ISM Composers’ views

Ed Scolding

It’s in a composers’ nature to explore the unknown, to look for what’s not already there, to make something from nothing. So it can feel rather against the grain to try and pin things down at the start of the project, when it’s so fresh with possibilities. But each project involves some ‘unknowns’ that can affect the success overall, and getting these out of the way early on can help make a much more positive environment for exploring the artistic ‘unknowns’.

Working with other people can be a joy and an inspiration. Discussing and agreeing on things like money and deadlines at the start can help avoid situations which are at best embarrassing, and at worst can hurt artistic outcome, reputation, or finances. And the agreements don’t always need to be detailed and technical to be effective – just having a brief but frank discussion about expectations can help clear the air, set a positive tone and give everyone a firm footing. On the other hand, bringing a thorough, professional template contract to the table can give a sense of security and clarity, whether as a concrete agreement or as starting point for discussion, a guide for what might be expected.

It’s not all about money, either. We’ve all done projects with no fee – there are other kinds of value, and sometimes money comes to the project part-way through. Sometimes it’s in this situation that one needs even more clarity about the expectations for a project – the timescales, commitment from other parties etc, so that you know your work is not going to waste.

I’ve had the situation of making assumptions and plunging in without properly discussing and agreeing things, then discovering at the end of a project the other party had quite a different idea of what was going on! A reliable piece of writing is really useful to kick off and guide discussion, bringing everyone onto the same page.

The guides and contracts in this pack are designed to help with a range of different situations, from zero-budget or working with a friend to dealing with international corporations, for commissioning live music, composing for film, signing to a publisher, or whatever new shape of project you create. They suggest the areas you might need to agree, what to seek for each area, and the contracts to establish different kinds of agreement.

www.edscolding.co.uk

Bushra El-Turk

After formal training at University, Conservatoire or otherwise it is as if a Composer ventures out into a jungle. You have the caring orang-utans to give you some good advice on the way, like the mentors you respect, and the hyenas who will present you with the best deal which will promise you a lot, but with nothing at first.

While a composer will have exciting opportunities to collaborate – with the bigwigs but no funds for the composer or with unknowns but no funds at all – it can be all too easy to fall into ditches as far as the law, your rights and your intellectual property concerned.

Written contracts, like the ones contained in this pack, are a useful and a necessary tool for the composer; these template contracts cover crucial elements you may not have thought about which could save your back when facing a collaboration or commission.

www.bushraelturk.com