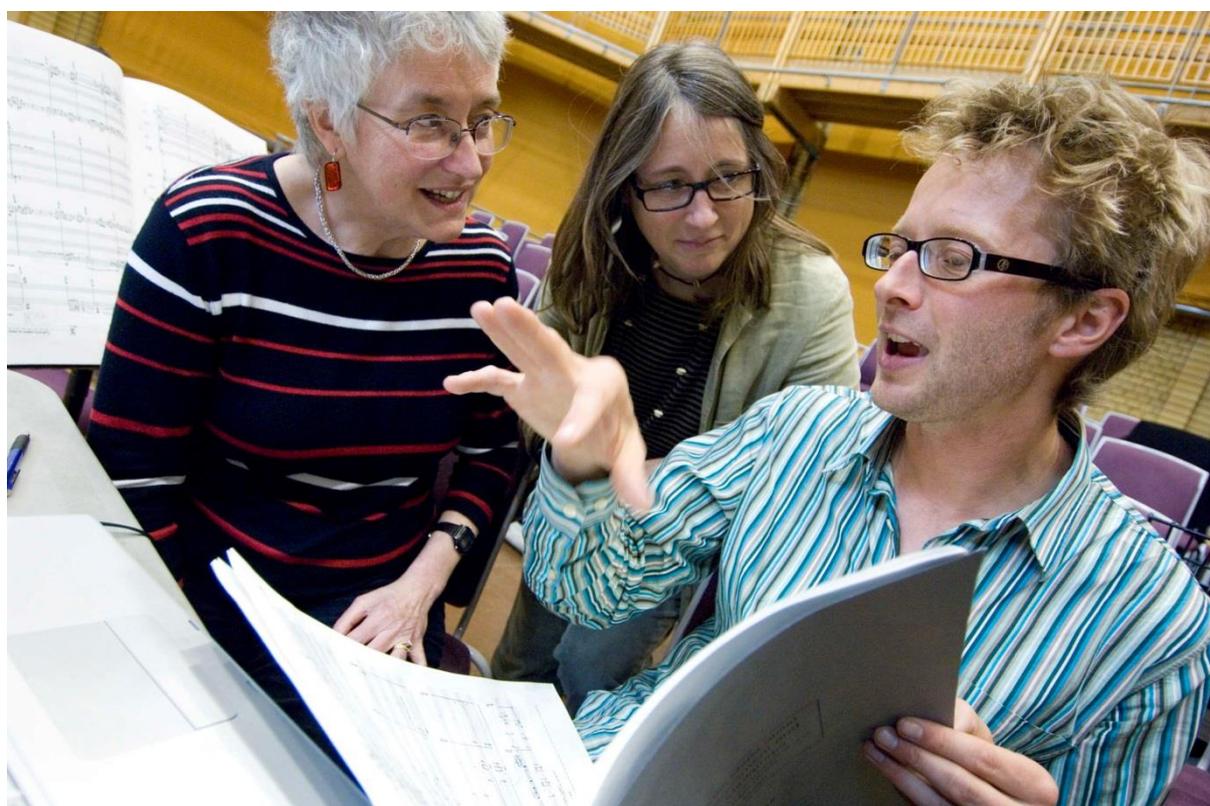


Case study

Sound investment



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Published 2013.

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Supported using public funding by
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Birmingham Contemporary Music Group (BCMG) is one of Europe's leading ensembles - performing new and 20th century music, and regularly commissioning new works from living composers from the UK and abroad. BCMG launched its Sound Investment scheme over 20 years ago to raise vital new funds for commissioning, to enable it to commission a wider range of composers with greater confidence, and to share the thrill of bringing new works to life with as many people as possible.

Objectives

- Raise new funds for commissioning new works from composers
- Provide a secure base to commission further ahead and further afield
- Develop an engaged audience for new work
- Strengthen relationships between composers, performers, audiences
- Create a family of advocates for BCMG and the idea of new music

Target audience

- BCMG's existing audience
- Wider classical music audience
- Wider contemporary arts audience

Process

- We divide the commissioning costs of each new work being written for BCMG into £150 'Sound Units'
- We share information about current composers and commissions via our Sound Investment catalogue and e-marketing channels
- Sound Investors choose composers/works to support, or leave the choice to BCMG by purchasing 'Floating Sound Units'
- Investors can donate by lump sum payments or through monthly direct debit instalments
- BCMG keeps Sound Investors up to date with progress of their supported works, which can often take several months or sometimes years to come to fruition

Outcome(s)

For Sound Investors:

- News of their chosen works' progress
- Invitation to all rehearsals of their supported work
- Drinks reception at the premiere
- Chance to meet the composer and performers
- Their name listed in the new work's score with exclusive right to buy a copy, signed by the composer
- News of further performances

'It's so exciting to be part of the whole experience of hearing music come to life – from its first rehearsal to its world premiere, knowing that this music has never been heard before, and that I've helped to make that possible' Sound Investor

For Composers:

- More BCMG commissions than would otherwise be possible
- Encouragement from the knowledge that a real group of people are supporting their work
- A direct channel for engaged feedback from audiences

For BCMG:

- £300,000 raised since 1991 supporting with over 65 Sound Investment premieres
- Up to 60 Sound Investors per new work
- High loyalty and return rate
- Investors form engaged audience who become friends of players and wider BCMG team
- Investors become advocates for BCMG, composers and new music
- Many Sound Investors extend their giving to other areas of BCMG's work

Key points for effective practice

- Administration – the importance of personal contact between BCMG and Sound Investors means significant admin time in running the scheme – with access to the Artistic Director, staff team and players
- Databases – the scheme’s unique nature (it isn’t a membership scheme) means consideration and planning to input data in a meaningful way for extrapolation.
- Finance and Budgeting - payments of different sizes, and restricted payments being made sometimes years in advance of the money being spent need careful budgeting and financial planning.
- Income – this is restricted, ensuring specific new music happens, so it is not a way of building up free reserves or similar.
- Sound Investors understand that commissioning is an adventure and a ‘risk’ and they don’t generally expect to influence who and what gets commissioned
- No Sound Investor has ever asked for their money back!

Conclusions and recommendations

- BCMG opens up all stages of the commissioning process to Investors
- As well as raising vital funds, the scheme is a genuine sharing of enthusiasm for new work
- We regularly review the running of the Scheme with input from Sound Investors

Additional information

www.bcmg.org.uk/soundinvestment