RPS COMPOSERS

APPLICATION GUIDELINES

Here follows information on the RPS Composers programme and how to apply. If you may like this information in a different format, for accessibility reasons, please call us on 020 7287 0019 or email our Administrator Emily Porter at admin@philharmonicsociety.uk, and we will do our best to help.

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Introduction

Annually, the RPS Composers programme aims to transform the prospects of promising UK-based composers, with creative and vocational support, at critical turning points in establishing their careers. Annually we form a cohort of around eight composers, offering each a grant and a commission to write for one of our programme partners – a range of noted ensembles, venues and festivals. We aim to help the cohort develop the skills, confidence and contacts they need to seek further commissions and performances of their own beyond the programme.

We are specifically looking for composers in the early stages of their careers who are secure in their compositional writing and will benefit from a year-long range of activities and support. Composers will join us for preliminary sessions later in 2026, before the programme fully gets underway in January 2027.

The RPS Composers programme includes the opportunity to:

- develop a creative relationship with an ensemble, venue or festival
- meet and draw insights from key figures in the music business and professional composers
- be part of regular online vocational workshops in a supportive group environment to fuel your confidence and ability to promote yourself and your music
- receive individual mentoring with the RPS team, looking at your own personal objectives and how we might help you to fulfil them

Through the programme, we aim to give you insights into the range of settings in which you and your music can have real impact, encouraging you to think more about the scope of everything you can do as a professional composer.

Timeline

3 February 2026: applications open

1 April 2026: applications close at 11am

April - May 2026: applications are reviewed by an expert panel

June 2026: all applicants will be notified if they have been shortlisted this month

3 July 2026: interviews for shortlisted applicants take place online

September 2026: first meeting for the new cohort, and partner organisations confirmed

October 2026: RPS Composers programme cohort will be announced

Autumn 2026: initial sessions and conversations with partner ensembles and organisations

January 2027: professional development sessions continue and composers begin writing

April - December 2027: composers receive their premieres

Autumn 2027: end-of-programme networking event and wrap-up

If selected for the programme, we will proudly present you as an RPS Composer, part of a lineage that goes back to Beethoven and Mendelssohn, and has more recently supported composers like Alex Paxton, Charlotte Bray, Daniel Kidane and Freya Waley-Cohen. Your continued success matters to us and, once the programme is over, we will find an occasion to bring the cohort back together and meet more professional contacts from across the music sector. There will also be a chance to reflect with us and each other on what you have achieved resulting from your RPS experience and what further resolutions you next need to make.

Please read these Application Guidelines carefully before applying, and continue to consult them throughout the process.

If you have any queries not addressed here, you can contact Emily Porter, our Administrator, at admin@philharmonicsociety.uk or on 020 7287 0019.

What does the RPS offer?

Usually we grant around eight commissions which we expect to have a value of £3,000 each, for a chamber or solo work, plus its premiere performance with a leading UK ensemble, venue or festival. Each of our valued performance partners plays a vital role in your experience, giving you a practical insight into their creative work and how you as a composer can fruitfully collaborate with more organisations like them in future.

From Autumn 2026 you will attend a number of group sessions and workshops designed to help you develop your vocational skills and establish a good footing in the music profession. You will make contacts who will be invaluable for your future, who will offer specialist guidance and address a range of practicalities of being a professional composer. Most of these sessions will take place remotely over Zoom, but we may hold some in person where it is practical to do so. We estimate such activity will take place across approximately 15–20 days over the course of the year.

Our current cohort of composers is writing for 12 Ensemble, RLPO's Ensemble 10:10, Hebrides Ensemble, Manchester Camerata, Music@Malling, Onyx Brass, Presteigne Festival and Swaledale Festival. To give you a general impression of what is offered, you can read about our current commissions and the composers fulfilling them on our website. While plans are still taking shape, we expect a similar range of opportunities to be offered in the year ahead. Please consider this carefully and only apply for the programme if you want to write a solo or chamber work with such performance partners or in similar settings.

Before finalising our 2027 partners, we look forward to meeting shortlisted composers at interview and hearing more about your plans and aspirations. With each partner, we will set the brief and parameters for the work you are going to write in the first months of the programme, with a view to you being able to make significant headway with it from the start of 2027. Each will have its own submission date, likely a month or two before performance, and premieres are expected to take place from April to December 2027, though some may happen slightly sooner or later than this, owing to commitments of each performance partner or the timing of particular festivals.

Who can apply?

The programme is for composers of any nationality based in the UK who plan to build their career here. Accordingly, the content of our sessions is based on principles and situations you will encounter in the UK music profession, and led by UK industry experts. We expect our cohort of composers to meet online or in person as a group throughout the year, and it is anticipated that each composer will visit the UK ensemble, venue or festival for whom they are composing.

As a charity, we are keen to support a wide range of musicians and initiatives. If you have received any kind of funding from the RPS within three years of the closing date (since 1 April 2023), we ask you not to apply this time, but if eligible you may do so in a future year once that period has expired.

Vitally, you should be at a stage where you are able to demonstrate genuine commitment to establishing a career as a composer, both in your application and in the proficiency of the music you submit. The commission we offer is at a professional level, and it is a piece you will write independently. If you are an early-career composer and would welcome more support or advice when writing your piece, we recommend you do not apply for the RPS Composers programme at this time, and look instead at some of the excellent opportunities and programmes available from other charities and performing organisations, some of which we've signposted on our website.

For most people, this programme is likely to be most useful when you have already been working in the music profession in some capacity, and are looking to reach the next level. You may have graduated in the last few years, or some time ago. Equally, a formal degree or equivalent qualification is not compulsory. We recognise that composers pursue many different routes at different stages in their lives, so we look forward to hearing your individual story.

Our programme supports composers writing music in the broad spectrum of contemporary classical music as might be heard with the ensembles and in the settings outlined above. We welcome and have a good track record of supporting composers who bring a range of musical influences to their classical interests – whether Afro-diasporic, Eastern, electronic, experimental, folk, jazz, media, sound art, traditional or other. They should explain how the RPS Composers programme would complement or help advance their practice.

Please note, this opportunity is not open to those studying at Undergraduate or Masters level from September 2026 onwards. If you are still studying, we recommend that you focus on all that your college or university can currently offer, then apply in a future year. Composers working towards a PhD may apply if you are already working professionally to some extent alongside your studies. Given its purpose to help establish your career, this opportunity is only for those aged 18 and above. There is no upper age limit.

We are always keen to hear from those who have not considered applying to the RPS before, but you are equally welcome to apply again if you have in a previous year, so long as you take the time in your application to tell us what has been creatively occupying you since you last applied. If you are applying again, please do not simply duplicate what you told us about yourself last time.

We are continually striving to address how we can minimise barriers to the widest possible range of applicants. We are proud to have adopted Sound and Music's Fair Access Principles, we work closely with Black Lives in Music, and we are also signed up to the Keychange initiative, aiming to achieve 50:50 parity of marginalised genders in the composers we support. We warmly welcome applications from composers of all backgrounds, particularly under-represented demographics, such as those who represent the global majority, those who are disabled, and those from working class backgrounds. If you feel that any part of our offer – or the experience in applying for it – could inhibit you or another candidate from applying, please do let us know and we will be happy to address this.

What is the process?

Applications can be made via our online application form, which will principally involve recording a short statement to camera, accompanied by some brief written information. Applicants should complete the form themselves where possible, but may elect another person to complete it on their behalf if needed. You will also need to submit two of your compositions for consideration by our panel – details of how to do this can be found in the 'Compositions' section below.

There is no application fee or cost to apply.

The **closing date** is 11am on **Wednesday 1 April 2026**. If for access reasons or exceptional personal circumstances, you may not be able to submit your application by the closing date, please be in touch with us to discuss the possibility of a short extension to make your submission. In the first instance please contact Emily Porter, our Administrator, by email at admin@philharmonicsociety.uk or phone on 020 7287 0019.

We receive well over 100 applications each year for around eight places, the majority of a very impressive standard. Applications are read with care, and submitted compositions reviewed by us at the RPS, select representatives from our partner organisations, and two independent professional composers. We appoint different people to fulfil this role annually and, in our brief to partner organisations and composers, we ask that they be aware of and challenge their own implicit biases.

We will notify all applicants if they have been selected for interview by the end of June. Thank you for your patience while we devote time and care to reviewing applications. Selected applicants will be invited to a short interview in July – to be held on Zoom – to talk more about their music and aspirations.

Your application

All applicants are required to complete our online application form, or elect another person to do so on their behalf if needed. As we can only invite around 10% of applicants to interview, we encourage you to take time and care in completing your application to ensure it represents you well. This plays just as vital a role as the compositions you submit in helping us gauge whether to grant you an interview.

If you have applied before, you will see that the process has changed slightly from recent years. Please take time to provide fresh answers, giving us an updated picture of your situation now. For ease, we have outlined the questions you will find in the application form as follows.

In your application, you are asked to:

- Enter some **basic information** about yourself. You will be asked to provide your UK address and confirm that you are based in the UK and plan to be until the end of 2027. If you are currently a student living away from home in higher education, you should give the UK address of your family home or equivalent.

- Provide a link* to a **short film of yourself** talking to camera, **not exceeding five minutes**, telling us about your progress as a composer so far, your music, and any other musical work you may have alongside composing. We would like to hear about your music, how you envisage your career as a composer taking shape, and how you feel the RPS Composers programme would help you at this point in your career. Please include:

    - Brief details of your compositional journey to date – e.g. study, significant performances or collaborations (please specify if these were attained through application to a programme or scheme), and any other musical activities you may have alongside composing such as performing, teaching, leading workshops, etc.
    - How would you describe your music to someone who had never heard it before?
    - How do you see your career as a composer taking shape, and what are your aspirations for your music? What barriers prevent you from achieving this?
    - What specific aspects of your musical and professional development do you feel the RPS Composers programme can help you with at this point in your career – and why particularly now?

For most people, five minutes of spoken word equates to about 600 written words. Your film need not be high-quality and we welcome it being filmed on a smartphone. What matters to us is hearing you speak from the heart about your music and why you feel the RPS Composers programme will make a difference to your musical and professional progress. If you are not able to record such a film for your application, please contact us well in advance of the closing date to discuss your circumstances further.

*Your film should be submitted as a link to YouTube or an equivalent platform. (If using a cloud-based file storage facility, we find Google Drive is compatible for most people.) Footage should remain visible there until the end of July 2026. If you are submitting a link to footage that is unlisted or private, please ensure you include any passwords with your link, if applicable, in the application form.

You are next asked to provide the details of the two compositions you are submitting. See the section below for what is required here.

We don't require a reference to apply to the RPS Composers programme, but if you are invited to interview we may ask you to provide the name, role and email address of someone who can provide a character reference for you. This could be anyone you've worked with in the music profession who knows you and your compositional work.

Finally, you will be invited to complete some standard inclusivity monitoring questions in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. These are not obligatory, and you may complete as many or as few questions as you wish. Taking a moment to do this is so helpful to us all collectively in classical music. We are committed to working with colleagues sector-wide to ensure we are representing excellence, creativity and innovation in music-making within a diverse, multicultural society. Thank you for playing your part in this.

Your compositions

We ask all applicants to submit two compositions of their own original, unaided work. These may be of any instrumental/vocal combination and should demonstrate your ability to compose for different forces.

Applicants need to provide a PDF score* for each work and a link to a recording. Recordings of performances or workshops with musicians are preferred but electronic recordings (such as notation software audio) are accepted in circumstances where opportunity to obtain a recording with live musicians has been limited.

*In the commissions that we offer as part of the RPS Composers programme, the musicians you will work with will typically be used to reading music in Western notation, graphic scores or similar. If your music is not notated, please instead provide a short explanation of how you would typically convey it to musicians to perform.

For each piece, we will accept either the complete work or a movement from it, but multiple movements from one piece cannot be considered as separate works. We appreciate some applicants may have taken a career break (which you can outline in your short film above) and as such might not be able to submit two recent works. Nevertheless, if possible, we ideally ask that at least one of your pieces be a recent composition and indicative of the music you are writing now.

Optimally you should upload your recordings to the internet using a website/application like YouTube or a cloud-based storage facility such as Google Drive. You can set your recordings as private or unlisted if you prefer not to share them publicly. Please ensure your recordings are clearly labelled with their title and your name online, and check that the links work and will be accessible for at least six months.

In your application form, you need to provide the title and duration of each work, and a link to where we can find the recording online (YouTube or Google Drive). If the link is private, make sure you tell us the password in your application form.

If your composition does not begin at the very start of any recording you submit, please state the time in minutes and seconds when it begins in the application form.

We ask you to upload your PDF scores to a dedicated RPS Dropbox folder – the link to this is here and you can also find the link in the application form online. Scores must be uploaded by the closing date of 11am on **Wednesday 1 April 2026**.

Each PDF should be submitted using the following filename format:

Forename Surname – Title of work

Due to the number of applications we receive, our small team does not have scope to check content and links once submitted, so please ensure that your application is complete and accurate before submission.

Interview

Shortlisted applicants are invited to an interview which will take place remotely over Zoom. In June, we will notify applicants who have been selected for interview, and interviews will take place on **Friday 3 July 2026**. Please mark this date in your diary now, as it is very unlikely that we will be able to offer any alternative interview dates if you are unable to attend. The interview will last 15-20 minutes with a small, friendly interview panel comprising representatives from the RPS and at least one of our partner organisations, and another professional composer – not involved in the initial shortlisting process. Ahead of the interview, we will let you know who will be on the interview panel and send you the questions we plan to ask. It's an opportunity to tell us more about your progress and aspirations as a composer, and the works you have submitted.

We aim to notify applicants of outcomes and make conditional offers within a few days of the interview. The decision of the panel is final. We will invite those selected to an introductory session – also to be held on Zoom – to meet each other and the RPS team in early September. Each composer in the final cohort will be paired with a partner venue, festival or organisation, which we don't finalise them until we've met you at the interview so we can take your plans and aspirations into consideration. We aim to introduce composers to partners in September 2026.

Feedback

As noted, we can only invite a select number of applicants for interview, and have a very limited number of opportunities to offer. There is considerable competition for this, so please do not be too disappointed if your application is unsuccessful. As noted, if you are still eligible to do so, you are welcome to apply again in future.

Owing to the high number of applications, we are unable as a small team to provide individual feedback specially written for every single applicant. Nonetheless, we appreciate that some insight can be useful for your future applications to the RPS and other opportunities. Duly, we endeavour to supply some general feedback notes that we refresh each year in response to the range of applications we have received. We hope these may offer some useful direction and encouragement.

If for any reason you do not want to be notified of the outcome of your application or receive feedback, there is an opportunity to indicate this in the application form.

Terms

Applicants should be resident in the UK and plan to be till the end of 2027 so they are able to travel easily to partake in the programme.

The RPS is based in London and any cohort activities taking place in person will invariably be held here, so composers should be prepared to travel to London once or twice during the programme where attendance in person is beneficial. The majority of group sessions will be held online. It is anticipated that you will travel to the festival, ensemble or venue in the UK where your commission is taking place, details of which will be agreed with your partner organisation. It is expected that you will arrange any travel and accommodation required yourself, though this should be fairly minimal. Depending on your location, the RPS and/or your partner organisation may be able to make a contribution towards standard rail travel and accommodation, which will be discussed with composers individually on being selected for the programme. Please let us know if you have any access needs or financial concerns that you feel may adversely impact your ability to participate in the opportunity offered, and we will do our best to address these with you.

Payment of the grant will be made into your UK bank account in two instalments. The first will be paid in the first months of the programme in Autumn 2026. The second will be paid around the time of your premiere in 2027, on receipt of a signed, printed copy of the work you have written. Following the completion of your work, it is your responsibility to prepare the parts and score for the musicians (and, if relevant, the conductor), and submit these by the submission date agreed with the festival, ensemble or venue.

As we will proudly regard you as an RPS Composer, we ask in return that you represent the Society whilst fulfilling the opportunity, and help us tell RPS Members and the wider public about how we are supporting you, most likely in the form of occasional blogs or videos accounting your progress that we can share online.

The information you provide in your application will only be used in accordance with our Privacy Policy as found on our website.

If you have any further queries not addressed in these guidelines, please contact Emily Porter, our Administrator, by email on admin@philharmonicsociety.uk or by phone on 020 7287 0019.