphonium, trombone, and tuba do not have the breath of solo and chamber music repertoire that other instruments such as the piano or violin do. The majority of works being written for these instruments today is being written via direct commissions and commission consortiums. This research analyzes the importance of expanding the repertoire of these instruments, along with detailed guidance on starting a consortium project and seeing it through to completion. The author, and interviewees Frank Gulino, Adam Frey, and George Alberti, detail their experiences working on consortium projects, and their views on the ethical importance of advancing the low brass repertoire. The author also recounts personal experiences from his work commissioning over a dozen pieces from 2009 through 2021.
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Glossary of Terms

Consortium:

A group of musicians joining together to financially support the production of a new musical composition. This can be a group of individual, a group of entities (such as chamber ensembles or institutions), or a combination of both.

Commission:

A project in which an individual or a consortium pay a composer to create a new piece of music.

Lead-Commissioner:

The individual that acts as the liaison to the composer as the voice for all participants of the consortium. Usually responsible for contracts, collecting money, promotion of the consortium, and other related administrative tasks related to the project.

Co-Commissioner:

A financial contributor to the consortium.

New Music:

In the context of this document, this refers simply to music written between 2009 and 2021.
Introduction

The Purpose

Performing musicians cannot exist without composers. Without composers, there would be no music to bring to life. For centuries composers have served as the lifeblood of music. In the time of composers such as Palestrina or Bach, new music was often funded by the church. Each Sunday there would be new music, and these composers were adequately compensated for their work from their position at the church. In the classical era we see even more opportunities for composer employment with the rise of court composers such as Joseph Haydn. Through Haydn’s continued employment he was able to write 107 symphonies, as well as many other works. These types of opportunities generally do not exist in present day. As history progressed these opportunities faded and led to more music being written by commission. A commission being when someone would directly pay a composer, or pay them through a consortium of participants, to write a specific piece of music. Throughout history many works have been created via commission, such as Bartok’s Concerto for Orchestra in 1943. Without commissioners, there simply would not be the plethora of music that we have access to today.


musicians take the time, organization, and care to work with the composers of today, the repertoire for low brass instruments will be alive and well for future generations.

Today, there are not many positions for composers to just write music and get compensation to directly allow them to afford to live their lives. Some very lucky composers work for colleges or universities, allowing them some flexibility in time for composition as they teach composition, music theory, or other related courses. Many have other vocations, both inside and outside music, and write when they can. In today’s landscape, most monetary support for composers comes from commissions for new works. With commissions being the primary source of income for many composers, this often drives their creative output. A composer may wish to write a piece for solo flute, cello ensemble, or trombone choir, but may not be able to bring those visions to reality until the proper commissioners come around to fund the project. The reality is that many composers cannot write works that are not funded with a formal commission. The monetary compensation is often a necessity to allow them the time to complete the work. Likewise, a composer may have no desire to write a piece for low brass until a commissioner comes around to ask them about the project.

With commissions being composers’ primary source of income, and primary impetus for new projects, it gives the work of being a commissioner ethical significance. If there is a prominent composer alive today, chances are they will not compose a piece for a certain instrumentation unless they are commissioned to do so. While this is important for performers and enthusiasts of all instruments to be aware of, it is particularly important for low brass instruments, as these instruments do not have the depth of original repertoire available as many other, older instruments do. Take the violin for example, with countless works written by the greatest composers throughout history. Beethoven, Bach, and Bartok all wrote for the violin.
None of them wrote any solo works for the euphonium, tuba, or trombone. This is part of what makes this work so important today. The performers of today have the responsibility of helping to shape the repertoire of the future by working with composers. Performers and composers working together can help ensure that a century from now the repertoire is more robust and reflects the greatest composers of our time here on earth.

This work is often equally important to composers and performers. It gives the composers the ability to fulfill opportunities, and to contribute to repertoire that they are often passionate about. Frank Gulino is a composer and bass trombonist, who is in the unique position of being able to contribute directly to repertoire that he is also a performer of. This gives him the unique ability to understand the instrument/s idiatically, and to have a deeper philosophical understanding of the importance of his work expanding the low brass repertoire. When asked to detail his background to give an understanding of his work as a composer for low brass, he stated:

My background is as a performing trombone player, but while I was studying trombone at Peabody, I started kind of getting into composing more … I didn't have any really serious aspirations at first. It was kind of just a different creative outlet. I had a few opportunities to write smaller pieces for friends, people in my studio, people who were programming degree recitals. I started to really enjoy it a lot. There were some good receptions to some of my music. I had an opportunity to start getting music published and I really just sort of fell in love with kind of the creative aspect of doing it … as [opposed to] a performer, you're always trying to kind of realize [the work] of composers and bring those to life as accurately as you can, but there's something sort of empowering about, I think, just having a clean slate and you get to decide how the music goes, and what the phrase sounds like, and what the notes are…by the end of my degree, I sort of felt like I wanted to spend more time I'm cultivating that aspect of things … at the end of college … I felt like composing overtook performing as kind of my main musical career aspiration.”

Since his time in school and getting into composing, Gulino has quickly become a prominent composer, especially in the world of low brass musicians. He has had works premiered by some of the titans of the low brass sphere, such as international soloist Steven Mead premiering his *Infinite Escape* for euphonium and piano in 2012\(^6\), Principal Bass Trombone of the Metropolitan Opera and Professor at the Jacobs School of Music Denson Paul Pollard, premiering his *Out of Darkness* for Bass Trombone and Piano in 2021\(^7\), and Principal Tubist of the North Carolina Symphony Seth Horner, premiering *The Effervescent Ballroom*, for Tuba and Piano in 2011\(^8\). When asked to reflect on the importance of his contributions to the low brass repertoire, and about writing for low brass instruments in general, he stated:

Being a low brass player, I think there is a good opportunity because as solo instruments, they are instruments that are relatively new to the scene. We don't have these lifetimes worth a repertoire like pianists do, or like violinists do. If I was in the same boat, but you know, I was a piano player and I decided, hey, I want to write a lot of music from my instrument. I could do that, except there's a lot more competition. There's a lot more major staples of the repertoire. There's literally centuries worth of great, great rep... and the thing is Beethoven never wrote euphonium sonatas or tuba concertos, you know, just we don't have the titans of the cannon writing extensive solo literature for our instruments. So, for that reason, I think that a lot of the great literature for the low brass instruments is kind of still to come. \(^9\)

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\(^8\) Horner, Seth. “The Effervescent Ballroom”. May 10\(^{th}\), 2011. Premiere Performance Video. 7:12. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyoPUvGs0lY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyoPUvGs0lY)

His view of this as an opportunity to contribute to instruments new on the scene, is one of unique historical perspective that does not apply to all instruments. This perspective will hopefully drive Gulino to continue writing and contributing to the repertoire as future commissions allow him to.

The idea of this work being important ethically is not solely from composers. Many lead commissioners are not composers themselves but are performers and educators on these instruments. George Alberti is a tubist and educator who has devoted a large amount of his career thus far to helping to promote new music for low brass instruments, with a focus on the tuba. When asked to give a background on his work in music, he stated:

I am currently the visiting assistant professor of tuba and euphonium at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania. I'm in the final semester of a DMA starting the spring at The University of Illinois ... I am also active freelancing in the central Illinois area. I play a lot with the main orchestras in that area, the Illinois Symphony and Urbana-Champaign symphony. I have a studio of middle school and high school students I teach over there ... going back to before I lived in Illinois, [when] I was in Texas ... I taught a lot of private students down there ... and that’s kind of where I am right now.10

Throughout his career, Alberti has long been drawn to working with composers and getting new music written for the tuba. When asked about what drew him to the work initially, he recounted:

I think what drew me to it was ... when we were in college together at IUP [Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2008-2012] I think one of the things we were learning about at that time ... was the sort of small repertoire we had for the solo tuba and solo euphonium. Our teacher Zach Collins kind of used it as a teaching moment ... and this is why we have been commissioning works. “We” being the tuba community, so much over the last half century or so, and we continued to do that. I think I remember playing some pieces that were written, you know, for solo tuba in the seventies and eighties, maybe that ... I really didn't enjoy ... but they just weren't good music .... subjectively that's my

opinion. Someone might like it. So, then I got the idea, or I think I had the bug and the thought that you know, this is what real musicians do, they encourage new music to be written. I think a lot of the people that were putting out solo albums when we were in school were doing that, like, this is a new piece that I got commissioned. [Such as] Demondrae Thurman’s album [Soliloquies] … and that kind of stood out to me, like that's what you're supposed to do. There's something about advancing [the repertoire] … I didn't know that that's what scholarly work was at the time. You know, I was 19 or 20 years old.  

Continuing about the purpose behind doing this work, Alberti references the distant past, when playing the music of that time was all they had.

Hundreds of years ago they weren't looking back in time looking for music. I mean, this is something from my music history classes that I'm plowing through right now in my DMA … this is something that's recent within the 1800s, you know, the early 1900s, early 20th century, when we started to be like, okay let's play Beethoven again. You know, let's play Brahms again. And by the way I love, love, love, love the old stuff. Can't get enough of it. If they're playing Beethoven 9 for the eighth time I'm like, yeah, I'm there. You know, it's still so cool to me every time we hear it. But you think about what it was like at that time when Beethoven 9 was played, or even before that, you know, Mozart symphonies and Hayden. The music that was being played was the music that was being written at that time and was being created at that time. And the performer was much closer to the product in creating the product. I feel like now when we perform Beethoven, when we perform these other pieces, it's a little bit of speculation, you know as to how it should be played. Whereas the wonderful thing, that's a long way to say … let's talk about doing it the other way, where we are playing the music of people of our time.  

Similarly, to Gulino, there is the connection here to advancing the repertoire. The reference to Demondrae Thurman’s Album Soliloquies shows how commissioning new music can even indirectly inspire the work of commissioning completely unrelated music. Soliloquies


is an important album, as it consists entirely of music written for and/or commissioned by euphonium virtuoso and professor of music at the Jacob’s School of Music, Demondrae Thurman.\textsuperscript{13} Due to high level musicianship and quality repertoire, this album reached many students and professionals alike when it released in 2005 and in the years to follow. This album clearly served as inspiration to George Alberti as he began to work on commissioning new works just a few years later. This recording project and others like it that showcase new music prove that new music is alive and vibrant today. This helps to further the ethical purpose, and to promote others to embrace embarking on this type of work.

Commissioning new music happens in projects both large and small and comes from many individuals across the low brass community. One of the most prominent commissioners is Adam Frey. Dr. Frey has led over 150 projects, many via consortium through his Euphonium Foundation 501c3 nonprofit organization.\textsuperscript{14} His experience comes from a diverse career, that has allowed him the great experience of working with many different composers. When asked about his own career to give background on his work in commissioning, he stated:

““My career is multifaceted … I'm active as a teacher at the University of North Georgia [where] I'm an associate professor. I also perform around the world, a little bit before COVID, starting to ramp things back up, but I did that for about 20 years. I'm also sought out as an adjudicator for international competitions, and I’m the artistic director of the international euphonium tuba festival that's been going on for 18 years. I am also the co-founder and artistic director of the schoolofbrass.com, which was a very innovative program … I also have two publishing companies, pinnacle brass, and euphonium.com publications. Each of those have over a hundred pieces in their catalog. Then I also run the euphonium.com store, which has more than 600 titles that are all specifically for euphonium.”\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} Demondrae Thurman. Soliloquies. Summit Records. 2005, compact disc.

\textsuperscript{14} Frey, Adam. Interview with Michael Waddell. Personal Interview. Remote, December 9\textsuperscript{th}, 2021.

\textsuperscript{15} Frey, Adam. Interview with Michael Waddell. Personal Interview. Remote, December 9\textsuperscript{th}, 2021.
This multifaceted global career has been ripe with opportunities to work with a variety of composers and been a key facet of Dr. Frey’s career. When asked about how this interest started, and why he feels that working with composers and expanding the repertoire is important, he stated:

It [Working to get new music written for euphonium] started when I was an undergrad at the University of Georgia and there were just a couple of transcriptions that I wanted to make. A bassoon piece, a cello piece, and that's sort of where it started…. and while I was an undergrad I also started doing some commissioning. One of the first pieces that was interesting was a piece for euphonium harp and flute. That was part of the LaGrange Symphony young artists competition. They had an instrumental competition … and so they had composers write pieces for the three prize winners … and it was a neat experience … Then the main reason I started doing commissioning and arranging is that there’s a need for repertoire for the euphonium. Especially 25 years ago [the repertoire] was really very narrow and quite thin. Since that time, I've done more than 150 arrangements and commissions that involve euphonium which is really cool thing, and they're all across a lot of different genres and performance mediums.  

The sheer breath of new music that has come out of Dr. Frey’s work is both impressive and inspirational. Much like Dr. Thurman’s Soliloquies album, he has recorded many of these new pieces of music that he has been involved with leading commissions for. This work has surely influenced countless other projects from individuals who have been impacted by the music that has come out of his work with composers, including myself.

All these artists show different perspectives, but they all align. They all feel strongly about advancing the repertoire of low brass instruments, and they have all been influenced and inclined to do this from a relatively young age during their undergraduate collegiate studies. It is

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impossible to underscore the importance of working with composers to commission new music for euphonium, trombone, and tuba. We do not have the luxury of centuries of great repertoire, and it is in the performer’s hands to get the process started with composers, and to help make this music become a reality. For without composers, we are nothing.

*Past Perspectives*

Outside of the world of consortiums and direct commissions, professional organizations such as the International Tuba Euphonium Association (formerly Tubists Universal Brotherhood Association), have played a great role in helping to expand the repertoire for low brass instruments. Since its inception in 1973 ITEA has been dedicated to expanding the low brass repertoire. Throughout the first 10 years of the organization’s inception, one of their primary goals was to help increase both the quantity and quality of the repertoire. This included both new original compositions and new arrangements. These were often presented through recurring columns in the Journal, such as a series entitled “Arranging String Literature for the Euphonium,” written by Dr. Paul Droste. In the period from 1983 – 2002, the organization continued commissioning new works, and began publishing works under their own publishing company. In addition to publishing works directly, the organization also accepted submissions to their journal for a “New Materials” column, that would promote new compositions. Looking

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forward to today’s most recent ITEA Journal, the new materials section still exists. It, however, does not contain any reference to the organization itself commissioning new works. It is now a collection of reviews of new materials that have been published. It includes new compositions, arrangements, and recordings. 20 This structure and focus of the ITEA Journal new materials section dates back to at least 2014, with no mentions of the organization sponsoring or publishing any commissions directly. 21 One of the most recent mentions of the organization’s direct involvement in a commission or publication of a new work comes from 2010, with the writing of *Truffles* for euphonium and piano by James Grant. 22 As time progressed, it seems the organization has shifted it’s focus from contributing directly to new project, to reviewing and spreading the news about works that have been commissioned by individuals and/or external entities.

A prime example of a larger commission run outside of any professional organization was the commission of the *UFO Concerto* for euphonium and wind orchestra, written by Johan De Meij. The work was commissioned by Jason Ham. The work had several premieres by many notable soloists around the world. David Childs gave a British Premiere and Adam Frey gave a premiere in Singapore. 23 On a less global scale, another example of commissioning moving away from organizations was the creation of *Ursa Concilium for Trombone and Percussion* written by Blake Tyson in 2016. This work was born out of a simple conversation with Tyson


and trombonist Justin Hastings Cook. They shared the common goal of looking for new repertoire to perform, specifically with the goal of something that could be used to performed at a high school recruitment concert. There was significant collaboration between Cook and Tyson throughout the writing process.  

These perspectives serve as a snapshot of past projects in the low brass community. This shift from professional organization led projects, to more individual led projects showcases the importance of performers working directly with composers today and in the future.

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Chapter 1

Consortium Logistics

What is a Consortium?

Many new pieces of music are written through direct commissions. A direct commission is when someone approaches a composer directly with a project and works out all of the logistic and financial details with them one on one. In most cases the commissioner will give the sole world premiere of the new work. While there are many advantages to the simplicity of a direct commission, there can be an insurmountable financial burden in many cases. To overcome these obstacles, many choose the route of commissioning new music via a consortium.

A consortium is one of the most powerful ways to work with composers to create new music. A Consortium Commission is when a lead commissioner gathers a group of others to fund a project jointly. The lead commissioner collects funds from co-commissioners and works as a liaison to the composer for the creative process. Much of the logistical work often still falls to the lead commissioner, but a consortium allows the financial burden to be spread across all co-commissioners. It also allows folks who cannot afford to do a direct commission themselves the opportunity to participate in the work of commissioning new music with a smaller monetary contribution. Creatively, there is often the opportunity for all members of the consortium to premiere the new work as part of a timed “consortium premiere.” With a consortium premiere, there is a set timeline from the release of the piece to all co-commissioners where they have exclusive performance (and sometimes recording) rights to the work. This can vary from project to project but is generally a period of at least several months, to give ample time for co-
commissioners to program the new work. In addition to giving co-commissioners the opportunity to be some of the first to perform this new piece, it is also great for exposure of the piece and the composer. Instead of one “world premiere” there are several, now spread across various geographical locations. This can aid in getting word out about the piece and assist in its longevity if it is well received. Commissioning via consortium is a great way to get many involved who want to help bring new music to life, but do not have the time or financial means to dedicate to doing the work themselves.

Organizing Your Creative Plan

Before ever reaching out to a composer or reaching out to your contacts to get funding for a consortium, it is important to have a creative plan for the project in place. There are many facets to consider when building out a commissioning project. First and foremost is to know the purpose of the project. Specifically, the purpose of the piece beyond simply furthering the repertoire for low brass instruments. How will this new piece serve the repertoire? Will it be an exciting new work that is aimed at being accessible to the average undergraduate college student, a long concerto of utmost difficulty only reserved for the world class elite performers, or the first work for the instrument by a particular composer? Perhaps something else entirely. Considering questions like these, both practically and ethically within the scope of your project will increase the odds of a successful outcome.
When asked about ethical considerations, and the purpose of a new project, Adam Frey stated:

What would make it [the new piece of music] interesting? It's like market research … what do we need? Do we need a 28-minute concerto that only five people can play? No … what if we get a wind band concerto by a well-known wind band composer that … [is] eight to ten minutes and the band parts are not too hard, and the euphonium part is accessible for college kids. They're going to do a piano reduction as well … a college kid could do the first movement at a jury or the second and third movement as part of a recital standalone. You know if you start putting all these components together of … college kids can do it, band can do it, somebody that has access to piano can do it. Then you're going to get more buy-in you know. If it's a piece for euphonium, accordion, and electronics, and it's built on a theme of Norwegian historical folklore that only people from the very northern tip of Norway [know] then I don't know how many people are going to want to contribute or be part of that … So … thinking about how that works … as far as marketing … is there the opportunity to promote some type of specific theme? Is there a component of interest or need within the composing areas? Is it in a south American style? Is it a Japanese style? Is it an avant-garde [piece]? Is it really targeted towards young high school kids or older high school kids? So, all those things are really good questions to ask. And if you have a very clear plan … it's going to make it a lot easier to get off the ground … very specific boundaries that are accessible to a lot of different people will be helpful.  

Dr. Frey brings up important points on what is most needed in the euphonium repertoire specifically. When considering a consortium, you must consider what people will be interested in contributing to. While a difficult long form piece may sound exciting, it oftentimes is not the most practical. The longevity of the piece in the repertoire is ultimately more important than the impact of the premiere. If the goal is to add something that will often get performed and be accessible, these considerations need to be made during the initial planning stages. He also brings up another key component vital in the planning process. What length and type of piece is going to be commissioned? When considering the latter, one must consider the style of the piece …

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and the accessibility. Is it going to be an avant-garde piece aimed at college-level playing, or a tonal melodic work aimed at high school students? Is it going to be a solo with piano, chamber group, unaccompanied, with large ensemble, or electronics of some kind? Is it going to be a chamber piece for trombone choir or tuba-euphonium quartet? The question of style, ensemble type, and level of the piece should be answered at this stage in the process. When considering the former, it is important to think in time ranges. Most composers will be able to work within a given time range, but not something as precise as “this piece needs to be 4 minutes and 30 seconds long.” Deciding on the scope and length of the piece, which will often tie into the budget and time aspect of the commission.

**Budgetary Considerations**

Considering your budget goes hand in hand with determining how the piece is going to be commissioned. If it is going to be a direct commission, then you as the sole commissioner are going to be directly responsible for the entire cost of the project. What budget do you have, and how will that guide you in the composers you are able to approach for the project? Do you want to have full exclusivity to premiere the piece or recording rights for a certain amount of time? How much are you reasonably able to devout to the project? How long will the piece be? The answers to these questions will help in guiding the decision of whether or not a direct commission is the right avenue for a project or not. It is important to not take the financial considerations lightly, and to not be stretched too thin financially. A commission should not have a negative impact on other more vital finances, such as living expenses. The type of composer you plan to approach may also affect the budget. There are many composers younger
in their careers, and oftentimes student composers, who can complete direct commissions for lower costs. With that in mind, there are big name composers whose projects can easily be north of ten thousand. Before diving into contacting composers, and that piece of the puzzle, ask yourself honestly what the budget can be.

If the work is going to be via consortium, think about how much money you believe you may be able to raise. Are you up to the task of organizing co-commissioners and the extra logistical work that will be required to run a consortium? If there is not enough money raised, what is the contingency plan? Will you be responsible for the rest, or will you dissolve the project before the composer begins the work? All of these considerations need to be worked out before the start of the project.

Dr. Adam Frey states the following on the importance of ironing out these details before beginning a project:

Like most of the consortium's I've done, they've all been, all the details have been hammered out first. Composers are actively working on it, and then I release participation and start drumming up participants. The only bad thing about that of course, is that typically I've already negotiated the contract and all the details. So, if that's the way it works, then you know, I'm personally on the hook for the finances. I think that that's an important thing from an organizational standpoint.  

Be honest when planning a project with what is viable from a budgetary standpoint. When in doubt, ask others who have gone through a similar process before on advice for planning a budget that is right for you and will lead to a successful outcome for your project both creatively and financially for all parties.

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Contracts

During the writing process, the composer should be able to focus their energy on the creative work of writing a wonderful piece of music. It should be the job of the lead commissioner to help minimize any extra administrative work for the composer. Their creative process should not be muddled with clerical work, and the burden of those duties, including the financial responsibility, should rest with the lead commissioner.

From a composer’s point of view, Frank Gulino stated the following about the importance of having contracts completed with the lead commissioner solely.

If I won the lottery tomorrow, I probably wouldn't take another dime for commissions, like, don't worry, you've got 50 million. It's fine. So, the financial side of things is always the elephant in the room, right. Because most tuba players are not billionaires. When you're talking about an individual versus a consortium, the same way, I try not to make the creative process too different, I try not to make the business side of it too different. I have contracts that I use with commissioners, and if it's going to be a consortium, my contract is with the lead commissioner, the person spearheading the project. I make them a hundred percent responsible for the financial obligation because I can't be writing the piece and chasing down 30 people.27

Oftentimes the composer will have a contract template that they wish to use for their projects that is specific to them. In my experiences, this has happened about 50% of the time. The other 50% of the time, I have utilized my own contract template to work out the details with the composer. The reality of the world is that some people are more organized and on top of these types of things than others. A contract should outline all the specifics in writing for financials,

exclusivity, and any other important details related to the project. This way there are no
questions in the future, difficult misunderstandings are less likely.

On the next page you will find a template that can be utilized for commission consortium
projects. This can easily be altered for projects that are direct commissions and not consortiums.
Contract Template

Lead Commissioner Name
Lead Commissioner Address
Lead Commissioner Email
Lead Commissioner Phone Number

Contract for Services for [“Name of Composer” – New Music Commission]

The following contract is between [Composer Name] hereby referred to as “the composer,” and [Your / Lead Commissioner Name] hereby referred to as “lead commissioner,” for the services of a new music commission.

Project Overview
This project is for a piece for [Instrument] and [Type Accompaniment] and should be between X and X minutes in length. This project will be completed via a commission consortium.

Timeline & Payment
The project is to be delivered no later than [Date or Date Range]. Upon delivery of the final copy of the score, a payment of [Amount of Money] will be paid to the composer from the lead commissioner. As this project is being completed via consortium, lead commissioner will bare full financial responsibility in the event that insufficient funds are collected. Any delays on the delivery of the piece should be communicated to the lead commissioner. In the event that there are extreme or unforeseen delays in the delivery, a new contract will be made and signed with the new delivery date.
Premiere & Publishing

There will be a consortium premiere open to the lead commissioner and all co-commissioners for through the [Timeline / Time Range]. There will be [No or Details] exclusive recording rights to any commissioners. Publishing will be at the sole choice and discretion of the composer. Lead and Co-Commissioners are entitled to digital copies of the music. Physical copies may be donated at the discretion of the publisher or purchased for an additional fee.

Additional Details

[ This section is reserved for any unique additional details that may be unique to a particular project, such as inviting the composer and covering their travel costs to visit for the world premiere. If there are no additional details this section can be deleted.]

Signatures

Composer’s Name: _________________________ Date: _______________

Lead Commissioner’s Name __________________Date: _______________
It is vital with this or any other contract template, that the record of signatures is easily tracked and accessible in your records. While it is possible to do this by simply keeping multiple copies physically and digitally on your own, it is strongly recommended to use a digital signing service that will track legally binding contracts and store them on external servers such as HelloSign, DocuSign, or PandaDoc.

**Timeline Considerations**

Another key consideration when setting up a commission, whether direct or via consortium, is to approach a project with realistic timeline expectations. When starting a project as a lead commissioner, it is important to think about what type of timeline is important or vital to the project. Is the work to be written for a specific performance, conference, or event, and therefore tied to a specific timeline? Is there a need for the piece to be done in 6 months or 1 year, or is it completely open ended? Lead commissioners need to ask themselves these types of questions before they approach a composer. It is also important, that, when possible, commissioners should be flexible in timeline when approaching a composer. Many composers have extraordinarily busy schedules and can often be booked out with commissions in the timeframe of years. Certain composers output many pieces each year, and others a very small number. Not all composers have the same workflow, and one should be very respectful of their time and availability to ensure a successful project. Imagine convincing a composer, who was booked out with commissions for 3 years, to add your project to their workload? That piece would likely be rushed, and not come out well even if they were to agree to write it. Timeline can be a piece that can dictate which composer/s may or may not be right for a particular project.
Just as important as being aware of the realities of composer work timelines, is the importance of agreeing on that timeline and documenting in writing, as seen in the contract template. You should state the mutually agreed upon timeline, and what the reasonable course of action should be if there are delays. When is the piece “due,” and is there a timeframe or an exact date? Who does the composer contact if there is a delay? If the project is a consortium, it is likely that money has already started to be collected from the lead commissioner. If any of that was funneled to the composer ahead of the distribution of the final work, will that need to be returned, and how? These types of questions ought to be worked out in correspondence with the composer ahead of time, with the lead commissioner and composer agreeing to the terms in writing as part of the contract.

When asked about the importance of discussing timeline with composers when setting up a consortium, Dr. Adam Frey shared the following from his personal experiences.

Organizationally I’ve typically confirmed what the composer is going to write and what their timeline is because different composers have different term timelines … you don't want to organize a consortium and then say, oh, by the way, the piece isn't going to be ready for two years. What people really want to do is that they want to be excited about a project and that it's going to deliver probably within six to 12 months … that's sort of a good timeline.28

Having the timeline confirmed in writing ensure no surprises, and that everyone departs the project feeling fulfilled and with feelings of mutual respect.

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The Premiere and Longevity of the Work

After the piece is completed and delivered to the commissioners, the most exciting part of the process can finally occur, the premiere. Details on the premiere should also be ironed out ahead of time, as seen in the sample contract. Namely, who will do the premiere, and what is the timeline for the premiere? If it is a consortium, will there be a consortium premiere? These details should be set in writing prior to the start of the project. It is also possible that the lead commissioner could have a priority to do the world premiere over the co-commissioners of the consortium. Another option for a premiere is to get a high-profile artist involved to give greater exposure to the world of the new piece. An example of this is the consortium for Frank Gulino’s *Infinite Escape*, which I led in 2012, but was premiered by Steven Mead in an effort to give greater exposure to the new piece. 29 These are all viable options, and options that should be dealt with up front, and communicated to all consortium co-commissioners.

Giving the premiere of a new piece of music is an honor, and one that should be treated as such. While in some ways there can be less pressure, as the audiences won’t be familiar with the work, there is the added pressure that you are the first to bring this piece to life musically. George Alberti has had the privilege to premiere several works for Tuba, and had this to say on the subject of giving a premiere:

I will say though, personally, it's almost like it's a baby, you know, it's like your baby you know, in a weird, convoluted way that you conceived with this composer. It's like it’s yours because, although the composer you know, has written it, you're giving the first performance you are, you know, you are almost setting the standard for how it is played because ultimately, you know, most of the time your composer isn't playing it on the tuba. They might have some tuba chops if you're lucky, but if not, I mean, you're the one

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who's going to play it. So, it's, there's a deep personal connection to it … and it’s a lot of fun.

I will say that the, the downside of it is you put your heart and soul into it and you're like, I love this piece. I'm digging it. It's good for me. And someone in the audience could be like, you should have just played the Vaughn Williams Concerto, because I like that. And you're like I guess so, but don't you like this cool new piece? And sometimes people are like, no, but you know, I mean, it's you know, back to Demondrae Thurman, we were talking about him earlier. I think about what he said once one time at a conference. He said, I would, I'd rather be really strongly loved by a small group of people and really strongly hated by another group of people than be like, kind of okay with everyone. So, you know, as long as somebody really digs what you're doing, I think you're doing right.\(^\text{30}\)

Premiering a piece is a privilege, but also a challenge. After usually months of work, the new work is finally going to be performed. The premiere should a fun and rewarding celebration of the hard work of all parties involved. In the event that you dislike, or even hate, the piece that is produced, every effort should still be made to give the best possible premiere. Even if the lead-commissioner doesn’t love the piece, it is still a new work in the repertoire that others may connect with.

**Commission Pre-Planning Guide**

When brainstorming ideas for a project, I use a template that I have created for myself to help organize all these different considerations. It is a simple sheet to get the ideas on paper, and something that should be done prior to contacting any composers or making an official contract. On the next page, you will see an example of this template, created for a fictional project.

Commission Pre-Planning Guide
Compiled by Michael Waddell

Purpose of Project

- The purpose of this project is to help expand the repertoire of euphonium quartet music that is easily accessible to the average-level college student musician. Most chamber works for euphonium are written for tuba-euphonium quartet, and this work will focus on a work for only euphoniums.

Length and Type/Style of Work

- 1-3 Minute Tonal Fanfare Style Piece

Direct Commission or Consortium & Details

- This project will be via consortium.
- Buy-In for the project in the $50 - $100 range
- I (Michael Waddell) will serve as lead commissioner and undertake the role of having all creative conversations with the composer on the project.
- Money will be collected during the project, and Waddell will be responsible for any money not raised, and/or dissolution of the project.

Budget Range

- $1500 - $2000
- Ideally with 25+ Co-Commissioners

Composers in Mind

- Nicole Piunno
- Frank Gulino
- Eric Whitacre

Premiere Details & Plan for Longevity / Timeline

- To be premiered Spring 2023
- Work exclusive for 6 months for “Consortium Premiere”

Other Notes

- Will reach out to contacts via social media and address book in the tuba-euphonium communities
- Will reach out to non-low brass contacts that have an interest in the composer chosen.
- Co-Commissioners will get a copy of the piece when it is published
• Planning to work with whatever publisher the composer choses (or self-published by composer)
• Composer will retain rights to the work, and no exclusive recording rights will be given.

You can see the categories I use, and an example of the types of notes I would take to outline a project in the bulleted italic texts below. This creates a simple and tangible way to organize all of the aforementioned ideas in a clear and succinct way before moving on to contacting composers, co-commissioners, or moving forward with any official contracts.

While some of the logistics outlined in this chapter may seem like common sense, it is important to approach them with the utmost care and consideration. Not every piece of music that comes out of a project will be great, or even good. This is just part of the process and should be understood. These expectations should be understood when embarking on a project. However, if care is taken in the pre-planning stage, there is a greater chance of success at the end of the line. With the ideas and considerations put to paper, the next step in process is to move forward with the most important part of the project, reaching out to a composer.
Chapter 2
Working With Composers & Co-Commissioners

Reaching Out to Composers

Composers are people, just like everyone else. First and foremost, if there is a composer out there that you admire, or that you would love to work with, do not be afraid to approach them. Once you have formulated a plan for your project, it is time to reach out to a composer or composers. Be kind, courteous, and respectful. If you don’t already know them or have a connection, contact them with a kind and concise email to see if they have interest in your project. Depending on the person, they may get back to you quickly, quite some time later, or not at all. This is okay, and part of the process. Composers generally want to write new music, and commissions are a huge part of how that happens. Go in knowing the project may or may not work out as planned, and don’t be afraid.

Frank Gulino had this to say about contacting a composer that you don’t know or have a previous personal connection with.

If you're thinking about reaching out to a composer, you should, most composers are very approachable and it's not like there's any pressure. You don't have to feel bad if you don't wind up getting a piece from them. Most composers are really happy to just explore possibilities and talk to you about what you're looking for, and if it's not going to be a good fit, it's better to find out at the beginning. You may even become friends with the person and not commission a piece from them. You may make a great piece but hate working with them on like a personal level. So, you want to make sure that all the puzzle pieces fit together. I mean, as long as you are professional, polite, respectful, and do some homework, you should absolutely feel empowered to reach out to any composer that you want to. Some of the A-list composers won't get back to you. Some of them
will. I mean, it's always worth a try, just, you know, follow any normal rules when contacting anybody out of the blue.

I’ve had people who reached out about a commission that didn't work out, you know, for whatever reason, and then they've reached out to you again, and it's actually worked out in the future. I've also had people who reach out like every year for the last 12 years and never commission anything. So, keep talking about it. I always try to respond to everybody. I always try to be professional, it’s such a relationship business. You never want to get a reputation for, you know, for being a certain way.

So, if you're thinking about reaching out to a composer, do your research, find someone whose sound you like. Identify a couple of pieces of theirs that you really like and boom, you already have something in common with them, right? If you're a big fan of three Michael Torke pieces, guess what? I'm sure he is a fan of those three pieces too, and you guys can talk about that, and that helps you kind of get inside each other's heads a little bit. I mean, that's just how it all starts. Be informed, it helps you plant the seed and start the relationship.31

As he states, composers are often just as much of a fan of their own music as you are as theirs. It can be an honor to a composer to be approached by a commissioner. This means that someone likes their previous work enough to want to reach out for the possibility to work with them out of the blue. Even if it doesn’t work out, there should be no pressure or hesitation in trying. George Alberti recounts an example of approaching a composer, with the story of his commissioning of Frank Sekimann’s Tuba Concerto:

Now there was one time where I did commission someone that I didn't know. We were at the army band conference … this was 2010 [or] 2011 …. We were on the bowling alley side of the exhibit hall, kind of near where I think Adam Frey hangs out sometimes and Brian Fredrickson, and there was an older guy who was selling sheet music … I was just bored walking around the exhibits, thumbing through sheet music. I found the Frank Siekmann Bass Trombone Concerto, which had been written for Charlie Vernon, and I was a huge fan of that piece.

It's a great piece, and although I wasn't familiar with Charlie's recording or as familiar with Charlie's recording. One of my favorite bass trombone CDs was a fantastic one by a

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German bass trombone player. That was a CD I picked up, I think in 2006 [or] 2007, when I was just finishing high school. So, I knew the Siekmann Concerto was a great piece. I was talking to this older guy and, and he said something, he was like, I'm Frank Siekmann … I was like, holy cow.

I was like, have you ever written a tuba concerto? And he was like, no, I was like, well, would you … he was like, yeah. You know, I was like, can I commission you? He was like, yeah. And so, I commissioned him to write a concerto, and he did, it's a good piece.

Fun fact, I didn't even know this. I just got hired at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania this year, which is where he taught for 40 years. I didn't know … didn't remember that. He just passed away early last year. So, you know, we just missed each other, but I have heard as a side note, his son runs a recording studio here in town, and one of my colleagues here said, you should go pop in one day with the concerto … but yeah, that was a fun little project to actually have done that with Frank Siekmann. \(^{32}\)

This project would have never happened if George Alberti had not had the confidence in that moment to speak with Frank Siekmann, a composer he admired, and to ask him to work together on a new piece of music. Even if you do not go into a project knowing the composer, it is important to work on building that professional relationship. Oftentimes long working relationships and friendships are formed throughout these processes. The greater invested both parties are in working with each other, generally speaking, the better the project turns out to be.

In addition to reaching out to composers whom you admire, working with folks you already know is always a great option. If you are a student, are there student composers that would be interested in working together on a project? Perhaps there are colleagues of yours who are composers and/or have connections to other composers they have worked with. Having a personal relationship with the composer can often help the project to be more successful.

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Finding the Right Composer

Every project has a composer, but every composer is not right for every project. This simple idea should be paramount when organizing a commission of any kind. When setting out to contact a composer for a project, there are many things to consider about which composer to contact. Sometimes, the impetus for a project might even be to commission a work from a specific composer. A commissioner might think, wouldn’t it be wonderful for John Corigliano, John Adams, or Joan Tower to write a euphonium concerto? In these cases, this decision is already made, and if terms cannot be established with the composer in question, the project might be changed, or abandoned entirely. However, oftentimes a project is conceived for a particular purpose, and commissioners will need to decide which composer or composers they will contact.

Adam Frey is one of the leading figures in commissioning new music for the low brass community. Over his career thus far he has been personally involved in 150 different projects. He has led many consortiums, direct commissions, and premieres. 33

When asked his process and mindset in selecting a composer, he stated:

So, let's talk about selecting a composer … there’s a lot of different facets that are involved with that … I've always been a big fan of finding a slightly younger … not necessarily age wise, but just sort of career wise, a slightly younger composer, that's very motivated to write and is enthused. Most of the time they've been to a concert or they're a fan of mine and that's going to ensure that it's a great piece that they're invested in. There's been certain pieces that people paid money to somebody that … feels like a transaction. 34

Dr. Frey stressed the importance of the selected composer having a personal connection to the project and to the piece itself. He elaborates on his thoughts on the importance that this connection has to the quality of the piece of music that is presented at the conclusion of the project.

It's like, hey, you hired me to write this. I wrote this piece. It's good, but it sort of lacks a little bit of whether it's a really good story or if it’s cohesive. It’s that personal connection … finding somebody that's motivated, enthused, and then also …. [is] really willing to work with you … I've worked with a variety of different composers; some don't want any feedback at all. Like when they send you the finished thing, it's not done …. and those are fine. Then others, you can make a lot of different suggestions.35

He continues on to explain the importance of the composer understanding how to write idiomatically for the instrument. There have been some pieces written by wonderful composers for the euphonium, low brass, or any other instrument, that don’t work well. This can come from a lack of familiarity with the instrument as a solo voice, or from lack of and/or poor communication with the lead commissioner. Dr. Frey explains specifics of these interactions he has had when working with composers.

[Speaking from the experience in working with Bruce Fraser on his Euphonium Fantasy] … this quarter note pickup feels a little bit weird … if you write out four scaler 16th notes, it flows so much better into this new section. The band will pick up on the new tempo change. Conductor will follow it [better] versus this sort of one ambiguous long note [that was there originally]. Every time I play that part in the Bruce Fraser Euphonium Fantasy, I get a little bit of a smile on my corners … that was originally a quarter note, and it would be so lacking in flow to this next section.”36


As a composer himself, Frank Gulino provides a unique perspective on the concept of choosing the right composer. When asked about the most important pieces of putting together a successful project, he jumped right at the opportunity to point out the importance of choosing the right composer for a project. He stated:

Point number one is do your research and make sure that you're reaching out to the right composer, because different composers have different strengths and weaknesses, different areas of interest, different areas of expertise. Everybody has a unique flavor … if you're a performer who really loves edgy and avant-garde [music], extended techniques, and extreme virtuosity and just … really, really, hard music there are composers who write that really well. And then I, on the other end of the spectrum, if you're looking to program a piece that's really tuneful and melodic and tonal ... you would probably not ask the same composer [for both of those styles], you know?  

He goes on to elaborate with some advice on doing research about composers before you reach out to them, and some best practices:

I think my biggest advice would be do your research, do a lot of listening. And if there's a composer who sound really speaks to you, whose music you find really compelling that you really enjoy, that's probably somebody you want to work with. And somebody who would be really happy to with you, because composers who are being commissioned are always going to be at their strength if they're kind of like writing within their sound instead of without their sound.”

Choosing the right composer is an integral piece of the puzzle of a successful project, but it also takes a dedicated composer and artist to know when they aren’t the right fit for a project. Artistic integrity should be at the forefront of the minds of both the composer and lead commissioner. Speaking to this concern, Frank Gulino states:

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I certainly have had people approach me about … asking for some more out their kind of pieces. I don't hesitate to turn work down if I don't feel like I'm the right fit. Because if something's going to go out with my name on it, as the composer and with your name on it, as the commissioner, I want it to be a product that reflects well on both of us, that you know, that I'm happy to put my name on, and that you're excited to go out and share with the world. Not everything is going to be a home run. That's just the way it is … you can't please a hundred percent of people, a hundred percent of the time.\(^{39}\)

Knowing who to reach out to, and finding the right fit for the project, first requires knowing the kind of piece you are going to request. This goes back to the creative plan that should already been in place at this stage. Frank Gulino expands on this point, and the importance of understanding the type of compositional voice a commissioner may be looking for.

[Compliments from interested commissioners such as] I really love the sound of that. I would like to commission something that's in that style or I want a piece that sounds like you. That's always kind of the best compliment a composer can get, because yeah. It's just, it shows that you've done your listening, you've done your research and it's more than anything … It's a show of trust in somebody's approach. Somebody's compositional voice. And I think, okay, if you do that from the outset, then getting the project off the ground becomes a lot easier. It kind of breaks down any sort of wall, any sort of tension, because, you know, as a composer it really means a lot when somebody trusts your voice, when somebody likes your music. And I think that's an aspect of collaboration that's really underrated. You know, it's not just a purely transactional thing. There is a relationship that’s there you know.\(^{40}\)

While money is involved, it’s important to remember that the goal of a commission is to create a piece of art that lives well beyond the initial premiere. Frank Gulino elaborates, and

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further drives home the importance of doing your research into composers on the front-end of a project:

It's not just supposed to be an exchange of, you know, a piece for dollars. So many industries are that way, right. It's just purely transactional, but when you're talking about something in the creative sphere … I think relationships really play into it a lot. I'm always really happy to write for friends of mine, people that I like as people who I also like as players … I'm a fan of theirs and that's great, that excites me to work on projects for them, but I've also been commissioned by people who I didn't know well, and who's playing I wasn't super familiar with, and still had good experiences … Just because they did their research on the front end, we … set the expectations, got an idea of what we were looking for and things worked out.41

Choosing the right composer for your project and being honest about this process can be the difference between a highly successful project that births a wonderful piece of music, versus ending up with something mediocre. Communication is paramount.

Respecting Finances

Often one of the most difficult pieces to putting a project together is agreement on finances. In an ideal world, money would be no barrier to the creation of new works for the repertoire. Unfortunately, reality is quite different, and composer’s too have to pay bills and eat just like the rest of us. It is, in general, not appropriate to approach a composer and ask them to write a piece of music for free. Sometimes this does happen. A composer may gift a work to a performer or group. This is rare and should never be expected or part of the plan when orchestrating a project.

It is essential to realize that many composers work in different ways monetarily. Some have flexibility, while other’s do not. In this part of the process, it is of utmost importance to respect the composer’s rates of work. Being respectful is key to having a successful project, but also to garner a good reputation over time, so that future composers will wish to work with you or your organization on future commissions. Trying to haggle a composer’s rates lower is never a good strategy, unless the composer comes back first with some creative options to help lower the cost. Sometimes composers will offer alternatives to payment, or alternatives that may lower the payment. These may be things like a guarantee the piece will get a high-profile premiere, a professional recording, or a certain number of live performances within a certain time frame. While it is not a good idea to pressure a composer into something, these alternatives are sometimes ways to make a project more possible from a financial perspective and can benefit both parties. Generally, these alternatives are not a replacement for monetary compensation, but simply a tool to lower it. One should never anticipate a free or discounted commission, as these are rare and not commonplace. On the topic of why writing music isn’t free, Frank Gulino stated:

I mean, I will say this, if money was absolutely no object, I would love to write pieces for all of my friends, for every musician that I'm a fan of, for every musician who's playing I love and respect without charging a dime. That would be great. I think there are so many great ideas to be had. There's so much new music left to be created and there's so many players out there, amazing players, who would reflect really, really well on things. But composing takes a lot of time … I have to pay bills also, and so, it's just not practically feasible for me to just write music for free.

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42 Gulino, Frank. “First Time Commissioners FAQ.” Email, 2021

43 Gulino, Frank. “First Time Commissioners FAQ.” Email, 2021

44 Gulino, Frank. “First Time Commissioners FAQ.” Email, 2021
As he states, composers have an artistic drive to write new music, but there is also the practical responsibility of keeping those composers fed and sheltered so they can continue to write music. On the same topic, George Alberti referenced the difficulties that many composers face in making a living off of their craft, and the challenges that many of them face financially.

Bartok’s concerto for orchestra, which is a classic today … that was a big commission … there was somebody raising the money to pay him. And so now we look at that as old music, and that's great, but there could be something that today we commissioned that, you know, serves that purpose a hundred years from now when they look back and they're like, okay, it's so good. That, that was a commission. And another side … early in history, we had the church, which was funding the composition of music, right. Palestrina was pretty much everything. Everybody was getting paid by the church to write their music, and then we had the courts and you had people that, you know, worked in a court and were paid money to make music, write music. We really don't have any infrastructure for that anymore. You know the composer, if they want to get paid, they have to drive Instacart or something. I don't know, they have to do something else like deliver groceries. They have to have another gig. If they’re really fortunate, they teach music theory at a university. You know, if they’re really fortunate, but nine times out of ten you know, they're struggling to make it. So commissioning is huge in that regard because it's privately funded.45

When approaching a composer about writing a piece, it is important to keep these things in mind. How does this composer make a living? Do they have a university teaching position, do they subside fully on composing, or do they have a completely different day job. These need to be considered ethically and with respect. Sometimes projects just won’t work out between certain individuals and composers, and even in these instances things should be approached with mutual care and respect.

Organizing Co-Commissioners

Oftentimes one of the most daunting tasks in being a lead commissioner doesn’t have anything to do with the composer or the creative process, it is organizing co-commissioners to join your project. A great way to get started even before formally starting a project is to gauge interest with close friends or colleagues. Let them know some of the details about the project you are considering and see if they are interested in contributing in a very non-formal way. No money exchanged, or official commitments, but simple gauging of general interest. This can help you to guide your preliminary budget planning as well. Before you can formally reach out to people to join the consortium, you must first have a system in place to collect the funds that will ultimately make their way to the composer.

Remember that the job of the lead commissioner is to recruit members to join the consortium. While in some cases the composer may play a more active role in this regard, this is generally not the case, as they should be able to focus their energy on their creative process. One way to collect funds is to have commissioners pay the lead commissioner directly, and for the lead commissioner to funnel the money to the composer. This can be done via mailing of checks, or by setting up links to payment apps online via a website or social media. This is not recommended unless it is a small-scale project. For example, a chamber group commissioning a piece directly from a composer. With more than a handful of people contributing, this becomes hard to track, and logistically complicated.
A second method is to run all of the contributions through an existing business entity. For example, perhaps you have a music studio that you run lessons out of that is established as a corporation, LLC, or other entity and is able to accept funds on the project’s behalf. Perhaps you have a website set up for teaching private lessons that can process payments, running as a sole proprietor. You can setup an online payment system for people to easily contribute to, and route them to that new page on your previously existing website. This is a great way to collect funds and makes it much easier to track things separately. It is recommended that funds go through a separate non-personal bank account if at all possible. This keeps things, such as taxes, legally separated and easier to organize in my experience.

One option to achieve this is to establish a non-profit organization, or partner with an existing non-profit organization to commission new music through. This way, contributors to the project can write off their contributions as tax deductible donations for the charitable work of advancing the repertoire. Adam Frey had this to say about these benefits in his experience:

I set up a nonprofit many, many years ago called the euphonium foundation. It's a registered 501c3. You can make a tax-deductible contribution as you like. So that was one thing that took a little bit of logistical planning ... when you work with universities, that's a great thing to have a separate business entity that it's not part of your schedule-C income or anything like that. That it's just, hey, this is the way that this works. And so that's one thing as far as the organization and the funding, I think accepting the money through that, we've had it where they can buy the memberships in the euphonium.com store. They can mail in a check. A lot of times I've organized the buy-in periods around my summer festival so that people can see and, and you know, get some firsthand communication about things there.46

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Dr. Frey goes on to explain the importance of having a set buy-in period for your consortium regardless of how you collect funds, and how it can help with building interest with those interested in participating in the project.

It makes a big difference … that everybody knows when the buy-in period is and how it can work. You know, having set timelines when the pieces are due, when people need to buy in. I've also negotiated with a couple of composers that we would have a flexible fee structure based on how many people buy in. And so that's been helpful in a couple of different ways. That way I'm not on the hook for too much stuff financially. But that it's still you know, still functioning, because it is tough. I mean, it is tough. But again, the nice thing about having the nonprofit set up is that it makes it a lot easier when you're communicating with different stuff.  

Dr. Frey’s comments also illustrate how there are many different options and different ways to approach a project, such as flexible fee structures based on a buy in rate. The most important piece of figuring out how to collect funds, is being sure that it is consistent and well communicated on the front end of a project.

Once there is a plan on how to accept the funds, it needs to be considered how to approach people to contribute, and how to further advertise the project. While social media tools such as Facebook and Instagram can be a powerful tool to help get followers and communicate information, in today’s climate they are also saturated and flooded with options. Even five years ago there was not as much bombardment of ads on social media. Due to this flood of information and content, it has been my experience that these are not the most powerful tools in recruitment for consortium projects. Perhaps in part due to the impersonality of social media interactions, true and real personal communication can be very effective. Reach out to your friends, colleagues, and acquaintances in the community surrounding your instrument. Tell them

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about the project and get them excited. Not just via a newsletter or Facebook post, but with a personalized message, phone call, or one-on-one meeting. Reaching out to people on a personal level, shows that as a lead commissioner of a project cares about the people joining them. They should not just be another number on the spreadsheet to get you to the monetary goal, they are real people and musicians, oftentimes just as excited about the project as the lead commissioner.

Once people are on board, and even after they have paid their fees, be sure to give the co-commissioners updates throughout the course of the project. Communicating with them anything interesting about chatting with the composer, updates on the how the piece is progressing, and notices of any unforeseen delays. What you can share may vary based on the composer’s wishes, and also on the scope of the project and number of co-commissioners, but continued communication is an important step in an attempt to keep everyone happy. Happy co-commissioners in one project can lead to an extended contact list when it comes time for the next one.

Working with composers and co-commissioners is ultimately about building relationships of mutual respect. Being a lead commissioner on a consortium brings the opportunity of bringing together a group of people to help meet a common goal. When approached with professionalism and planning, it is an incredibly rewarding experience for all involved.
Chapter 3

Personal Project Compendium

As a euphonium performer, new music is a staple of our repertoire. The euphonium does not have the luxury of having a great historical depth of repertoire, as it did not really come into its own as an instrument until 1874 and took quite some time to develop its popularity and usefulness as an instrument that composers would even be interested in writing music for. Due to this baked in affinity towards new music, I became particularly interested in working with composer’s as early as my undergraduate studies. Fortunately, I was surrounded by several energetic student composers who were equally excited to collaborate on new music. This excitement and love for working with composers to bring new music to life has extended across the past decade. The following are accounts and details of pieces that I have directly commissioned or served as lead commissioner on. Works where I participated in a consortium as co-commissioner or works outside of the realm of low brass (i.e., wind band) are not included in this compendium.

Concerto for Euphonium by Anthony O’Toole

The first project I was ever involved in commissioning was Anthony O’Toole’s *Concerto for Euphonium*. Anthony and I attended Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) and overlapped in school for a couple years. We were both members of the Tuba-Euphonium

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Ensemble, a credited ensemble at the University led by Dr. Zach Collins. O’Toole was a composition major, but also played the tuba, bass trombone, and other instruments in the music department. We had performed a few of his compositions in the tuba-euphonium ensemble and I was quite fond of them.

Eventually, we got to talking about him writing a full-fledged concerto for euphonium. This project was a direct commission from me. A small fee was exchanged, as we were both students at the time of the piece’s writing. Throughout the composition process, O’Toole sent me snippets and drafts of movements asking for input. We talked about limitations in my playing ability at the time, but also the idea of not letting my personal abilities stunting anything in the piece. I did not want to stifle his creativity, and what came out was a piece that was very challenging for me at the time, but also rewarding. The work is a great challenge for the undergraduate collegiate musician, also works well for graduate and professionals alike.

The piece was premiered by me on a recital at IUP in the Spring of 2010. The piece was premiered in its original incarnation with piano. The following year in the Spring of 2011 the version with Wind Ensemble was premiered by me and the IUP Wind Ensemble under the direction of Jack Stamp as a result of that academic year’s IUP Student Concerto Competition. The work continues to serve the euphonium repertoire and is published and available for purchase through euphonium.com publications.
Double Concerto for Euphonium and Alto Saxophone by Anthony O’Toole

Following the success of the concerto, myself and graduate saxophone student at IUP at the time Will Gillespie, jointly commissioned O’Toole to write a full-scale double concerto for euphonium and Alto Saxophone. The composer describes the work as follows on his website.

This work is inspired by painting and photographs of Chicago in the 1930's. The first movement is a musical portrait of the city skyline as it is built higher and higher with each additional skyscraper, the music of the bustling streets during daytime. The second movement, Nocturne, is all about the gritty nightlife, hot jazz, and gangsters. The concluding movement is inspired by the painting “Steel Mills at Night” by Richard A. Chase and shows the industrial side of this Midwestern metropolis. All the material is revisited in the finale.49

The work was never premiered by the original two commissioners but was premiered on a student recital at Georgia State University by me and saxophonist Brandyn Taylor in the Spring of 2013. The Wind Band version of the piece was premiered by the Indiana University at Bloomington Wind Ensemble on February 22, 2022, under the baton of Rodney Dorsey. The soloists were Demondrae Thurman on euphonium and Otis Murphy on alto saxophone.50

2011: A Tuba Odyssey by Anthony O’Toole

2011: A Tuba Odyssey was commissioned via a small-scale consortium of students at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 2011. The work was commissioned to be a short, under 2-


minute fanfare with the vague idea of a space theme. The work was premiered by a student quartet named the SuperTubes in the Spring of 2011 on campus at IUP. The work is currently published and available from Cimarron Music Press.

*Songs About Life and Love by Reed A Hanna*

*Songs About Life and Love* was commissioned via a direct commission in 2011. Reed Hanna and I overlapped as undergraduates at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. At the time of this work being written, Hanna was a graduate student in music at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I had heard some of his music while he was at IUP and was a huge fan of its unique melodic style. I originally approached reed to write a euphonium concerto. The concerto went through a few iterations, and ultimately was never written. Out of the ashes this work was born. A beautiful 5 movement modern song cycle written to be performed in any order the performer wished, or as standalone short character pieces. The work was premiered as part of my undergraduate senior graduation recital at IUP in the Spring of 2012. This work lives on as a unique staple of the euphonium repertoire. It is published and available from euphonium.com publications.

*Infinite Escape by Frank Gulino*

Frank Gulino’s *Infinite Escape* for Euphonium and piano is the result of the first project I led as lead-commissioner of a consortium. This project took place over the course of the 2011-2012 academic year, with the piece ultimately being premiered by Steven Mead in the June of
I later performed the piece in the Fall of 2012 on a graduate recital at Georgia State University. During the time of the consortium I was a senior music education student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and under the instruction of Dr. Zach Collins, I was tasked with designing a senior project. The project had relatively open-ended guidelines as part of the requirements for the final semester of applied lessons. At this point I had been involved with a couple of commissions from other students at the University, but I had never approached or worked with anyone that was not related in some way to the University. With approval, I decided that this project would be a wonderful opportunity to delve outside of the University talent pool and reach out to a composer.

In order to bring the project to fruition, I decided to create an entity with the now defunct euphoniumcommissions.org. This website served as a place to direct interested co-commissioners and would also serve as a home base for a few future projects. Social media in 2011 was in its infancy compared to where it is today. The bulk of the work to grasp co-commissioners happened via email and direct contacts. After I had created the website, I moved on to finding a composer for the project.

I first heard of Frank Gulino’s music when Zach Collins performed his *The Effervescent Ballroom* on a faculty recital at IUP. Gulino had written a euphonium piece previously, *Tornado* for Euphonium and Brass Quintet. I did not know Frank, and the sole connection was Collin’s performance of his work on campus. I found his email on his website and sent him a detailed email about the project. He was enthused, and we discussed details such as budget and scope of

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the project. We settled on a 5-8 minute, through-composed piece that would have a fast and slow section. The piece was to be accessible to college students, and in the style of Gulino’s writing, tonal and melodically focused.

The resulting work has had a great lasting impact on the euphonium repertoire. It is often performed on recitals across the world by students and professionals alike. It is published and available for purchase from Cimarron Music Press, who served as a collaborator on the project during the consortium phase.

**The Elk Rider by Nikos Syropolous**

*The Elk Rider* was commissioned in 2013 and premiered by me at the 2014 International Euphonium and Tuba Festival (IET) in Atlanta Georgia. In 2013, after the completion of the *Infinite Escape* consortium with Frank Gulino, we kept in touch, and he suggested I listen to an internet radio station which had a show featuring new music from composers across the United States. Gulino was having some music featured, and there was a list of several other interesting composers. While tuning into the broadcast I heard a work entitled *A Major Happy* by Nikos Syropolous. The work was for strings and piano, and I was enamored with the piece. So much so that I reached out the next day to the composer, introducing myself and asking if he would be interested in writing a piece for euphonium and piano. We worked out the logistics for a direct commission on a 7-10 minute through-composed work. This was his first piece for euphonium, and as a composer he had not worked often with brass instruments. We had a lot of back and forth about what was idiomatic for the instrument, and I sent him several recordings for him to study the instrument. The concept of the piece was for the piano part to be just as important as
the euphonium part, more of a duet then a true solo with piano accompaniment. The resulting work *The Elk Rider* is a 9-minute work showcasing the beauty of Spyropoulos’ melodic and rhythmic writing. The piece is available directly from the composer.

*War Machine by Anthony O’Toole*

*War Machine* was born of unique circumstances, and its composition did not follow a traditional trajectory, or a traditional commission process. In 2012, about a week before that summers International Euphonium and Tuba Festival (IET) in Atlanta GA, as a graduate student, I was tasked with helping choose a variety of music for euphonium quartets to play during the camp. I knew O’Toole from our days as students at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, so I sent him a message asking if he had anything we could use, specifically for a faculty/staff quartet who had named themselves “War Machine.” There was no immediate response, and we moved on. About 4 or 5 hours later, I did get a message. O’Toole had not had a composition which fit our needs when I reached out, but within those few hours he had composed *War Machine*. We were shocked and thrilled to find that he had composed this exciting euphonium quartet showpiece in less than half a day. We were thankful for the opportunity to play such a fun new piece, and it was premiered the next week by myself, Adam Frey, Paul Dickinson, and Jason Casanova. *War Machine* was published shortly thereafter and has enjoyed meteoric success in the tuba-euphonium world since, even having been performed by the joint armed-forces euphonium ensemble. The story behind the composition of this piece demonstrates a peek into
how O’Toole works as a composer and views his life as a musician. When presented with a project that interests him, he is always keen to jump on the opportunity.  

On the context of writing War Machine, O’Toole said:

> When they asked me if I had a piece and I go, I had not written one, but I could. All I need is really one little nudge and that is all I'll need, and I'll just go [Write] because I do like the utility faceted part of music. It’s like - there's a need and how do I fill that? How do I make something possible? Otherwise, you would've just had to play something else, but nothing’s more exciting than premiering a half decent work and having your name on it. 

O’Toole often thinks of writing music in the context of solving a problem. Regarding the “ask” to write War Machine, he says:

> They [The Low Brass Community] are constantly asking me to write new pieces and people are like “aren't you tired or writing low brass pieces?” and I go “No!” because every piece has a new problem to solve, right? Like, I'm not writing the same piece for everybody. There's some overlap. Like there's a, a voice in my music, or at least I like to think that I have a recognizable voice in my music and way how I put things together. So that voice is recognizable, but it's also like there was a new problem in that is this, we need a piece, it was a dire problem, and it wasn't even really a problem. Like you never really, I don't think you really formally asked me to do it.

He is right, we never formally asked him to do it. We asked about music he already had, and he took that as a nudge and as an opportunity to create something new, and to solve a new problem. War Machine has gone on to be a very popular piece in the still very limited repertoire for euphonium quartet. The work has been recorded multiple times, and even performed by the join

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53 O’Toole, Anthony. Interview with Michael Waddell. Personal Interview. Remote, October 10th, 2020
54 O’Toole, Anthony. Interview with Michael Waddell. Personal Interview. Remote, October 10th, 2020
armed-forces euphonium ensemble. *War Machine* is published and available from euphonium.com publications.
Psalm by Zach Collins

Following the success of the *Infinite Escape* consortium with, I embarked on a second project using the euphoniumcommissions.org platform. This project took place in 2013, with the pieces being finished and delivered in the summer. Instead of building the euphonium solo repertoire, this project was focused on expanding the repertoire with new music for euphonium ensemble. Three works were commissioned for the project from Zach Collins, Nikos Spyropoulos, and Anthony O’Toole. The project had over 20 co-commissioners that helped to see the project through to its completion.

Collins’ Psalm is a beautiful work scored for 4 euphoniums that explores lush harmonies and beautiful textures. It is in reminiscent of many contemporary choral works by composers such as Eric Whitacre and Morten Lauridsen. Harmonically this is achieved through the constant use of 9-8 and 4-3 suspensions throughout the piece, which is constructed with a clear emphasis on plagal motion.

The work was premiered on a graduate recital in 2013 at Georgia State University by Myself, Jason Casanova, Kyle Clements, and Vincent Rose. It is published and available from Cimarron Music Press.

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Prelude by Nikos Syropoulos

Prelude is another work for euphonium quartet that was part of the 2013 euphoniumcommissions.org repertoire consortium, alongside works by Zach Collins and Anthony O’Toole. The work has not yet been formally premiered and is available directly from the composer.

Technodrone by Anthony O’Toole

Technodrone is the final work on this list that was commissioned in 2013 as a part of the euphoniumcommissions.org repertoire consortium. It can be viewed as a follow up to his popular 2012 work War Machine. While these two pieces share some compositional similarities, they are unmistakably different in character, form, and scoring. Differing from War Machine, Technodrone is scored for not 4, but 6 euphoniums, an uncommon instrumentation, but one that allows for exploring many possibilities that cannot be achieved with just 4 players. The work is most suitable for a large ensemble by doubling many of the 6 individual parts. Technodrone is a great adventure that explores the full range of the euphonium through its almost 4-minute romp of futuristic-machine like textures and themes. It was premiered on a studio recital at Georgia State University by a large ensemble in the Spring of 2013. The work is available directly from the composer.

**Prairie Songs by Reed Hanna**

When working with and forming relationships with a composer, sometimes there are exciting surprises. *Prairie Songs* by Reed Hanna is one of those happy surprises. A few years after the premiere of Hanna’s *Songs About Life and Love*, I woke one morning in January of 2016 to a complete score to *Prairie Songs*. We had not discussed a commission project; he had simply decided to write another set of character songs for euphonium and was hoping I would premiere the piece. The work was premiered by me the following summer in July of 2016 at the Bureleson Texas Tuba-Euphonium Project Summer Camp. The work is similar in vain to *Songs About Life and Love*, but the piece is more accessible to students from a difficulty perspective. The work is available directly from the composer.

**Carnival of Scenes by Zach Collins**

I was very fond of the work that Zach Collins did on his *Psalm* for euphonium quartet as part of the 2013 euphoniumcommissions.org repertoire consortium. A few years following this, in 2017, I approached him about the possibility of commissioning him to write a solo work for euphonium and piano. He agreed to the commission but refused any monetary compensation. This was his first work for solo euphonium, and there was much collaboration on the piano part with Amber Shay Nicholson. The work features his characteristic melodic and harmonic style, taking the listener on a 6-minute journey through various iterations of a motive based on a major seventh. The work was premiered at Midwest Tuba-Euphonium Day in Columbus Ohio on March 10th, 2018. The work is published and available from Pinnacle Brass Publications.
**Songs of a Sojourner by Nicole Piunno**

I first met Nicole Piunno when she and I were working with the same high school marching band at in the Columbus Ohio area in the summer of 2014. Dr. Piunno is an accomplished composer, best known for her wind band literature, with a background in trumpet performance. While working with her, she shared several of her brass compositions with me. Prior to *Songs of a Sojourner*, she adapted her unaccompanied trumpet work *Monterey Letters* for euphonium, which I have performed on numerous occasions. Following my performance of *Monterey Letters* Dr. Piunno approached me with a piece she had been sketching, a series of songs based on places Hocking Hills, Ohio. This eventually became *Songs of A Sojourner*. We collaborated on what would work well on the euphonium, and about making the piece accessible to a wide audience of performers. I premiered the work at the 2016 Burleson Texas Tuba-Euphonium Project summer camp. The work is available through the composer’s website.

**Sweet Appalachia Tuba Quartet Project by Various Composers**

The Sweet Appalachia project is a concept album that at the time of this writing is currently in post-production with a planned release of Spring 2022. This project was recorded by the Keystone Tuba Quartet, of which I am a founding member, in the Summer of 2021. The group is made up of me and Logan Carnes on euphoniums, and George Alberti and Zack Grass on Tubas. The concept of the album was to write and commission all new compositions and arrangements for tuba-euphonium quartet with the theme of the Appalachian trail, and the Appalachian region as a whole.
All of the works were commissioned by the quartet directly, and at time of writing none of the works are published or have been released outside of the quartet. The Keystone Quartet held exclusive rights to the first recording of all of the works, for the exception of Anthony O’Toole’s *Shake and Bake* which is the only pre-existing work that was not specifically commissioned for this project.

The works commissioned and composed for the project were, *Appalachian Trail Overture* by Zach Collins, *Suite Appalachia (I. Sweet Appalachia II. Rumpringa III. Mothman)* by Zack Grass, *Katahdin* by Jonathan Boudreaux, *Serenity and Little Dance* by Reed Hanna, and *Appalachian Hymn* by Logan Carnes. Two new arrangements were also completed for the project, *Heartsease* by Amy Beach arranged by George Alberti, and traditional *Down in the River to Pray*, arranged for tuba-euphonium quintet and electronic backing track by Zack Grass.
Conclusion

As musicians it is our ethical responsibility to further the repertoire of our instruments. This responsibility lies not only in the hands of composers, but in the hands of performers. One hundred years from now, future performers of our respective instruments should be able to look back on our time and reflect on the great music that was written. Idealistically, the greatest composers of today should be sought after to write for the euphonium, trombone, and tuba. If Beethoven were alive today, and no one commissioned him to write a euphonium sonata, tuba concerto, or trombone quartet, wouldn’t that be a shame? The work of commissioning new music is just as important as the quality of one’s own playing, as the notes on the page will far outlive the memories of any performance.

When embarking on this work, one must remember to stay organized and respectful throughout the process. There are many steps, that at times can seem daunting, but serve the greater purpose at hand to advance the repertoire. Organizing oneself prior to starting a project will always help the process. Having a clearly drafted creative plan, understanding of budget, and scope, are essential to a successful project.

When working with composers and co-commissioners, respect and encouragement goes a long way. Everyone is different, and every composer will work differently. Having clear contracts that also allow for some artistic flexibilities are important in keeping everyone happy and fulfilled throughout the project. When a piece is delivered, the lead commissioner should do their best to promote the work. It is important to note that not every piece of music from every composer is a masterpiece. Not every concerto will be the next big hit or stand the test of time.
This should be viewed as part of the excitement, and an inevitable component of this creative process.

No one can predict how composers and performers alike will advance the repertoire of low brass instruments in the future. What we can ensure, is that a wide variety of music continues to be written from a wide variety of composers. We should continue to seek out new composers and reach out to esteemed composers who have yet to compose for our instruments. For nothing great can be created if we do not try.
Appendix

Adam Frey Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Michael Waddell
Interviewee: Adam Frey
Interview Setting: Remote Via Zoom
Date: 12/9/2021

Michael Waddell:
I'm here with Adam Frey, and we're going to discuss the purpose and the process of commissioning new music for low brass instruments. Can you give a brief overview of your career first before we really get into it? The three-minute version of what your career in music is and sort of what you're doing right now actively.

Adam Frey:
Thank you for having me, it's a great pleasure. So, my career is multifaceted. Some will talk about it as a portfolio career. I'm active as a teacher at the University of North Georgia. I'm an associate professor. I also perform around the world, a little bit before covid, starting to ramp things back up, but I did that for about 20 years. I'm also sought out as an adjudicator for international competitions, and I’m the artistic director of the international euphonium tuba festival that's been going on for 18 years. I am also the co-founder and artistic director of the schoolofbrass.com, which was a very innovative program. Let's see, what else do I do? I also have two publishing companies, pinnacle brass, and then also, euphonium.com publications and we have each of those have over a hundred, pieces in their catalog. Then I also run the euphonium.com store, which has gotten more than 600 titles, that are all specifically for euphonium.

MW:
Awesome. Wonderful. Thanks for that. And I know that you've done a lot of work commissioning new music for euphonium, and various iterations of music that involve
euphonium. Can you talk a little bit about what sort of drew you to do that kind of work initially? And if you can remember what the first piece you worked on was and talk a little bit what that experience. What was it like getting into sort of being a leader in that arena?

AF:

Yeah, it started when I was an undergrad at the University of Georgia and there were just a couple of transcriptions that I wanted to make. A bassoon piece, a cello piece, and that's sort of where it started. The other thing that helped start it was a computer setting. Some old manuscripts … It's Fantasie Originale by Picci. It was in terrible, terrible manuscript. So, I did the first finale setting of it and everybody was overjoyed. We sold a lot of copies of that. I actually submitted it to Tuba-Euphonium press for publication, but their rates were so low. There was no royalty and so I decided to start my own publishing company that was originally called Athens music publishing, because of Athens Georgia. And while I was an undergrad, I also sort of started doing some commissioning. So, one of the first pieces that was interesting was a piece for euphonium, harp, and flute. That was part of the LaGrange young artists competition. So, they had an instrumental competition. I tied for first because they did not want to give first place by itself to euphonium player. So, they had composers write pieces for the three prize winners. So that was one of the first ones that sort of started it out. It was a neat experience. I had to play really soft because it was with flute and harp and euphonium. But the students here at LaGrange college wrote several pieces and it was actually pretty interesting. Then the main reason I started doing commissioning and arranging is that there's a need the repertoire for the euphonium, especially 25 years ago, it was really very narrow and quite thin. Since that time, I've worked on 150 arrangements commissioned or made by myself that involve euphonium, which is really cool thing, and they're all across a lot of different genres and performance mediums.

MW:

Awesome. And that that first piece, when you went to a composer for the first time to ask them to write a piece for euphonium, what was that process like? If you remember sort of like as initial conversations with the composer and how has that changed over the last 20, 25 years in doing that, how you actually approach a composer to say, hey, would you write a piece for me? How has that process evolved?

AF:

Yeah, so the first process was basically like, hey, you don't want to write above a high B flat or below a low F. And other than that, that was basically it, you know back then everything was just about sort of range. Don't write too high, don't write too low. It'll be
fine. I sort of think about it, you know, like in finale that you get different colored notes based on the range of what's good and what's borderline and what's insane. And so, it was sort of like that. Now in my communication with composers is, is all different from early on. I basically didn't really say very much and a few times that got me into trouble because the composers write crazy stuff. You know, I used to send out a little pack of CDs and, and photocopies of different solo parts as an example, like early on, I would send them a copy of the Ellerby euphonium concerto the Cosma euphonium concerto and the Marcello Sonata in F major.

I wanted to give composers sort of this open door for what they could write. Like, Hey, don't be limited, because a lot of times the composers had never written anything for euphonium. And the Cosma concerto is a perfect example of that. When Cosma wrote it originally, he knew nothing about the euphonium. He was a, a film music composer that was contacted to write for a competition that occurred in 1998.

And they were like, who's, who's a famous French composer that we can have write a concerto for this. And they asked him to do it. And there were four different iterations of the piece because after he wrote it, they sent it to different euphonium players, and they're like, ah, this is not good. Or that's not hard enough type situation. And he kept making it harder every single time. So now of course, I just sent this out to a young composer that I met in Pittsburgh a couple of weeks ago. So now, you know, I send them some YouTube links and some PDFs that they can study, and I give them very specific instructions, you know, because a lot of times there's, there's not a need for a 28-minute insane concerto. What we really have a need for now are pieces that are usable for competitions, for colleges, for juries, for an ensemble. So, I'm steering them towards like a five-to-eight-minute piece, sometimes three minute, three movements, like a Sonata … and with the difficulty that's geared towards young college students.

MW:

Just sort of filling in the gaps of what you see as the needs in the repertoire, is this an accurate statement? the weaker links in the repertoire currently, which is no longer those 28 minute concertos.

AF:

Yeah. We've got plenty of those. We’ve got enough substantial pieces in the repertoire, but the funny thing is if you go back 20 years pretty much all we had when I first started out was the Ellerby concerto, which at that point in time, didn't have orchestra. We had the Cosma concerto which didn't have wind band or brass band. Those were sort of the big ones. We had symphonic variants by James Curnow. Also, the Horovitz Concerto, which isn't with full orchestra, it's with the chamber orchestra. So those were sort of like the primary choices. Now we've got a ton of choices. So, I think as far as commissioning
that looking for those specific angles is really important. The other thing that I've done is a number of unaccompanied works that are, that are quite specific like Chris Dickies pieces and Ben Horne's *Stutter Step*. These are all new publications and that have, have a very specific purpose.

MW:

Let’s shift shifting gears just a little bit talking about commissioning music via a consortium and getting a group of people together. Can you describe what that process has been like? I know you've done a number of consortiums and in different ways, can you talk about what that process is like really from sort of beginning to end. How do you go about choosing a composer or composers, and what do you look for in a composer? How do you structure that in a very practical sense to hopefully see it through, to completion?

AF:

So, let's talk about selecting a composer. So, there's a lot of different facets that are involved with that. So, the first one is about your budget. You know I've always been a big fan of finding a slightly younger, not necessarily age wise, but just sort of career wise, a slightly younger composer. One that’s very motivated to write and that they're enthused. Most of the time they've been to a concert or they're a fan of mine and that's going to ensure that it's a great piece that they're invested in. There's been certain pieces that, that people paid money to somebody that they just sort of were like, oh, well, they're like, well-known, we're going to just have them write it. I don't want to name names, but we can probably think of some, euphonium piece that feels like a transaction.

It's like, hey, you hired me to write this. I wrote this piece. It's good. But it sort of lacks a little bit of whether it's a really good story or it's really, really cohesive. It’s sort of that personal connection. So, finding somebody that's motivated, enthused and then also that's, I think really willing to work with you. Maybe send you a couple drafts ask your opinion on things. I've worked with a variety of different composers; some don't want any feedback at all. Like when they send you the finished thing, it's done, like maybe I'll change a slur to a tongue or a tongue to a slur because you asked me, but I'm not changing any notes and I'm certainly you know, those are fine. Then others, you can make a lot of different suggestions to about, oh, you know, this technique doesn't really work that well, why don't you try this?

Or, hey, this quarter note pickup feels a little bit weird. If you write out four scales, 16th notes, and I have a specific example for that one, if you write out four scalar 16th notes, it flows so much better into this new section. The band will pick up on the new tempo change. Conductor will follow it versus this sort of one ambiguous long note. And every time I play that part in the Bruce Fraser *Euphonium Fantasy*, I get a little bit of a smile on
my corners because I'm like, you know, that was originally a quarter note and it would be so lacking in sort of flow to this next section. So that's one part now, organizationally I've typically confirmed what the composer is going to write and what their timeline is because different composers have different terms and timelines. So, you don't want to organize a consortium and then say, oh, by the way, the piece isn't going to be ready for two years.

What people really want to do is that they want to be excited about a project and that it's going to delivered probably within 6 to 12 months. So, so that's sort of a good timeline. Like most of the consortium's I've done, they've all been, all the details have been hammered out first. Composers are actively working on it, and then I release participation and start drumming up participants. The only bad thing about that of course, is that typically I've already negotiated contract and all the details. So, if that's the way it works, then you know, I'm personally on the hook for the finances. I think that that's an important thing from an, from an organizational standpoint. Okay. What were the other parts of the of the question?

MW:

So once you've got the composer chosen, you've got to organize the contract with sort of the composer and the type of piece? How do you go about sharing that information to try to get people on board in the consortium? How do you, you know, for lack of a better term, sell it to people to get on board?

AF:

That’s changed over the years. Early on we would pick up the phone and talk to different professionals. I would see and collect an email database at concerts. I mean, it seems so archaic now, but I mean, I remember at the end of a concert, I'd have a little email signup list that was by the CD table and the sheet music table. As funny as it seems now, nobody wants to give out any information now they're like, I don't need anything, but at that point in time, man, everybody was like, oh man, I want to sign up for your euphonium propaganda. There wasn't all this stuff. No, I mean, I remember doing high school college workshops and I would pass around this list a sign-up list to be on the euphonium.com email list.

Everybody was like, what? You guys send out an email about euphonium stuff? Oh my God, that's so crazy. So now it's totally different, but at that point in time, that was sort of the first step was having an email database that you could send out. And then of course, now we've progressed to doing social media whether you happen to use something like constant contact or MailChimp to sort of manage your contacts and things like that that. Then of course now you can do targeted advertising through social media platforms, which is, which is great.
MW:

Do you find it interesting about how it's changed over time, and just sort of how we manage contacting people has changed? Do you find that it's gotten easier or more difficult with all of these changes to get people on board for consortiums with the changes in technology?

AF:

I think it's more complicated now because there's so many things happening and there's a delusion of, of information and opportunity. You know, if you rewind 10, 15 years, there were very few opportunities and a consortium commission was a novel and unique thing. Now, I feel like the consortium commissions … there's too many of them. It's now like the main stay of how things happen. And there's, there's a little bit of jockeying for position of will. If I'm part of the consortium, who's actually doing the world premiere, is it a consortium or world premiere, who's actually doing the first performance in all these sorts of territorial things, which, I mean, it didn't use to be that complicated, you know?

MW:

No, I think that's a good point. Now it's so easy to access everything that way. Thinking about the logistics of a consortium, how do you set it up to accept finances from people? How does that look just logistically? How do you accept money for the consortium and get it to the composer? Do you have different tiers of contribution with different rewards, and how do you decide that?

AF

Yeah, I think so. First of all, I set up a nonprofit many, many years ago called the euphonium foundation. It's a registered 501c3. You can make a tax-deductible contribution as you like. So that was one thing that took a little bit of logistical planning when you work with universities, that's a great thing to have a separate business entity that it's not part of like your schedule-C income or anything like that. That it's just, Hey, this is the way that this works. And so, so that's one thing as far as the organization and the funding, I think accepting the money through that, we've had it where they can buy the memberships in the euphonium.com store. They can mail in a check. A lot of times I've organized the buy-in periods around my summer festival so that people can see and, and you know, get some firsthand communication about things there.

MW:

That makes sense. Having those, those buy-in periods are usually restricted, right? Because you want to have a specific amount of time that then you know what the funds are for the project?
AF:
It makes a big difference. A subset that everybody knows when the buy-in period is and how it can work. You know, having set timelines when the pieces are due, when people need to buy in. I've also negotiated with a couple of composers that we would have a flexible fee structure based on how many people buy in. And so that's been helpful in a couple of different ways. That way I'm not on the hook for too much stuff financially. But that it's still you know, still functioning, because it is tough. I mean, it is tough. But again, the nice thing about having the nonprofit set up is that it makes it a lot easier when you're communicating with different stuff.

MW:
That makes sense. What are you kind of, sort of already answered this, but in case you can think of anything else, some of the greatest difficulties in seeing something through all the way to completion? what have been sort of some of the biggest, and I know you've had a lot of incredibly successful commissions and consortiums, but is there anything commonly that you can think of that is common issue? that if you were advising somebody that was going to do a project to sort of be aware of?

AF:
So, there's always delays, especially by the composers. So that goes back to what I suggested about, making sure that things are at least in process. So early on, I can't remember who it was, but we used to bundle like four pieces together in a consortium. That's the way that I sort of did it. It was sort of like, hey, buy in for 150 bucks or 100 bucks or 75 bucks. We had these platinum gold and silver levels, and then we would have three to four pieces in there, but I do remember at least one composer … it took forever. The other three were done and they were still messing around with it, and I just basically had to be like, I am really, really sorry that this one piece is just not going to be delivered on time right now.

So just to be aware that there's going to be challenges that, that come from that from the timing of things, that would be the one thing. And then the other big challenge is to make sure that you either agree with the publisher who's going to pay for the promotional copies or negotiate that up front. There were ones that I've been involved with where they wanted additional copying costs for the members. They were like, no, no, no, the commission was for the composer. Like, that's the composer, we're the publisher. So, this was a little bit of a complex situation that left a bad taste in everybody's mouth because they wanted, I can't remember, it's like an extra 25 bucks at the end of it for the actual copies instead of just emailing PDFs. So that made it a little bit of a problem also.
MW:

Being aware of those things, I think going in and there will be delays is good advice. What would your key advice to getting a project off the ground? Finding a composer and getting a project started that would end successfully, for someone doing this for the first time.

AF:

I'd say have very, very specific goals and be sort of like, okay, I'm going to raise 300 bucks or 500 bucks. And it's going to be a piece that is for euphonium and piano, like five minutes long, you know, like make it such that, you know, everything is all set and clear. I'm not even talking about marketing, just make sure that the product is going to be interesting for people and accessible. Again, we don't need a 28-minute concerto because everybody can't play that. And then make sure that you've got a good budget. So budget, difficulty, length of the piece, and that the composer is comfortable with that. And then the next step is, start talking with your friends and you could also do this maybe before you create the boundaries. It's like, hey, you know, like Tom or whoever you want to talk with, like, hey, would you be interested in doing this?

What would make it interesting? It's like market research, you know, like, hey, what do we need? Do we need a 28-minute concerto that only five people can play? No, that's not going to turn out well, hey, what if we get a wind band concerto by a well-known wind band composer that, you know, like 8 to 10 minutes and the band part's not too hard, the euphonium part is accessible for college kids. They're going to do a piano reduction as well, a multi movement. So, like a college kid could do the first movement at a jury, or the second and third movement as part of a recital stalones. You know, like if you start putting all these components together of all right, college, kids can do it, band can do it, somebody that has access to piano can do it. Then you're going to get more buy-in then you know, if it's for instance, if it's a piece for euphonium accordion, and electronics, and it's built on a theme of Norwegian historical folklore only people from the very Northern tip of Norway know. Then I don't know how many people are going to want to contribute or be part of that.

So, I think, you know, thinking about how that works and then the final thing, as far as marketing, is there the opportunity to either promote some type of specific theme? Is there a component of, of interest or need within the composing areas? Is it in a south American style? Is it a Japanese style? Is it avant-garde? Is it really targeted towards young high school kids or older high school kids? So, all those things are really good questions to ask, and if you have a very clear plan then it’s going to make it a lot easier to get off the ground. So simplified budget, motivated composer, and very specific boundaries that are accessible to a lot of different people will be helpful.
MW:
That's great, and you kind of touch this in your answer, but do you consider any sort of ethical considerations when starting a project? Is there anything else that you consider from a non-musical and non-marketing level when you're thinking about a project?

AF:
Well, number one, pick somebody who writes music that you'd like, you know, whether it's from a melodic harmonic, or rhythmic standpoint. I mean, my most recent example is I was up in Pittsburgh playing with Duquesne University wind symphony, and the conductor had gotten two brand new pieces by student composers and they were both very good. One was written by the French horn player. Other was written by a vocal student and I was really quite taken by the vocal student’s piece. So, I talked with them afterwards and said I'd like to commission you to write this piece. I told him a lot of different information, and I just sent out a digital PR pack to him with YouTube links and PDF samples and stuff and told him I'd be happy to play it in June at IET, if he can get it done soon enough.

But I liked his music. I also like that he's not a band guy because he'll probably write it without the boundary of, of thinking like band music. I think that's where we've gotten some of our best pieces in the repertoire. Jukka Linkola, you know, his concerto is, is built out of a whole different spectrum of harmonic language, melodic language and up until, you know, meeting a lot of the brass guys in Finland … he's a jazz pianist is how he worked in a lot of different ways. And I think Tim Jansa’s concerto is fabulous. He's not even a formerly trained composer. He just writes what sounds good to him. So, there's a variety of different, different situations. So, make sure that you'd like their music and that they’re enthused to write for the instrument.

MW
That's great advice. Have you ever approached a composer that you don't know and haven't met. Have you ever just been like, I really want to reach out to this sort of person. I love their music. I've never had the opportunity to meet them. Have you ever done that?

AF:
I have, and some with varying different degrees of success early on, I contacted a couple people and just because they were sort of like big names and stuff. Some I found out the budget was way more than could happen. Other people were enthused, but then, because we didn't really have a personal connection, the pieces were a little bit … I don't think they turned out as well. I had one composer who wrote a second piece for me and stuff like that. He was like, yeah, he listened to the recording … I don't think it’s quite right. And he's like, okay, good. And so that, that change I would like to do more things like
that, where I reach out to composers that I don't know or that have really strong followings.

**MW:**

Is there anything else that you just sort of would want to add and, and encourage anybody looking to try to get new music written for, whether it be euphonium or whatever their instrument is?

**AF:**

Commissioning music is just like a skill on your instrument. It takes practice. You learn about different questions that you should ask, and different boundaries to set. So, start, you know, talking to composers that are in your music department, or in your high school that are students and or faculty that are enthused. And then also you know, progress from there because you'll learn something with every interaction, you know, like how you need to communicate. Oh, you know, you told them to, to write whatever they want, or they went out of the boundary and how you decide that there was one piece that a composer wrote for me that was 17 minutes. And it's like, ah, that's really, really long. Hey, what about this? I see, like, you've got this same theme that happens in at the beginning and sort of the end, how about we sell it as a 16-minute concerto, but then like, you can do this seamless cut from here to here, and it turns it into a seven-minute showpiece. And he was like, oh, that sounds good. I said, trust me, I will get to play this a lot more as a seven-minute piece than I will as a 16-minute concerto and stuff. So that's been helpful. That's also start early, start early, and start writing.

**MW:**

Was it over 100 projects you have led for new music?

**AF:**

Over 150 pieces.

**MW:**

150. Okay. That's a lot.

**AF:**

It is. They're not all good though. That's the other thing I haven't said yet. Is that not all the arrangements and not all the commissions are good. It's part of the process to understand that there's some that will go on, and there's others that will not. I will share
this much is that I commissioned a concerto, and we did the world premiere, the piano edition, and I was like, man, I can't wait to be done with this piece. Like, I like the piece, but I didn't think that it had like longevity and and at the premiere, everybody went nuts and I was like, wow, I didn't think that they were going to like that that much. And then I've had other pieces that I'm heavily invested in and feel like, man, this is like going to be the new piece for euphonium land. And then everybody's like, it's good … Did you want to ask for how you can get a copy of it so you can play it later? You know … and they don't ask. And then meanwhile, that other concerto that I did, everybody was like, man, when is that going to be available? And I was like, I didn't even print copies because I didn't think anybody would be interested … I can sort this out next week. You know?

MW:
That's interesting, you never quite know what's going to happen.

AF:
No, it's absolutely true. Absolutely true.

MW:
Yeah. And with sort of the other work you've done in arranging, I know you've personally arranged a lot of music. Can you talk a little bit about sort of how you got into doing that? I know you mentioned earlier, you know, it was a Mozart bassoon piece, and sort of what got you interested in arranging. Why have you kept doing it and what's been your motivation to continue to arrange and transcribe things for euphonium?

AF:
Yeah, so my motivation started early again, when I was in college because of just hearing different repertoire played on different instruments that I was interested in. I spent one semester over the summer studying with the bassoon professor at the University of Georgia, and we studied obviously the Bassoon transcriptions and stuff. And that sort of got me in the idea of, hey, what on other instruments works well on euphonium? And of course, this has been done for years before, but you start looking at new things and interesting things. And you know, there is one angle to doing it yourself from a business standpoint because of course. I didn't have to have a mechanical licensing or copyright issues with that particular situation because it was my intellectual property.

The other thing is that you can do what sort of dynamics and articulations that you want to on the recording, and it's not like somebody is comparing, oh, hold on … this other arrangement, oh, you don't do the tonguing here. You don't do the dynamics there so that they are in alignment. Then a lot of times people want to buy the specific music they
hear, they don't want to get it in a different key. They don't want to get it with different articulations and dynamics. They want to like, hey, what is this version that so-and-so played and what's the version that so-and-so played? You can think about it with jazz performers, where they transcribed solos and stuff. You know, if you’re going for the Chet Baker version, you don't want somebody else's improvisation, you know, you want to read what somebody transcribed from that and go from there.

The other thing that encouraged me about arrangements was hearing pieces that I thought maybe weren’t possible for the euphonium. A lot of that is the string stuff, and you know, if you go back 15, 20 years before YouTube, it's not like it was easy to find out whether somebody in France or England had already taken a famous violin piece and arranged it.

I still remember there's a great euphonium CD called the classic euphonium. And it's all bassoon concertos with orchestra and it's great and stuff. But I got to tell you, I did not know about that CD until after I had spent the semester studying with the bassoon guy and I had done the transcription and actually played the Mozart bassoon concerto with the Lorraine symphony orchestra as part of a concerto competition with the arrangement that I made. So that was really unique. But then I found that CD later and I was like, ah, wow, somebody else had that great idea. So, I might’ve thought that I was unique, but I was just late to the party, so to speak.

MW:
I know that CD, but that's a good story about when we didn’t have access to everything. Why do you think it's important for us to study music from those eras as musicians and as students? With the students you work with, why should we study and play these arrangements and not just this new music that's being commissioned. What is that importance in your mind?

AF:
So historical performance practice is one of the primary things. You know, the style of playing Baroque music is so different than playing modern music. I find that it's really educational because a lot of older music, especially early classical is so transparent. You know, if you have tuning problems, it shows up because the harmonies are really very straightforward. If you have inconsistencies in articulation, you want to know where it shows up and the fast movements of scalar work and a Baroque or early classical transcription, you can't hide that you don't know your F major scale when you play the Marcelo Sonata in F major you know, you can maybe hedge on some modern pieces … the accuracy of the technique and stuff like that, and the pitch center, but man, in a lot of those classical and early baroque, you can't get away from that.
I think it's also important to study transcriptions from a stylistic diversity standpoint, you know, whether it's romantic opera arias that you learn about the style of Puccini, and then also you've got these great string transcriptions, whether it's sort of like the cutesy Andante and Rondo from Capuzzi’s double bass concerto, that again, is very transparent, very refined. You do not play with the same articulation and dynamic pallet on that piece, as you would with say Martin Ellerby’s concerto and stuff, if you did, you'd get in big trouble. The other thing that I think about the transcriptions is that my teacher was David Randolph at the University of Georgia, the way he organized recital programs. I don't know if he like steered me in this way, but I know that I loved to start with a baroque piece., then I would do a modern piece and then I would do like something very vocal and lyrical, and then a show piece.

So, if there were four pieces on the program, I would hit those four different categories. The idea that one of those four styles is going to appeal to audience members, and you get to show a variety of skillsets that you don't use the same sound, dynamics, or articulations in each of those really distinct styles. So, I think you develop a much better playing persona and a much broader abilities as a player. You know, I can definitively tell you, I've heard people play different transcriptions, and they sound just like what I just talked about … oftentimes I don't know why the will be programing the pieces they pick … but they play the Baroque stuff just like they do the modern stuff. It's supposed to be chamber music in the back corner you know, at a very refined party with people with powdered wigs and drinking tea like this … It makes you so much more well-rounded, I think. I think you can also put it sort of along with a metaphor of clothing that we choose, that some days we feel dressing one way, the other way, maybe a little bit more flamboyant another day, a little bit more refined, you know, it's personal expression and you want to have that personal expression.

The other thing I wanted to tell you about, you know, you asked about why did different transcriptions, and this might be one of your next questions, but also because of a performance opportunity. When I got to play with the Boston Pops, the conductor called me and said, hey, we want you to play, what can you do? And I sent him a list of all these pieces, and he picked, I think, three of the four that did not have orchestral arrangements. So, I had to hustle and do orchestral arrangements of the three pieces. The funny thing is you know, I did an arrangement of Pantomime for the New Zealand symphony orchestra recordings and I still have the piece of paper that Phillip Sparke signed off on during the discussion to make an orchestral arrangement. It was at the bar at the Royal Northern college of music in Manchester, England. And it was just sort of like a very cordial discussion with Philip. Like, hey, I want to make an orchestral arrangement of Pantomime. He was like, why would you do that? Nobody wants to play that. And I was like, no, no, I want to do it. I want to record it, and I want to do it. I feel like he might've tried to talk me out of it, and then I was like, no, no,
no, no, I'm going to do it. I'm going to do it. And you know, now people are able to play it. So, it's a really cool thing.

MW:

When you're arranging specific things, a lot of times it's based on the particular project, like the New Zealand symphony orchestra project … and picking pieces that are going to be for those recordings or for those performances. What does that process look like? Not in choosing a piece, but in actually doing the arrangement. You know whether it be for orchestra for piano … how do you sort of go about it, what's your process of making those musical decisions before you put it on paper or into finale?

AF:

So let me talk about piano arrangements first because this is always interesting. So, when I arrange for piano, number one, I want to make sure that any of the common mistakes in the originals are corrected. It is a good first step. The second thing is I have a couple pianists that I send the part to and I give them very specific instructions. Like, Hey, I'm not a pianist. Tell me how to make this better and easier, because one of the biggest challenges I have as a performer is I show up, I have one rehearsal with a pianist, and then I've got to do a concert, you know? And so, we want to try and make them as straightforward as possible. You know, if that means we, in the arranging process, that we take out repeats or we make sure the pager margin is right, so that they don't have to turn the page back and forth in the middle of a repeat section, which happens way more than you think.

Then we take out anything that's stupid, hard, like octaves in thirds, you know, in harmonizations and stuff like that. I just make it easy for the pianist. So that's one component. The other thing is that we think about how we simplify that euphonium part, whether it's from a range standpoint or a technique standpoint, especially if it's a string transcription, that's an easy one. Are there certain things that work well, certain things that don't work well, so making the decisions how that affects and giving it maximum playability. And then if you need to, and you'll see this in a lot of my arrangements, I like to use a lot of ossias. Whether it’s like, hey, if you want to play the super E-flat, then you do the super E-flat. If you want to do the one in the middle of the staff, because it's easier than do that.

If you want to play, instead of doing these crazy 16th notes, you want to do the 8th notes, you can do that too. So that's an important consideration. We want to make that, you know, something that people can use, but then what's something that doesn't frustrate somebody that they're like, well, I don't want to play that piece. If it's just too crazy high. And it's like, no, no, high is not the function of the composer. It's a function of how we played it. You know, how an artist played it. But if you're an adult amateur, a college
student and maybe you don't have super chops or something like that, then it's okay, just take it down an octave. And it's written, you're given permission from the ossias. A lot of times people need the permission in the music, I can read it down or not. If it says it right here, you know?

MW:
Right. They don't want to feel like they're disobeying what's on the printed page. I feel like sometimes.

AF:
Right? Yeah. I wanted to add something. So, when you get into doing arrangements for orchestra and band you also get a chance to play like a mini composer through the orchestration process. And I find this really, really intriguing. So, with pantomime I'll use that as an example. So, you notice how the strings sort of work in sections. The brass and woodwinds work in sections. So, it's sort of like getting to compose in different ways and highlight different parts. So, like I'm particularly proud in the Pantomime orchestration that the strings are really brought to the forefront because, you know, this was a cool thing. They sound so different and so much more unique than the brass band setting of that.

The other thing is like with a lot of my wind band arrangements you notice that they're really thin textures. So early on in my solo career, when I was playing with a lot of bands, I'd play whatever was available. A lot of times the accompaniments are really thick. They're really dense. You really have to play really loud. One of the really nice things about my arrangements, I was like, well, I don't need the whole band to play when I'm doing all the 16th notes in the last variation of a solo. All I really want is a couple of trumpets, a couple of the woodwinds until the loud, last eight bars. And then the whole band can come in and be like, you know, I'm playing high B flats. But other than that, I really want to make sure that the texture is thin. I'm not leaving out the opportunity for the band, but I'm making an educated decision.

MW:
You get to sort of choose what you want to highlight and also make sure that the soloist is getting heard. Like you said, you don't need the whole band playing when there's a just a bunch of 16th notes happening. That's a really good way to sort of look at it. You know, playing a composer in that role.

AF:
It's nice because a lot of times the conductors appreciate it because how many times do, they have to tell the band to play softer play softer? And the band is trying, but
sometimes the bands have limited dynamic flexibility, which is understandable when it happens, but sometimes that's a result of the arrangement, or the composer making it as dense as it can be. This sounds silly, but you know, the bands like to be able to hear the soloist and be part of that, versus just playing so loud. Because they've got such a hard, intense part, they don't ever get to listen. And then lastly you can adjust the difficulty of the piece so that it's not a situation that a conductor is like, oh, what pieces do you have? Oh, we've got these grade six pieces on the program, so I can't have a really hard arrangement that I need to like to spend intense amounts of time on it. And I'm like, I got just the thing for you type situation.

MW:
An engaging solo, but you don't necessarily have to have a band part or an orchestra part that's going to stretch the ensemble.

MW:
I really appreciate you doing this and sharing all of this.

AF:
Absolutely. My pleasure.
George Alberti Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Michael Waddell

Interviewee: George Alberti

Interview Setting: Remote Via Zoom

Date: 12/10/2021

Michael Waddell:

I'm here with George Alberti. It is December 10th, 2021, at 12:10 Eastern time Thanks for being here, George.

George Alberti:

I appreciate it. Hey, thanks for having me.

MW:

Can you give a two-minute overview about sort of what you do in music, where your career is now and just sort of what you're doing related to music in general today?

GA:

Sure. Thank you for asking that. I am currently the Visiting Assistant Professor of Tuba and Euphonium at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania. I'm in the final semester starting the spring of my coursework on a DMA that I'm doing at the University of Illinois. And then other than those things, I am fairly active freelancing in the central Illinois area. I play a lot with the main orchestras in that area, the Illinois symphony and Urbana-Champaign symphony. I have a studio of middle school and high school students I teach over there. And that last part is, is kind of, I think the thing I've done the most in my career so far, going back to before I lived in Illinois, I was in Texas, and I taught a lot of private students down there and that's kind of where I am right now.

MW:

Awesome. Thanks George. Lots of experience in sort of teaching and performing tuba and low brass in general that'd be an accurate statement, right?
GA:

Yeah, I think so.

MW:

Awesome. Thanks, George. I know you’ve done a fair amount of work with composers. What sort of drew you to commissioning new music? And do you remember the first piece that you were sort of involved with either approaching a composer or as part of a consortium. What was that like?

GA:

I think what drew me to it was that when, when we were in college together at IUP. I think one of the things we were learning about at that time well actually, you know, I think what it was if I had to put my finger on, the short, small repertoire we had for the solo tuba and euphonium, and our teachers Zach Collins kind of using it as a teaching moment to say, yeah, and this is why we have been commissioning works. We being the tuba community so much over the last half century or so. And we continued to do that. I think I remember playing some pieces that were written, you know, for solo tuba in the sixties, seventies, eighties, maybe that I really didn't enjoy … they were original works. But they just weren't good music … subjectively that's my opinion. Someone might like it. So, then I got the idea, or I think I had the bug and the thought that you know, this is what, what real musicians do they, they encourage new music to be written. I think a lot of the people that were putting out solo albums when we were in school were doing that, like, this is a new piece that I got commissioned. I want to say maybe Demondrae Thurman or somebody, I recall having had an album that was just entirely music that had been written for them in some way.

MW:

Yeah, it was Soliloquies that has all the music written for him.

GA:

Yeah, and that kind of stood out to me, like that's what you're supposed to do. And there’s something about advancing. I didn't know that that's what scholarly work was at the time. You know, I was, you know, 19 or 20 years old, but the second half your question, I think the first time I did a commission was for a classmate of mine who, you know as well, which is Reed Hanna. I forget how the conversation had started, but I knew Reed was a composer. I may have heard one of his other works and I know Reed played piano for me on something. We were talking about it and Reed wanted to write a
piece of music for me. I still remember it because he asked me, this is Reed's style As you know, he said, give me three composers or musicians that you really like. He said three musicians that you really like, and I'm going to base the piece of music on that. I’m gonna know that in my head, as I write this music for you, and I want to say it was like, David Maslanka, the strokes and Shostakovich or something, I don't know.

MW:

Three totally different types of music.

GA:

I just was like; this is what I'm listening to on my little iPad or iPod as I walked to class. And so, yeah, Reed wrote me a tuba concerto. And that would've been 2009, that would've been the first work that I was a part of commissioning.

MW:

I know you've worked on more pieces. Have you ever either set up a consortium or been a part of a consortium, and how would you sort of describe that experience?

GA:

I think I have a lot less experience with the consortium side of things. I've participated in several. think I did one of yours back with you on euphoniumcommissions.org. I was also a part of Kevin McKee's Brass Quintet which he wrote kind of on pirate themes that's yeah. I think being a part of a consortium, which has been my, the extent of my experience has been kind of fun because when you think about it it's, it's actually what am I trying to say here? More adequate compensation for what a composer actually does in writing the music. You know, a single commission when I hire Reed Hanna to write a piece for me because there's a friendship involved, nine times out of 10 they give you a deal on it and they put in all this work. If it’s a friend of yours, but a consortium, I think it almost feels more like, hey, we’re giving the person what they should get for a great piece like this, but I hope that answers your question. I don't really have a ton of experience in the consortium side of things.

MW:

Thanks. Yeah, no, that answers it really well, because it's an interesting perspective as sort of a participant because it's in your experience, has it basically been, oh, there's this consortium, here's some money, and then later on you get the opportunity to get the piece and be a part of the premiere, right?
GA:
Yeah, exactly. Yeah. And, and I will say the thought of organizing a consortium is just exhausting to me. I, I couldn't imagine all the …

MW:
Awesome. No, that's really good. I appreciate it. What are some of the greatest difficulties and what is the process like for you, either working with Reed or working with other composers. The back and forth, or any of the challenges, or even just interesting things that happen along the way when working on a project.

GA:
Yeah. I mean, I, I think there's a couple of like examples that come to mind and one, you know, without naming names, to keep everybody anonymous in this case, because these were, I think some less positive commission experiences that I've had. I had a person who wrote me a Sonata and they sent me the first part of it, I thought, you know, you haven't quite pushed the limits yet on what the tuba can do technically. Maybe make it a little bit more challenging. I think the person took it as a bit of as an insult. I really don't know what they were thinking, because what they came back for the third movement was just like insanely hard. They didn't just increase it like a little bit. They took it to a level where I, I would say that piece is borderline not playable now. And I have performed it. I have performed the third movement under tempo and yeah, I don't play it anymore. So, working with composers, I mean, I think there's a back and forth. There's a communication in part I always want to be free to let the artist do what they want to do. I don't want to inhibit their creative process, because I feel my role in this process is to be just to share what they have created and it's not, and I don't want to put a big stamp on it. I mean, I will occasionally with Reed for example, having written music for me I edited some of his tuba music even stuff that he hasn't written for me, but he's handed to me and said, hey, can you look at this and tell me how this sits on the tuba?

And so, when it comes from like, you know the practicality of how to play a piece, I'm more than happy to say, you know, this is something that on the tuba, you know, on the cello, this might be something you could really do well, but for the tuba we might have to abbreviate this part right here. This is maybe too challenging because again, right with, with commissions, it's not just about writing a piece of music that only Oystein Baadsvik can play. We want music, that's going to be a part of the repertoire that more people can use than that. You know, one side example, you know, as we go down this rabbit hole .. Aaron Tindall recently, he played on his recital an arrangement of the Cinderella Suite that his student Justin Gruber did.
MW:

I didn't know that. Yeah …

GA:

It was a great piece, but after listening to the performance, I kind of had the thought, I was like, you know, I think Aaron might be one of the only people that can play this, you know, cause he's really good. But I thought about like, even for myself personally, if I could buy this suite off of them, and play it myself, I was like, you know, I don't know if this is even in my wheelhouse and maybe not for most.

MW:

What do you think is important about doing this? You kind of answered this a little bit before, But why do you think it's important as you tuba player, and just as a musician in general, to work on commissioning new?

GA:

Hundreds of years ago they weren't looking back in time looking for music. I mean, this is something from my music history classes that I'm plowing through right now in my DMA … this is something that's recent within the 1800s, you know, the early 1900s, early 20th century, when we started to be like, okay let's play Beethoven again. You know, let's play Brahms again. And by the way I love, love, love the old stuff. Can't get enough of it. If they're playing Beethoven 9 for the eighth time in the I'm like, yeah, I'm there. You know, it's still so cool to me every time we hear it. But you think about what it was like at that time when Beethoven 9 was played, or even before that, you know, Mozart symphonies and Haydn. The music that was being played was the music that was being written at that time and was being created at that time. And the performer was much closer to the product in creating the product. I feel like now when we perform Beethoven, when we perform these other pieces, it's a little bit of speculation, you know as to how it should be played. Whereas the wonderful thing, that's a long way to say … let's talk about doing it the other way, where we are playing the music of people of our time.

It's much more connected. I mean, one piece that we just had commissioned for our quartet album, which is coming out soon was Katahdin, that Jonathan Boudreau wrote. And, you know, we wanted to make a little change on that piece at the end and say, Hey, what do you think about this? We just asked him, we said, hey, we think maybe we could do this at the end, this little extra change. And, and for him just to write back and say yeah. Or he could have been like, no, don't do that. We would’ve been okay, but
when we commission, it's so important for us to commission music and continue to do this because it just moves us forward.

You know, now that you think about it and you realize like you know, Bartok’s concerto for orchestra, which is a classic today, which is huge. That was a big commission, you know, there was somebody raising the money to pay him. And so now we look at that as old music, and that's great, but there could be something that we commissioned today that, you know, serves that purpose a hundred years from now when they look back and they're like, okay, it's so good. That, that was commission. And another side I was thinking about this also driving in to teach today, I was thinking about your project you know, early in history, we had the church, which was funding the composition of music, right. Palestrina was pretty much everything. Everybody was getting paid by the church to write their music, and then we had the courts and you had people that, you know, worked in a court and paid money to make music, write music. We really don't have any infrastructure for that anymore. You know the composer, if they want to get paid, they have to drive Instacart or something. I don't know, they have to do something else like deliver groceries. They have to have another gig. If they’re really fortunate, they teach music theory at a university. Yeah. You know, if they're really fortunate, but nine times out of ten you know, they're struggling to make it. So commissioning is huge in that regard because it's privately funded.

MW:

Composers to write for us. Right. I mean, how many composers have stopped composing that we don't even know about that could have had great works because there's no infrastructure for it? To your point on Bartok, if nobody paid Bartok to write the *Concerto for Orchestra* that could have never existed … and sort of along the same lines as this, when you're thinking about trying to do a new project or approach a new composer or anything like that, are there ethical considerations or anything that you consider outside of music outside of the music itself when looking to start working with someone?

GA:

Yeah. I mean, I think it's hard not to ignore the landscape of today and the obligation we all have just as human beings to lift up the voices and celebrate the works of people that are less represented in our field. So that of course is always, I'm a part of it. But I will say, you know, ethically first and foremost, the reason I want to commission someone will never be primarily because of how they identify and who they are. It is always because I think they write good music.

I've asked enough people to write music, that’s come out badly … there's one person that comes to mind who wrote this piece of music for a Brass Quintet that I was in. This was a
piece of music that had like two minutes of ideas. We could have like kept it to a two-to-four-minute piece and this composer transposed it through 6 different keys for 12 minutes and just repeated it again. It's like, okay, so now we're gonna do the same thing again. Up a Fourth, and now we're gonna do the same thing again, down a fifth. We talked to him about it. We were like, hey, look you want to write a 20-minute work for Brass Quintet, look at like Michael Tilson Thomas' music, look at the techniques he used, you know, not have everybody playing at the same time all the time.

The composer was very resistant to that. He said, no, this is the music I wrote, play what I wrote. We're like, okay. But after that interaction, I said, I'm not going to approach this person to write music for me again. And I know that's kind of a mean way to think about it, but you know, I guess that's the dark side of commissioning. So, to talk about how I decide and, you know, determine who I want a commission or who I want to write music for me. Oftentimes I do want to look at their catalog and see how they are writing, how in touch they are with what the instruments can do, and ultimately how open are they to having a conversation about it. So, yes, I do have ethical considerations I consider when doing all of that. But first and foremost, is do I like the art that they create, and are they going to be easy to work with? And those are the two most important things for me.

MW:

I think that kind of goes hand in hand with a lot of things in music, if you're not easy to work with, you know, you don't go down the road again … If you were going to talk to young musicians, college students, or recently graduated students that maybe haven't been a part of a consortium or haven't, you know, sort of been bitten with this bug of working with composers, what advice would you give them about how to approach a composer or how to start doing this kind of work?

GA:

Well, I think I would be talking about it from two, two sides of it, two angles, right? Number one, from the composer's side of it, I think the composer needs to compile as big of a portfolio as they can, of their music being played by live musicians. So, for the composer, if I had a student that was a composer, I would say, hey, you know, if you can write, if you have friends that play saxophone, flute, and violin, and they want to play your music in a trio, you should write for that group and get your music to be played. For my students that are performers, you know, what I would encourage them to do as far as getting into this is, number one, I would say, you know, this is hugely important for you to do for all of us to do as we continue to move forward.

Another thing I'd point out too is while you are in school you know, there's a good chance you can get your buddy on discount. Because we have classmates, we went to school with that are very successful composers now. If commissioned one of these composers
like Anthony O'Toole, Derek Cooper, or Reed Hannah, even if I commissioned them in 2009, I might have gotten away with like a $50 commission or something like that. You know, I could have gotten a really good piece of music from their voice and from their mind early on and supported them as they were also kind of growing and learning. But now today, if I want to commission Anthony or something you know, there's a long line and the price tag is a little bit rich for me currently, you know.

MW:

That's a good point, you know, approaching, I think, you know, approaching your friends and your colleagues. And I always find it interesting thinking about that. You brought up people we went to school … you never know where people are going to end up that you just, you know, from high school, college, or whatever.

GA:

Yeah. And I think it's a part of, you know, building your little ecosystem, your little environment, because I mean, we have classmates, we went to school with, at IUP that I I'm kind of shocked they are doing as well as they are.

MW:

And the opposite.

GA:

That too … and the opposite people I thought would do really well, that didn't, but I, I'm kind of as she ashamed of myself for having been in school at IUP and looked at a student with prejudice and thought, they're not gonna make it because whatever, you know. Maybe they were doing things to lead you to believe that, like partying too much and not staying on their academics or taking things seriously. But then years later we look at them and were like, wow, they, they turned out … but building those relationships and that, that comes from commissioning and creating art together, creating music together.

MW:

For sure. What is or how do you, you've kind of answered this, but in case there's anything else you want to add about how do you approach a composer about starting a project, and have you ever approached a composer that you've never met before? What was that like?
GA:

Well, if I'm going to approach a composer today, I won't approach anyone unless I'm familiar with their catalog and the work that they've done, and if they're easy to work with.

Now there, there was one time where I did commission someone that I didn't know. We were at the army band conference, and you might remember this, you were there, I think you may have been probably, and this was 2010, 2011. We were in DC and you and I had either graduated or I graduated and you were about to graduate. We were on the bowling alley side of the exhibit hall, kind of near where I think Adam Frey hangs out sometimes and Brian Fredrickson. And there was an older guy who was selling sheet music. And I was just bored walking around the exhibits, thumbing through sheet music. I found the Frank Siekmann Bass Trombone Concerto, which had been written for Charlie Vernon, and I was a huge fan of that piece.

It's a great piece. And although I wasn't familiar with Charlie's recording or as familiar with Charlie's recording. One of my favorite base trombone CDs was a fantastic one by a German Bass Trombone player. That was a CD I picked up, I think in 2006, 2007, like when I was just finishing high school. So, I knew the Siekmann Concerto was a great piece. And I was talking to this older guy and, and he said, and something, he was like, I'm Frank Siekmann I was like, holy cow. I was like, have you ever written a tuba concerto? And he was like, no, I was like, well, would you … he was like, yeah. You know, I was like, can I commission you? He was like, yeah. And so, I commissioned him to write a concerto and, and he did, it's a good piece. Fun fact, I didn't even know this. I just got hired at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania this year, which is where he taught for 40 years. I didn't know … didn't remember that. He just passed away early last year. So, you know, we just missed each other, but I have heard as a side note, his son runs a recording studio here in town. And one of my colleagues here said, you should go pop in one day with the concerto … but yeah, that was a fun, a fun little project to actually have done that with Frank Siekmann.

MW:

That's a great story … I've got one more question, George … just something I thought of is what's it like, what's your experience been like premiering a new piece?

GA:

Yeah. Well, first and foremost it, you feel better about missing notes because you're like, hey, you y'all don't even know what this is supposed to sound like …
MW:

Yeah, no one has seen the score.

GA:

Right. So there there's a lot less pressure there. I will say though, personally, it's almost like it's a baby, you know, it's like your baby you know, in a weird, convoluted way that you conceived with this composer. It's like it's yours because, although the composer you know, has written it, you're giving the first performance you are, you know, you are almost setting the standard for how it is played because ultimately, you know, most of the time your composer isn't playing it on the tuba. They might have some tuba chops if you're lucky, but if not, I mean, you're the one who's going to play it. So, it's, there's a deep personal connection to it … and it’s a lot of fun.

I will say that the, the downside of it is you put your heart and soul into it and you're like, I love this piece. I'm digging it. It's good for me. And someone in the audience could be like, you should have just played the Vaughn Williams Concerto, because I like that. And you're like I guess so, but don't you like this cool new piece? And sometimes people are like, no, but you know, I mean, it's you know, back to Demondrae Thurman, we were talking about him earlier. I think about what he said once one time at a conference. He said, I would, I'd rather be really strongly loved by a small group of people and really strongly hated by another group of people than be like, kind of okay with everyone. So, you know, as long as somebody really digs what you're doing, I think you're doing right.

MW:

Thanks for doing this, George.

GA:

Yeah, man.
Frank Gulino Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Michael Waddell

Interviewee: Frank Gulino

Interview Setting: Remote Via Zoom

Date: 12/11/2021

Michael Waddell:

I'm here with Frank Gulino. It is December 11th, 2021, at 11:00 AM. Thanks for being here, Frank.

Frank Gulino:

Sure. It's a pleasure.

MW:

Can you give a brief overview of sort of your career and music and what you're doing now, the three-minute version of your musical life?

FG:

So, my background is as a performing trombone player, but while I was studying trombone at Peabody, I started kind of getting into composing more, just like I didn't have any really serious aspirations at first. It was kind of just like a different creative outlet. I had a few opportunities to write smaller pieces for friends, people in my studio, people who were programming degree recitals. I started to really enjoy it a lot. There were some good receptions to some of my music. I had an opportunity to start getting music published and I really just sort of fell in love with the creative aspect of doing it, you know, as opposed to as a performer, you're always trying to realize the visions of composers and bring those to life as accurately as you can, but there's something sort of empowering about just having a clean slate. You get to decide how the music goes, and what the phrase sounds like, and what the notes are.

And, you know, by the end of my degree, I sort of felt like I wanted to spend more time cultivating that aspect of things. And so, it was really sort of, at the end of college, when I
felt like composing overtook performing as of my main musical career aspiration. And I've continued to perform here and there, but I've also taken time off from playing. Big chunks of time off. The only thing I've never really stopped doing the, this entire time, the past 15 years or so, is composing. And I think the fact that I come from a performance background has been really helpful because most of my friends, the people I'm closest with, are other performers who are always looking for new music. I mean, being a low brass player in particular, I think is sort of a good opportunity because as solo instruments, the instruments that we play are relatively new to the scene. We don't have these lifetimes worth a repertoire like pianists do, like violinists do. If I was in the same boat, but you know, I was a piano player and I decided, hey, I want to write a lot of music for my instrument. I could do that, except there's a lot more competition. There's a lot more major staples of the repertoire. There's literally centuries worth of great, great rep by all of the giants like Beethoven.

**FG:**

And the thing is, Beethoven never wrote euphonium sonatas or Tuba concertos, you know, we just don't have the Titans of the cannon writing extensive solo literature for our instruments. And so, for that reason, I think that a lot of the great literature for the low brass instruments is still to come.

**MW:**

Awesome … as a composer that's been commissioned, I know you've worked in consortiums and things like that. What is it like getting a project off the ground, and what are some of the difficulties surrounding getting something started when you’re approached by someone to write a piece?

**FG:**

Getting everybody kind of on the same page and just sort of having a really clear concept of what the expectations on both ends are, I think is really important. Kind of a tangent to your question, but I've had a lot of people reach out who had not commissioned music before, and sort of asked that same question but from a practical place of like, I want to commission a piece and I don't know what to do. After I got that question a handful of times, and I found myself responding to it over and over and over, so I together a first-time commissioner FAQ that I just started sending back to people.

Point number one of that is do your research and make sure that you're reaching out to the right composer, because different composers have different strengths and weaknesses, different areas of interest, different areas of expertise. Everybody a unique flavor. And
so, if you're a performer who really loves edgy and Avant Garde music, and extended techniques, and extreme virtuosity and just, really hard music, there are composers who write that really well. And then I, on the other end of the spectrum, if you're looking to program a piece that's really tune-full, melodic, and tonal … you would probably not ask the same composer, you know? I think my biggest advice would be do your research, do a lot of listening, and if there's a composer whose sound really speaks to you, whose music you find really compelling that you really enjoy, that's probably somebody you want to work with. Somebody who would be really happy to work with you because composers who are being commissioned are always going to be at their strength if they're writing within their sound instead of without their sound.

I’ve certainly had people approach me about asking for some more out there kind of pieces. I don't hesitate to turn work down if I don't feel like I'm the right fit. Because if something's going to go out with my name on it, as the composer, and with your name on it as the commissioner, I want it to be a product that reflects well on both of us, that I’m happy to put my name on and that you're excited to go out and share with the world … and not everything is going to be a home run. That's just the way it is. You can't please a hundred percent of people, a hundred percent of the time, but I think you stand the best chance if you're like, hey, you know, I play this instrument, I've heard your pieces, X, Y, and Z. I really love the sound of that. I would like to commission something that’s in that style or, I want a piece that sounds like you. That is always kind of the best compliment a composer can get, because it shows that you've done your listening, you've done your research and … more than anything, It's a show of trust in somebody's approach. Somebody's compositional voice. And I think, okay, if you do that from the outset, then getting the project off the ground becomes a lot easier. It kind of breaks down any sort of wall, any sort of tension, because you know, as a composer, it really means a lot when somebody trusts your voice … when somebody likes your music. I think that’s an aspect of collaboration that's really underrated. It’s not just a purely transactional thing. There’s a relationship there.

MW:

I think when it is transactional like that, oftentimes not the best music comes out of it.

FG:

I totally agree with you. It's not just supposed to be an exchange of a piece for dollars. So many industries are that way, right. It's just purely transactional. But when you're talking about something in the creative sphere like this, I think relationships really play into it a lot. I'm always really happy to write for like friends of mine, people that I like as people, who I also like as players, you know a lot of my friends play really well. I'm a fan of theirs and that's great, like that excites me to work on projects for them. I've also been
commissioned by people who I didn't know really well, and who's playing, I wasn't super familiar with and still had good experiences. Just because they did their research on the front end, we kind of set the expectations, got an idea of what we were looking for, and things worked out.

**MW:**
It can go sort of in all different directions … How often are you just commissioned from somebody where they say I want to do the commission, it's just for me, versus somebody organizing a consortium for a piece.

**FG:**
I think more and more people are going the consortium route. I've certainly worked on projects both ways. There’s a lot more considerations that go into it than just financial. Obviously if somebody is commissioning a piece on their own, the financial burden is going to be more, but the administration of it is a lot easier too. Some people don't want to herd the cats, you know they don't want to corral consortium members. They don't want to get everybody's info. They don't want to be sending emails, making sure people are paying the buy-in fee. They don't want to be keeping tabs and everyone in case they're mailing address changes. You’ve run consortium, so you know that being the lead commissioner is more work than just being a participant. It’s easy to say here's my hundred bucks and please make sure you spell my name right in the score. Yeah. But if you're the one running the project, there's a lot of responsibility there.

It also becomes a little bit less exclusive, right? Because say the piece comes with a year of performance exclusivity, or a year of recording rights. You have to share that with the other members. So, a piece that maybe can be performed by 30 people in the first year is different than a piece that can only be performed by you for the first year. So, you get to, if you book a big recital tour, you've got some good venues coming up, you're doing a bunch of college visits or whatever. If the piece is exclusive to you, you can really bring attention to the project, bring attention to your playing. You and the composer have a shared interest in promoting the piece and wanting it to be successful, and the benefits of that you don't have to share with other people. So, from a promotional perspective, that kind of exclusivity and the reduced headache of running not having to run a consortium sometimes, for some people, that is worth paying more. But the, the reality is that most low brass players, you know, money is an object. Yeah. And, you know, as, as far as the, the composer is concerned, more people are always, you know, fun …and if they're like-minded people too, you know, presumably if you say, hey, do you want to join a consortium? Some people are going to say no, like that's not really my bag, but the people who say yes are like, oh, I love that guy's writing or that girl's writing, count me in. And so, when you have a team of people who are all pumped up about it and are all
enthusiastic about the project and feel like, oh, hey, we can have a euphonium piece by x, y, z composer … that's really cool. So, for the tradeoff for the composer is, again, you can't please everybody all the time.

MW

Right, because now you're writing. This is my next question, but you’re kind of already in it … what's that process like? How is it different as a composer, both administratively, but also musically, when you're writing for a large group, and not someone specific like Steven Mead, even though he might play it, you know. Now you're just writing for, you know, whoever joins a consortium … how is that different?

FG

You want to make it accessible, and I mean, for me personally, accessibility has always sort of been a hallmark of what I do. I want it to be accessible to performers. I want it to be accessible to audiences. I want people to enjoy both ends of the piece, sharing it with listeners and also sitting there and listening to it. At the end of the day, composers and performers both depend on audiences. So, it's got to be a good listen, and you want it to be musically rewarding. When I'm writing for a single commissioner, I'm happy to be as specific as they need me to be in terms of crafting them a piece that they're really, really excited to go play. So, once I had a trombone solo that was commissioned by an individual who was like, hey, I have a really great high D, like make sure there's a high D in the piece. And I was like, perfect, cool, I can do that. Whereas if it was commissioned by like 30 trombone players of their ability from, you know, maybe college or grad student through professional, not everybody can paste a High D on trombone. So I don't want to exclude people from playing the piece, especially if they're in the consortium helping to fund it. So, I'm not going to make it ridiculously hard.

MW:

Right. And you can't feasibly if there's 30 people on a consortium. You can't study everybody’s playing and somehow try to meet them all with the piece.

FG:

It doesn’t make any sense either. Yeah. It's just not possible. So, but to answer your question, I try not to make the creative process too difficult, too different in either case. Mostly because I feel like if people are joining a consortium to commission a piece for me, they sort of know what they're getting into. That’s one regard where I think it has been really helpful to kind of cultivate a style or a sound, people sort of know what they're gonna get. They know whether they want to participate in this project or not. My music has a certain sound to it and doesn't often depend on extreme range or extreme
technique or extreme virtuosity. I try to stick to that, whether I'm writing for one person or for many, because even if the piece is commissioned by one person, I don't want them to be the only one that is ever able to play it. I think inclusivity is really important and there's always going to be room on concert programs for pieces that are not extreme.

MW:
Yeah. Not everything has to be the Cosma Concerto.

FG:
Right. It's great that we have hard pieces because the level of playing is going up all the time. It's crazy. I mean, I listen to undergrad trombone players today and I'm like, these people play circles around folks that were winning jobs 30 years ago.

MW:
It's … it's disturbing.

FG:
Sometimes, yeah. The level of playing is really high. The level of virtuosity is off the charts. There are people who play really musically. There are people who just have great sounds. I think the level of playing is going up all the time and you kind of want to keep that in mind. It's great that we do have really challenging, boundary pushing rep. For me it comes down more to what I said before. There are certain composers for certain tasks. I think if I tried to write something that was just absolutely bananas and super difficult, I just don't know that the quality of the piece would be where I want it to be.

MW:
It's not what you do or what you're used to doing or what's like in your mind really, right?

FG:
Yeah. Whereas if I write in my wheelhouse, I know what I can do to achieve the sound that I want, and that like little sliver of composition, there are things that I probably do as well as other composers, you know, but then there's other areas where sure, It's like, I don't want anything to sound forced or hard for the sake of hard.
MW:

Yeah. Right. Just for the sake of having done it. From a non-musical, do you find any more difficulties or challenges that come up when you're doing something with an individual versus a consortium? Or does it just kind of depend on the project? What is that like from a business standpoint or an administrative standpoint working on a direct commission versus a consortium?

FG:

Like the, the practical side of it, not putting the notes on the page.

MW:

Right.

FG:

So, the biggest component of it is financial. Composers need to get paid because that's the only way we can keep doing what we do.

I mean, I will say this, if money was absolutely no object, I would love to write pieces for all of my friends, for every musician that I'm a fan of, for every musician who's playing I love, and respect without charging a dime. That would be great. I think there are so many great ideas to be had. There's so much new music left to be created and there's so many players out there, amazing players, who would reflect really, really well on things. But composing takes a lot of time. I'm not particularly fast or efficient. I'm very slow and methodical in particular, and I point and click every note, and it's like, you know, I'm a disaster … but having said that, I have to pay bills also. And so, it's just not practically feasible for me to just write music for free.

If I won the lottery tomorrow, I probably wouldn't take another dime for, commissions, like, don't worry, you've got 50 million. It's fine. So, the financial side of things is always the elephant in the room, right. Because most tuba players are not billionaires. When you're talking about an individual versus a consortium, the same way, I try not to make the creative process too different, I try not to make the business side of it too different. I have contracts that I use with commissioners, and if it's going to be a consortium, my contract is with the lead commissioner, the person spearheading the project. I make them a hundred percent responsible for the financial obligation because I can't be writing the piece and chasing down 30 people and whatever.

The truth is the lead commissioner often has the relationships with the other team members, right? So, if it's a tuba player, they know other tuba players who are. They're the ones with the network who might really be interested in and benefit from the project. So, it's like, I don't … I just want to write the notes. I don't want to do the recruiting and find people to participate in it. I also think that if I'm in a contractual obligation with just
with one person, there's a lot, obviously a lot more predictability for me. There’s kind of more at stake for that person to follow through on their end, and so I don't really care how they want to divide up the obligations or anything … if I tell them, hey, my fee for this piece is X.

If they want to split it 10 ways or 50 ways, doesn't make a difference to me. They’re on the hook for the entire amount either way. And so, you know, it depends, again, some of those considerations I mentioned before, how exclusive do you want it to be? What do you want the individual buy-in to be, how hard do you want the piece to be? Obviously, if it's going to be a really hard professional level piece, you can only recruit really exceptional players. Whereas if it's more kind of a middle of the road accessible piece that doesn't have extreme high range and stuff like that, maybe there are even college kids who are going to be giving degree recitals that want to get in on it and think it'll be really cool to do a consortium premier on one of their school recital programs. So, I really, I leave it up to the consortium leader, how they want to run that. I try to empower them to run the project the way that works the best for them.

MW:

Right. Stay out of it from your perspective, so you can work on focus on the music. And that's interesting, you've got a contract and it's like, hey, this is the contract. I imagine a lot of other composers work in a similar way. For the creative process how much back and forth is there with the lead commissioner? I know it can vary between whoever's commissioning it, but do you share any drafts or ideas? how does that process sort of work for you ideally, and then what are some interesting things that have happened along the way?

FG:

So, I'm big on communication. Mm-Hmm, but I'm not big on drafts and snippets. I like to stay engaged and, you know, text with people and, like I said before … part of it is a relationship thing. I feel like the more I get to know the person and what's important to them almost the easier the process starts to feel. So again, I don't want it to feel really transactional and kind of dry and impersonal. So, I like staying in touch. I like giving updates on the project you know, as a two-way street. I like to let people know that I'm working on it, how it's coming. Whether there's ideas I'm really excited about, I like to hear from them, on how recruiting is going, what kind of performances they have lined up.

Plus, just even not necessarily talking about the project, but just getting to know each other, I've made friends with people through these commission projects. I mean, including you, right?
Yeah.

That's pretty much how we started talking, and it's great because you meet people, you get inside their head, you, you learn about them musically. You learn about them as instrumentalists. You learn about them as people, and I really like most low brass players. It’s great that these become ways that you stay in touch with people that are like; they almost become part of your family when you've created an original piece of music with a team of folks. There’s more of a bond there than I think non-musicians might realize, because the creative process really is like you’re sharing a lot of yourself.

I think great performers come across as sharing a lot of themselves, really musical players. There's a very kind of openness when you go to a recital by somebody who just plays really artistically and you feel like this person is on stage, sharing themselves and that it’s meaningful. And so, when it can be a collaborative thing, I put dots on a page, but you bring it to life and put it out in the world and make it possible for listeners to enjoy it. I think with that sort of end result in mind it’s easy to make friends with the people that you collaborate with. Okay. I'm big on that, but I'm also not the kind of composer who's like, here's draft number one, tell me what you think. Some people want to be hands-on, and some people want to be totally hands-off. I've had people make really, really specific requests and people who are like, please write a piece that sounds like you I'll see you at the finish line.

See you at the concert!

Yeah. Pretty much. And you know, I'm happy to explore both ways. People have all kinds of different personalities and temperaments and that's great. Everybody's a little bit different, you know. And so, I like it both ways personally. I think it’s a big compliment for somebody say to write a piece that sounds like you, I trust you. I'm sure it'll be great.

It’s interesting in how people approach things differently and sort of to that end, if you were going to talk to a young musician … Would you give any advice to any young musician who's thinking about contacting somebody about how they should approach it initially and what they should do sort of before they reach out?
FG:

Yeah. So there's always a first time, right? Not everybody is an experienced commissioner of new literature. You might be someday, but for most people they're excited about the creative process. They're excited by the thought of a new piece and the literature for their instrument. And if you're thinking about reaching out to a composer, you should, most composers are very approachable and it's not like there's any pressure. You don't have to feel bad if you don't wind up getting a piece from them. Most composers are really happy to just explore possibilities and talk to you about what you're looking for, and if it's not going to be a good fit, it's better to find out at the beginning. You may even become friends with the person and not commission a piece from them. You may make a great piece but hate working with them on like a personal level. So, you want to make sure that all the puzzle pieces fit together. I mean, as long as you are professional, polite, respectful, and do some homework, you should absolutely feel empowered to reach out to any composer that you want to. Some of the A-list composers won't get back to you. Some of them will. I mean, it's always worth a try, just, you know, follow any normal rules when contacting anybody out of the blue.

I’ve had people who reached out about a commission that didn't work out, you know, for whatever reason, and then they've reached out to you again, and it's actually worked out in the future. I've also had people who reach out like every year for the last 12 years and never commission anything. So, keep talking about it. I always try to respond to everybody. I always try to be professional, it's such a relationship business. You never want to get a reputation for, you know, for being a certain way.

So, if you're thinking about reaching out to a composer, do your research find someone whose sound you like. Identify a couple of pieces of theirs that you really like and boom, you already have something in common with them, right? If you're a big fan of three Michael Torke pieces, guess what? I'm sure he is a fan of those three pieces too. And you guys can talk about that and that helps you kind of get inside each other's heads a little bit. I mean, that's just how it all starts. Be informed, it helps you plant the seed and start the relationship.

MW:

That's awesome advice. Can you talk about something specifically … when we did the Infinite Escape consortium back in 2012, can you tell me about what that experience was like from your end?
FG:

So, we're coming up on 10 years ago … I remember more than anything, like being really excited about it because I had not written a ton of music at that point. Yeah. I had like I had pro count on your hands number of pieces by that I had written.

MW:

Yeah, I think where I heard your music was because Zach Collins at IUP played … I think it was *The Effervescent Ballroom*. Is that the name?

FG:

Yeah, really lyrical tuba piece. Works well on the CC tuba, which, you know, most tuba solo literature is really, really hard and plays like in the upper range because that's where tuba soloists are able to distinguish themselves. So, there's not a lot of solo literature, especially lyrical solo literature written for the orchestral size tuba, and I love the sound of the orchestral size tuba. So, I wanted to write a piece that would work for guys who play these like six quarter horns and have a sound that just sounds like 30 string bases playing together. You know what I mean? And so, that is a piece that I think was like very characteristic of my style. Even though that's a decade ago now, it is still characteristic of my sound. I think we worked together after that and that was my first euphonium piece.

I'd always thought about the euphonium as you know … so I'm a trombone player. The trombone is such an unwieldy instrument. You've got the slide … it's hard to get around. I always heard these great euphonium players and it's like, these people can play anything. Super high, super low, super-fast, lyrical. I mean, throughout the entire huge range, and so I do remember thinking like, okay, I need to not think like a trombone when I'm writing this, I need to capitalize on more of the different things that the euphonium does really well. So, there's some technical stuff that would not be possible to play cleanly on a slide, but then there's also really melodic, lyrical stuff that the euphonium does so well. I just remember, I was really excited about the project and the aspects I wanted to realize the most were just capitalizing on as many different things that the euphonium does well as possible. I remember being really conscious of that because I had not written for the euphonium before, which in some ways is a more capable instrument just because you've got valves.

I take it back. That was not my first euphonium piece. First was *Tornado* in 2009, because that was how I was able to reach out to Steven Mead for our project, because he had already premiered a piece of mine. Steve is one of my favorite musicians in general. He's amazing. Especially for a low brass player, for the euphonium, he's just, I can't say
enough about what a tremendous player he is. So, for me, it's been like a pinch me moment that he has given the World Premieres of three of my euphonium pieces. *Tornado* in 2009, *Infinite Escape* in 2012, and *Aces* in 2016.

**MW:**

He recorded *Aces* on one of his albums, didn't he?

**FG:**

Yes. The album is called Dream Times and that is the first track on the CD, and that's pretty. I mean, I still listen to it. It's still amazing.

**MW:**

writing I know you write a lot for low brass instruments, and you have sort of that experience as a performer. You know how low brass instruments work, you play trombone, you play bass trombone. So, you have that sort of in your wheelhouse … when you write for other instruments outside of that … Is there a different communication that happens with the commissioner about the instrument, or is there sort of a different type of studying that you have to do? How does that change your process, if at all?

**FG:**

That's, that's a terrific question because yes, that has come up. So, I also write concert band music, and my experience with woodwinds and percussion is just extremely limited. So, I try to be really sensitive to putting in some study time to make sure that I'm not writing things that are impossible, or even just not idiomatic for the instruments.

**MW:**

I don't know if you think about this, but do you have to think about a specific kind of thing for high school band or something, this sort of grade level system that we have.

**FG:**

Sure, which kind of prescribes keys, time signatures, ranges, rhythms, and everything. So, there's a lot to keep in mind, but people are like, oh, woodwinds can play really fast stuff … but there's also quirks of each woodwind instrument, like clarinets going across the break and things like that. Where there's a big difference between what a high schooler can play and what somebody in the New York Philharmonic can play. And so, like for low brass, I can figure what a high schooler can play versus what a pro can play, because I know trombone players at every level, it's not so with the other instruments. So, if I'm doing concert band music or chamber music that involves instruments that I don't play I do try to keep all of those things in mind.
Now, if I'm writing a solo piece for so for instance, I've written some solo horn music recently and during those pieces, there have certainly been more instances of me taking a picture of a lick that I just wrote and I texted somebody to be like, can you play this with a good sound? Like a run that goes up to a high D or something? I've made change, I've changed keys of certain sections and stuff just to make it sit better on the horn. On the trombone I know which keys work well. You're playing like B flats in the valve going in and out of you know, a lot of things with fifth and sixth position is just, doesn't sit on the horn as well. Right? Usually the closer in, on the slides you are, the cleaner everything is going to be. That’s something that's just like second nature in the back of my mind all the time. Whereas I don't have that same familiarity with say writing for the horn. There are times where I've asked people about, you know, their ranges and their key preferences, and different challenges to keep the music really idiomatic. Because one of the things that I really, really try to always keep in mind is that the less focus you have to devote to technical or logistical challenges, the more focused you can be on playing really musically and expressively. I don't want somebody who's really going to tense up about anticipating whether they're going to hit this high note. That doesn't serve the music. So, if we put everything in a place that is comfortable, that sounds great, that you can approach with confidence that sits well in the instrument, you're more likely to play a beautiful phrase or to execute a tough run or anything like that.

MW:  
Makes sense. Yeah, Thanks for doing this. This is great stuff.

FG:  
Oh, good. No, I'm glad, this has actually been a lot of fun.
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