

# Library Music: The Musicians' Secret Weapon.

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## What Is It?

The key to longevity as a musician is to find ways of earning royalty payments, and Library Music (also called “Production Music” in the USA and Europe) is a great way of doing this.

Library Music is the musical equivalent of image libraries such as Shutterstock, or the Getty Images Library: if a film or TV director doesn't have the budget to commission the writing and production of an original piece of music they can search the music libraries to find something suitable. Library companies therefore place great importance on the metadata embedded in the audio files.

The more tracks you can get released, the more this residual income stream will grow. At first, it could be small, but soon you'll find it's paying your phone bill, then your utilities bill, then your mortgage or rent. As you write new tracks, the older ones keep on earning: it's a numbers game. It is also independent of time or fashion: one of my most successful pieces is a Hendrix soundalike I made 25 years ago. Every time HBO make an episode of the “Heroes Of War” series set in Vietnam, they have a choice: do they pay Hendrix's estate \$30,000 to use the original of “Purple Haze” or do they pay \$300 to an obscure English guitarist to use a track in the same style and sound which was recorded in a home studio? I wrote and recorded this with a drummer: he kept stopping and asking to do another take because he felt he was playing in a too modern style, too accurately, too much on the click. The time we took to get the right sound and spirit was worth it: that track still earns money.

## How Does It Work?

The Library companies commission (or accept pitches from) writers to deliver music which they think they can sell. This is based on a variety of factors:

- What is currently trending in the pop charts?
- What are their competitors doing?
- What gaps are in their catalogue?
- Observation of current styles in film/documentary/game making.

Writers can research all these factors themselves: I have just been inspired by playing Gran Turismo Sport on my games console and amid the usual metal guitar thrashes associated with the sim racing game genre there is a lot of excellent ambient/chill-out music from an artist called Lenny Ibizarre. I'm writing a few tracks in this style to pitch to one of my Library client companies.

The Library company does all the marketing and handles the MCPS royalties while the writing royalties come through PRS (or whatever collection agency the writer belongs to.) The usual split is 50/50. It is best to let the company decide on titles and do their own mastering: they know their customers better than the writer ever can!

You are required to produce and deliver professional standard recordings: it is rare nowadays for budgets to be made available for studio and musicians' costs.

All the major labels now have their own library music divisions, but some don't have their own A&R departments, sourcing music instead from smaller library companies, which means the writer's royalty will be "sub-published." Effectively, if the small library company gets 50% from the larger company, the writer will get 50% of that 50%, also known as 25%. The calculation for the writer is whether it is better to get 25% of the greater usage that the larger company can achieve or 50% of a much smaller usage income?

There are a few online companies, the American Audiosparx being one of the biggest, though their deal is 60/40 in their favour and the writer has to enter their own metadata (which can take up to 10 minutes per track!) Audiosparx also supply in-store radio music programming which can generate a small but steady income stream.

There are a lot of companies offering royalty-free music. The writer gets a one-off fee for the track regardless of when and where it is used. This is only recommended for writers who are starting out: the music tends to be of slightly lower quality as a result but it can be a good way of learning how to do it.

Library Music has traditionally been instrumental only, but many libraries are starting to commission songs too.

## **How Do You Do It?**

First, do some research: if a commission comes in (or if the writer is intending to pitch to a company) the following questions need to be answered:

- What is the production style?
- What is the instrumentation, Primarily electronic or acoustic, etc.?
- What are the harmonic/rhythmic structures used in the genre?

If a new style or genre appears in the pop mainstream, do a couple of tracks in that style and pitch them to library companies. Be very careful that you don't copy the tune itself: Library companies are rightly very nervous about copyright infringement. I avoid this by only listening to snippets of tracks so that nothing gets stuck in my head and unconsciously makes its way into one of the compositions.

Make sure the production is of professional standard. Take as much care as you would with a pop record intended for release. This area of the recorded music industry generates more money for musicians than mainstream pop records nowadays: it's worth taking the time to do it properly, as your competitors certainly will.

The writer is expected to deliver several different versions of the track, called "Cut-downs". Typically, a full 3-minute version, then versions of 60 seconds, 30 seconds, 15 seconds, etc. (In some territories all TV ads have to have ½ a second silence at the beginning and end, so many companies ask for 59 seconds, 29 seconds, etc. Make them absolutely accurate: no ugly reverb endings, no bad edits, etc. Underscores (the track minus the lead instrument) are also often requested, as are stems (the drums on their own but with associated reverbs, the keyboards on their own with effects, etc.)

Make sure you deliver in the specified file formats and observe the file-naming conventions defined by the client.

## **And Finally...**

As the royalties start to appear, every quarter you can spend an hour or so scrutinising your PRS statements showing what each track earned and where it earned it. My favourite ever PRS entry was one quarter a few years ago. A simple solo acoustic guitar piece generated a royalty of £0.48 from the Czech Republic Playboy Late Night channel. I still cherish that 48p.