

Jeremy Crosmer

1. Do you like writing for strings? What are the challenges? What do you enjoy?

As a string player, yes of course! For string ensemble, it's nice because you can get a nice smooth, connected and blended sound, or you can vary the texture quite dramatically. Not to mention string players have the best range and tessitura. Viola is an especially nice instrument to write for because of its characteristically dark seductive tone. It's often tempting to overuse the long phrase capabilities of stringed instruments, I often find it difficult to resist the urge to just write continuous streams of melodies. Silence is a powerful tool in composition that is easily overlooked when you have an instrument that can sustain for long periods of time.

2. If you had to write a piece for viola, which could be of any form or style, what would it be like? And why?

The trick to writing a viola piece is to create something that is both idiomatic for the instrument and also uses its strengths and unique characteristics. The viola is not a lower-sounding violin, and it shouldn't be written for in that way. I've written for viola numerous times, and I'm always searching for ways to take advantage of the beautiful, thick low register as well as writing soaring melodies in the upper register (which sound more like soaring albatrosses rather than your typical whiny, Vivaldi-violin-birds; assuming you have a good violist).

3. What would you want us (instrumentalists) to do before we approach you for a commission? (e.g., play for you, send you a recording, listen to your works, etc.)

All of the above, although it's not always necessary. It's up to you to find a composer whose music you enjoy. One thing I would add is this: composers often work best under limited conditions: if you have a specific goal in mind for your piece that will help shape it, it's a lot easier to get past writer's block. Don't approach a composer with the idea of "just write a piece for me!" We like it when you say "I'm performing a benefit concert to raise money for the tsunami victims in the Philippines, and I'd like a piece which reflects the hardships of those who have been displaced. Specifically, if you could write a 7 minute work that shows the disparity between the comfortable first world standard of living and the victims of unprepared-for natural disasters. Also, I'd like the viola to have some seagull effects if you don't mind." Anything to get us started, even if it's vague.

4. Under what circumstance and for what reason would you accept/reject a commission?

If the timing is poor, or if you're aloof about a possible performance opportunity, or are not specifically interested in my music, then I would probably say no. The best way to ask a composer for a commission is to provide a detailed goal with a specific performance date, show why you're interested in their music, and provide plenty of advance notice. Multiple times I've been asked to write and later found out that they

couldn't put the piece on their recital after all . . . it's a waste of time and kind of a let-down.

5. How clearly of an idea for the piece should we have before approaching you? (e.g., instrumentation, length, number of movements, etc.)

Very clear. If length is flexible, make that clear too. But make sure we have enough information to get started. If I start a viola sonata and you tell me later that you want to add a violin, that's tricky on my concept of the piece. The more information, the better.

6. How and how much can we take part in the creation process?

As much as you'd like. Again, the more the better! Collaboration with performers is always fun for composers and allows them to write more idiomatically for the instrument. Be careful not to step on our toes, though. Remember to separate the role of performer from composer. You are there to showcase the work, and we are there to set the parameters. You can guide our process, and we can guide your process, but in the end we have different talents.

7. How far ahead of time should we ask?

6 months before you need the final work, or perhaps 9–12 months before your recital.

8. What do you expect in return?

- a) at least one performance.
- b) promotion of the work among your colleagues.
- c) continued interest in the work after the premiere.
- d) sometimes payment (for me, it's not as important because I am not earning a living off of composing). Also, composers get paid royalties when their work is played, so often times just performing it multiple times can earn them more than an upfront payment. Nevertheless, to show you value their time and effort, an honorarium is usually a good idea. Look for grants.

9. Any other things we should know or be aware of?

The best way to utilize a commission to its full potential in terms of career-advancement to both parties is to produce a good video/audio recording of the piece before the premiere. Composers love to put links on their websites or streams and promotion for the work, and it seriously goes a long way to boost the value of the project. I can't tell you how many times I've regretted not following through with this while I was in school having pieces commissioned frequently. I have one or two videos online now, and I get constant e-mails asking for the music to those pieces, one of which is now in the process of getting published.