

We want new music too!

✦ Composing, Commissioning, & Publishing for Young Strings



Lauren Spavelko

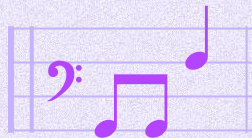
Composer / Educator
Violin, Piano, Voice



Liam Thomas





Composer / J.W. Pepper's MyScore Lead
Guitar



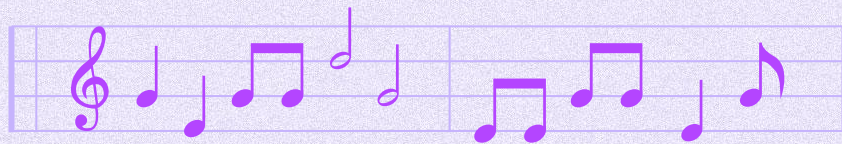


This is for you if...



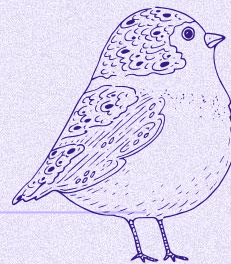
-  You're curious about composing/arranging for your own ensemble or someone else's
-  You're curious about the composer/director collaboration, one-on-one or as part of a consortium
-  You want to learn more about writing specifically for this level (young strings).
-  You want to learn how to distribute your compositions & arrangements more widely.





Why the focus on
young strings
in particular?





Composing

- What are the special considerations for young strings?
- Why compose or arrange for your group?
- Example works





Resources for Writing for Young Strings



Method Series

Essential Elements (Books 1-3), Suzuki (1-3)
Useful reminders of progression of skills and limitations at each level of study



ASTA Strings Syllabus

Grade level guides by instrument



Publisher Leveling Guidelines

Grade level guides for the whole ensemble. Many publishers have short charts outlining the considerations for each level (Alfred, Excelcia)



Orchestration Books

Instrumentation and Orchestration
(Alfred Blatter)
Essential Dictionary of Orchestration
(Alfred Music)



Considerations for Young Strings



Grade .5 (First year, limited study.)

- **Keys:** D (b minor) – First six notes of the D Major scale only – Use of Open strings outside of this is ok as long as it is moving to another open string.
- **Time Signature:** 2/4, 3/4, 4/4
- **Rhythms:** Quarter, Half, Whole, plus two repeated 8th notes.
- **Ranges:** Violin, Viola, Cello—no extensions; String Bass—1st position
- **Bowings:** Natural bowings only: Simple detaché, slow pizzicato (Quarter notes or longer) – Two or more rests between switching from Arco or Pizzicato.
- **Scoring:** Three-part scoring (Viola doubles Violin II, Bass & Cello share the same part). Give all sections some melodic material. Unison is preferred.



Considerations for Young Strings



Grade 1 - 1.5 (1-2 years of study. Beginning.)

- **Keys:** C, G, D (plus relative minors)
- **Time Signature:** Same
- **Rhythms:** Add dotted half & dotted quarter notes. Ties. Simple syncopation.
- **Ranges:** Violin, Viola, Cello—no extensions (except Violin Lo 1 on the E string); String Bass—1st and 3rd positions (F-natural on E String)
- **Bowings:** 2- and 3-note slurs. Hooked bowing.
- **Scoring:** Similar. Prefer all sections have some melodic material. Open string double stops.

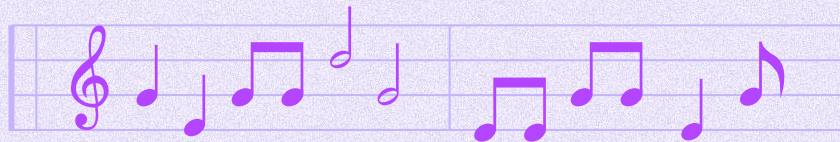


Considerations for Young Strings



Grade 2 - 2.5 (2-3 years of study. Early intermediate.)

- **Keys:** Add A, F, & Bb (plus relative minors)
- **Time Signature:** Add 6/8 and cut time
- **Rhythms:** Add 16th notes & 8th note and quarter note triplets.
- **Ranges:** Violin, Viola, Cello—1st through 3rd positions with all extensions; String Bass—1st through 4th positions with all extensions
- **Bowings:** Add 4-note slurs, spiccato, and double stops that include 1 fingered note
- **Scoring:** Similar. Optional divisi possible.



Many teachers begin composing / arranging...

- to respond to a **need** – a **gap in the literature**, a focus on a **pedagogical skill**, a **special consideration** in the ensemble
- because they imagine **something that didn't exist before**
- because **it's fun!**



01



Gaps in the Literature





Institute for Composer Diversity

2023 NFHS State List Repertoire Report ORCHESTRA



We analyzed lists of
18,063 orchestral works
from 12 states.

These lists included
7,783 unique works
by **1,315** composers.

Works by historically excluded composers and white men composers

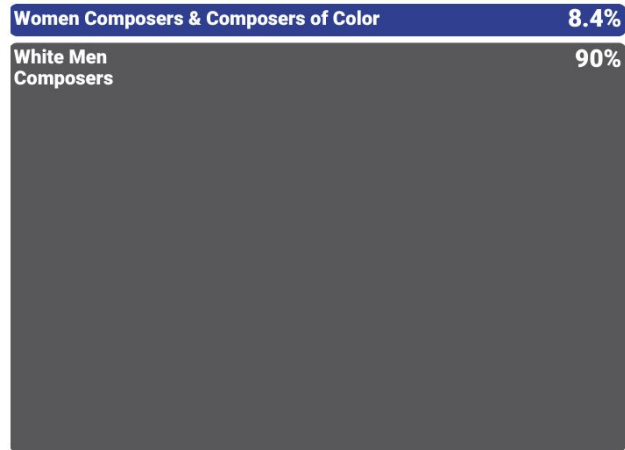


Fig. 1: Comparison of works by women composers and composers of color and works by white men composers within the aggregated NFHS State Orchestra Repertoire Lists.

Works by living composers and deceased composers

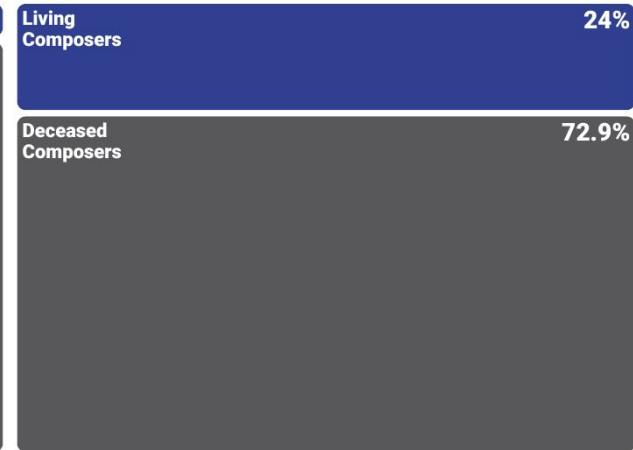


Fig. 2: Comparison of works by living composers and works by deceased composers within the aggregated NFHS State Orchestra Repertoire Lists.

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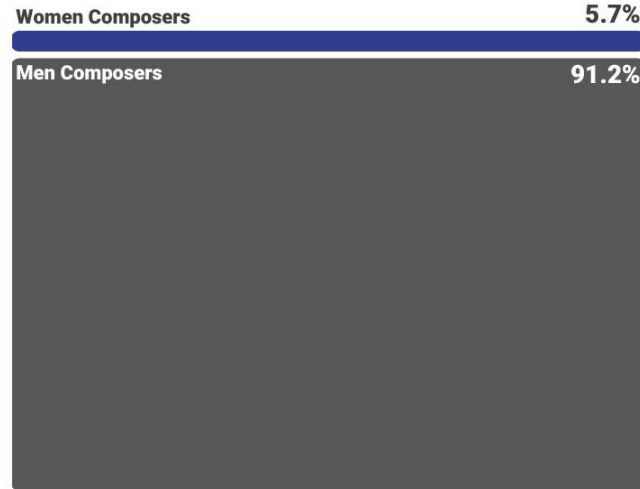


Fig. 3: Comparison of works by women composers and men composers within the aggregated NFHS State Orchestra Repertoire Lists.

Works by composers of color and white composers



Fig. 4: Comparison of works by composers of color and white composers within the aggregated NFHS State Orchestra Repertoire Lists.



Gaps in the Literature



- ✦ **More cultural inclusion**
- ✦ **More works from historically underrepresented composers**
- ✦ **Eclectic Styles (fiddle, folk, popular, jazz, rock, electronic, mariachi, etc.)**





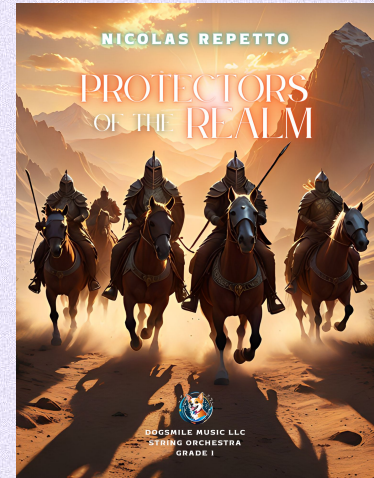
Protectors of the Realm (Grade 1)



Nicolas Repetto

Argentinian-American
TV, Film, & Concert
Composer

- Strings, Rehearsal Piano, Optional Timpani, Opt. Percussion 1-4
- Set in a cinematic style, every section in the orchestra gets a chance to play the main theme. The piece reinforces marcato and legato playing while the optional percussion parts add excitement and enhance the orchestration to give a full sense of the adventure





Go off! (Grade 2)



Armond Vance Wimberly

Performer, composer,
arranger and educator

- Choice of 8/4 changes the rhythmic hierarchy – familiar rhythms for ease of reading (reinforced with rote learning)
- Hip Hop influences. Catchy motivic ideas.
- Track or drumset



Vln. I

Vln. II

Vln. II

Vln III



Pedagogical Writing

02



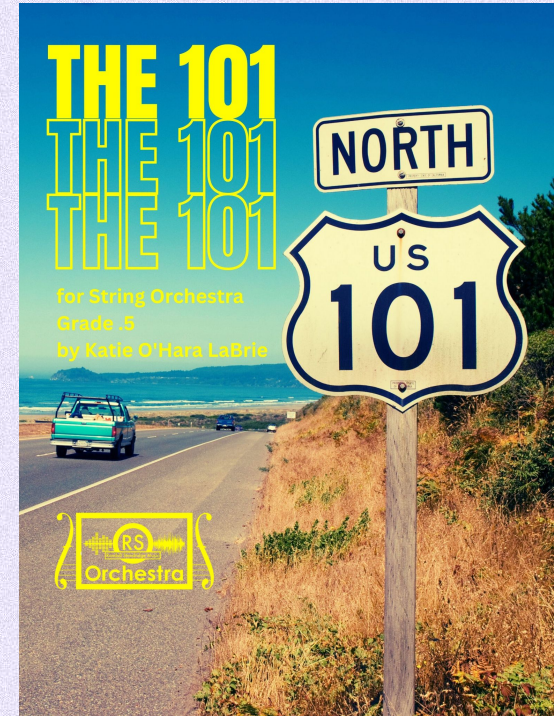
The 101 (Grade .5)



Katie LaBrie

Performer, composer,
arranger and educator

- Only open string & 1st finger
- Violin II/Viola & Cello/Bass double
- Piano adds harmonic context
- Optional drumset





Nocturne in Five (Grade 1)



Lauren Spavelko

- Themed on the number five - 5/4 time, main theme uses first 5 notes of the E minor scale, 5 sections
- Simple harmonic structure supports early composition / improv in the ensemble - suggested rhythm, students choose pitches from E natural minor
- Introduce irregular meter sooner (5/4) with familiar rhythmic units & primarily steps & skips in the melody

5 arco
p

9

33 *Composed Melodies*
mp



Momentum (Grade 2.5)



Adrian Gordon

Performer, composer,
arranger and educator

- Staccato or spiccato bowing
- Rhythmic drive, some syncopation



03

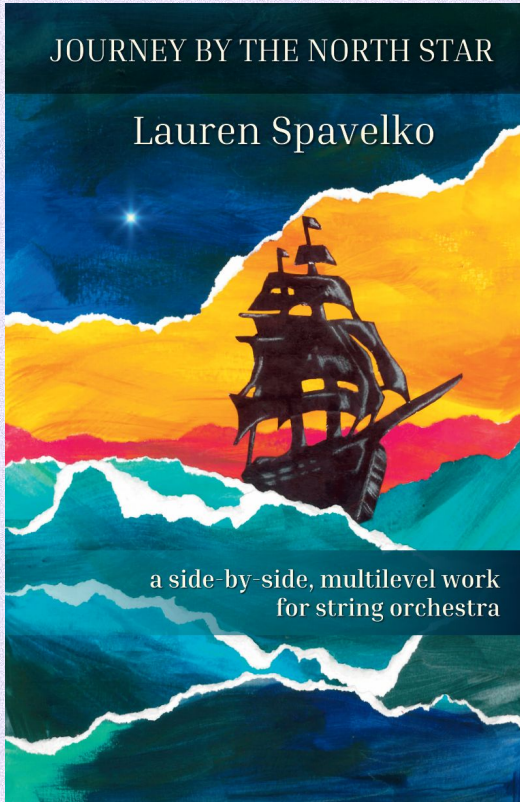


Something new!



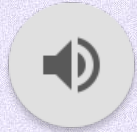


Journey by the North Star (multilevel)



Lauren Spavelko

- Grade 1, Grade 2.5, Grade 4
- Written for six possible combinations
 - Standalone: Grade 2.5 or Grade 4
 - All parts
- Rondo (ABACADA)
- Grade 1 plays the North Star theme (adjacent to "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star") - essential material (not a simplification), optionally reinforced by upper orchestras
- In contrasting sections, more advanced students introduce new musical ideas—the ship sailing, stormy seas, and a sea monster. These ideas are blended with each restatement of the North Star theme.

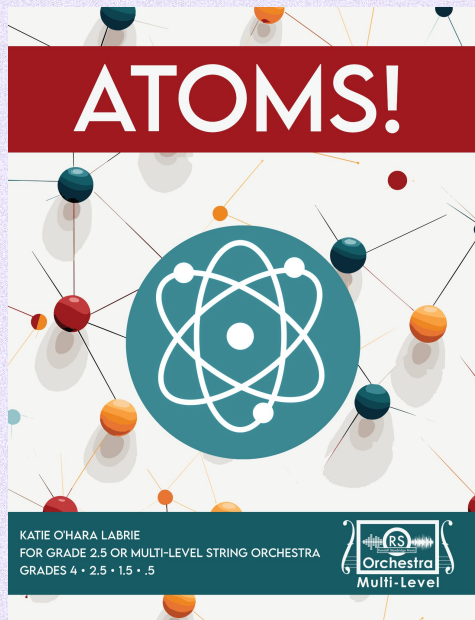




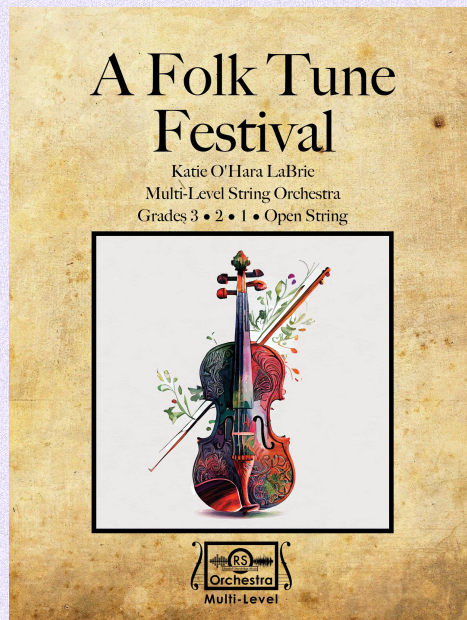
More multilevel!



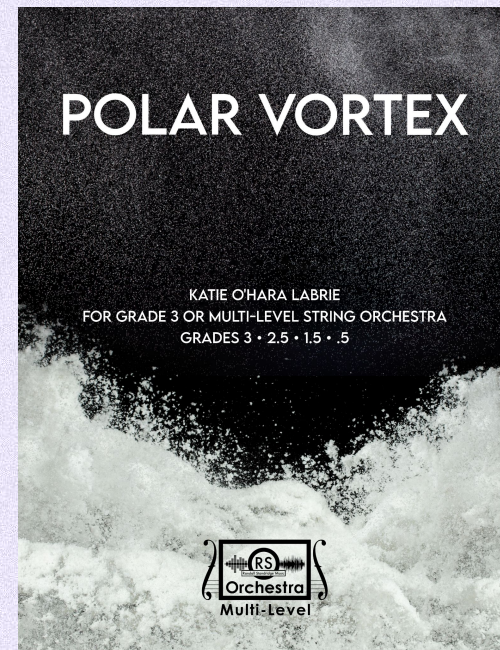
Katie LaBrie



Atoms



A Folk Tune Festival



Polar Vortex



I'm a composer.

**When might I decide to
work with an arranger?**

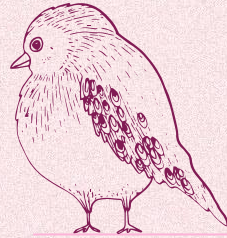


★ **Expert help**

New to the ensemble or level?
Some arrangers can adapt your
work and teach you more about it
for the future!

★ **Short on time?**

An arranger can take your original
ideas and help you reach this
audience more easily & quickly.



Commissioning

- Why commission new music from a composer?
- How to find & connect with composers / directors
- Commissioning Models
- How to organize a commission



Why commission new music?



Inspiration & Motivation

- Pride in ownership



Modeling, representation & inclusivity

- Support composers (including underrepresented & emerging composers)
- Models for students



Educational enrichment & opportunities for co-creation

- Student composition / co-creation
- Interdisciplinary elements
- Community identity

Consider regular commissioning with your program. You might do a series of commissions with different composers, or even build a rapport with a particular composer across time.



How to find & connect with composers



- ***Institute for Composer Diversity (www.composerdiversity.com)***
Search by composer demographics, genre, & geographic location
- ***Local colleges - composition programs***
- ***Colleagues***
- ***Professional Facebook groups (ex: String Orchestra Directors & Composers)***
- ***Contact a composer you already love!***



Commissioning Models



- *Commissions can be initiated by the composer or the director*
- *Individual Commission*
 - Director commissions exclusively for their ensemble
 - Often a better fit for co-creation between composer and ensemble
- *Consortium*
 - Composer & director work together to collect a group of commissioners
 - All consortium performances are counted as premieres, and all are credited in the score.
 - Often have a lead ensemble for the first performance, to record, & to invite other ensembles to join the consortium



Commissioning Considerations



● *Details of Work*

- Duration, level, size of ensemble
- Reason for commission
- Dedication
- Special requests
 - Any collaboration or co-creation?
 - Special features for the work? (Quotes, text, visual, etc.?)

● *Interaction with ensemble*

- Will the composer attend / participate in any rehearsals (in-person or virtually) or performances?
- Will the composer chat / Q&A with the ensemble?
- Will there be any mentorship or workshops of some kind?

● *Timeline*

- Usually want to initiate conversation about a commission at least 9-12 months in advance; occasionally shorter timelines can be accommodated.
- Discuss any check-ins or exchange of drafts (as needed)
- Set delivery date
- Exclusivity period?



Commissioning Considerations



● Fee

- Fee varies by composer according to skill, experience, demand, etc.
 - The composer usually agrees to a flat fee determined by the length of piece, size of ensemble, complexity, etc.
 - Ex: Ensemble rate of \$700-1000 per minute of music (ex: 3 minute piece = \$2100-3000)
 - Fee can include creation of work + optionally calls, visits, travel, etc.
- A consortium can share the financial cost of the commissioning fee, and may sometimes even help a composer earn a higher fee and additional performances. (Ex: \$250-500 per ensemble)

● Final product

- Digital Delivery, hard copy, or both?
- Recording for composer



Example Commissions



Individual Commission

La Gruta: The Bat Cave (Grade 2 Band)

- 8th grade band
- \$3000
- **Close, consistent collaboration with the director**
 - Composer video - introduction, discuss *La Gruta*, model composition process
 - Designed lesson plans to guide students to compose their own bat themes
 - Curated and edited student ideas between a principal bat theme
- Attended a day-of rehearsal to coach & discuss with the students and the performance
- Brought personal recording equipment (video & microphone)
- Final product: Musical work / accompanying or standalone composition activity
- After premiere, distributed the piece with Murphy Music Press





Example Commissions

Consortium Commission

Two Lyon Pieces (Grade 4 & Grade 2 orchestra)

Based on the silk industry trade in Lyon, France & its historical impact on the culture of the city

Composer initiated

Composer & Director will invite consortium members

TWO pieces

- **The Silk Weavers** - Grade 4 (5-6 min)
- **The Puppet Guignol** - Grade 2 (2-3 min)
 - Consortium members can opt into commissioning one piece or both based on their program / interest
- **Estimated fee** - \$550 for both / \$400 / \$250

Opportunities for cross-curricular connections

- French history (Canut revolts, WWII), language, & culture
- Art: Puppet Theatre, Textiles





Example Commissions



Consortium Commission Two Lyon Pieces (Grade 4 & Grade 2 orchestra)

Lead Ensemble

- Drafts / virtual meetings with ensemble (spring 2025)
- In-person attendance at premiere (covered by grant)
- Recording - Lexington Schools Tech

Timeline

- Composing (spring 2025)
- Rehearsal & premiere by lead ensemble (fall 2025)
- All other consortium members (exclusivity through July 2026)
- Scores available for general purchase (fall 2026 or after)

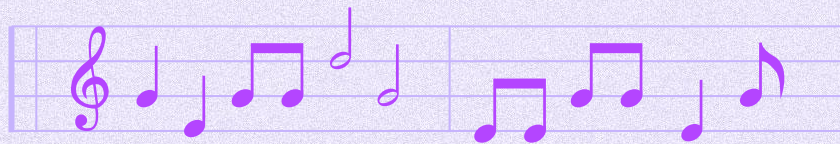


Lead Ensemble:
Rachel Jayson, Lexington Schools (Boston)



Publishing & Distribution





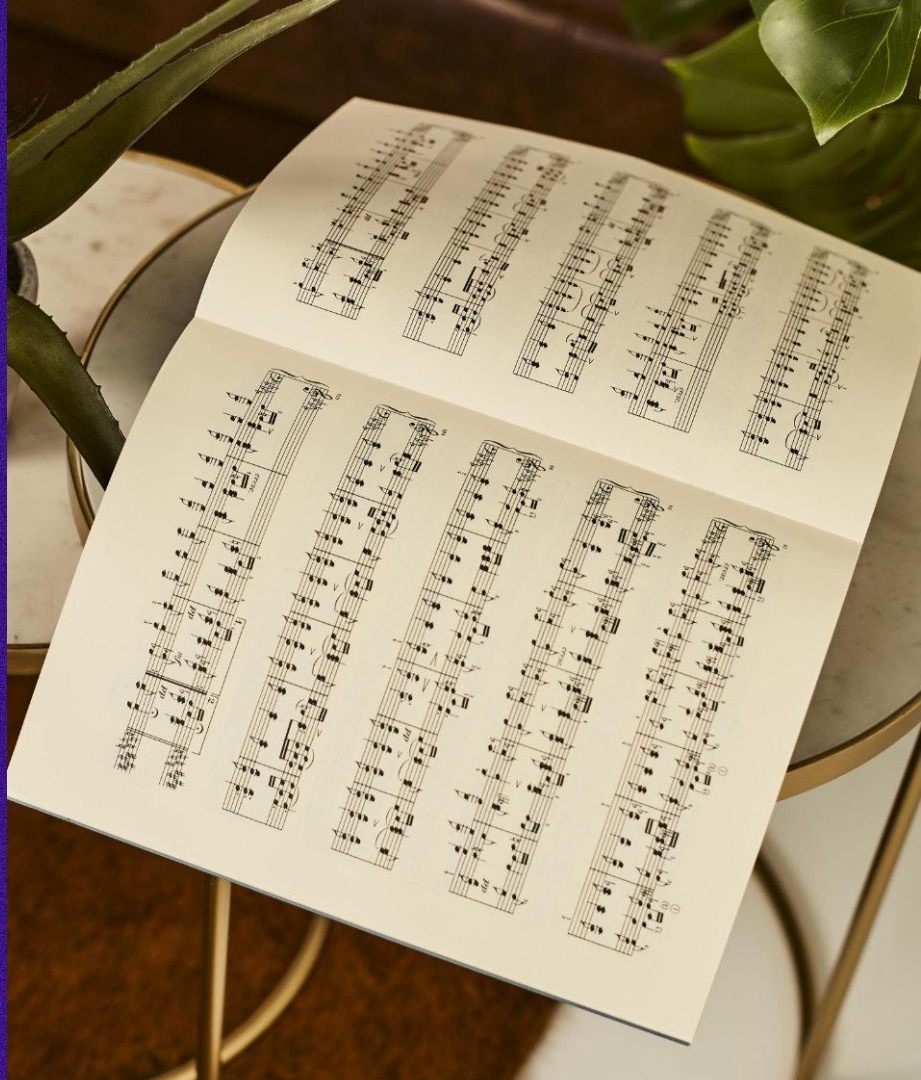
What's the *distinction* between a **publisher & distributor** – and *why* are they taking my royalties?



★ Publisher



- Does more to **promote, market, engrave, and produce** your music as a product
- Takes a **larger share** of royalties
- Often takes the **copyright**
- Brand recognition





Distributor



- Sells music directly to customers from vendors
- Less royalties are taken but the marketing, promotion, and creation of a product is all up to the composer
- Keep your **copyright**



YOUR MUSIC, OUR NETWORK

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**Liam Thomas**

Liam Thomas Music

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Liam Thomas is a composer, guitarist, and pianist born in Wilmington, Delaware. In the Greater Philadelphia area, he has written, performed, and studied music for the better part of the last decade and recently graduated from the Master of Music program at West Chester University of Pennsylvania with a focus in composition. He has performed many

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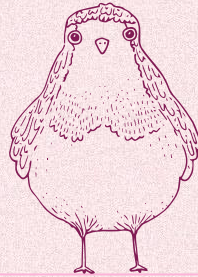
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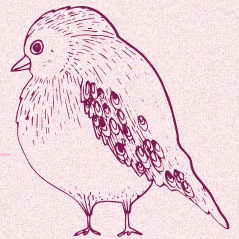
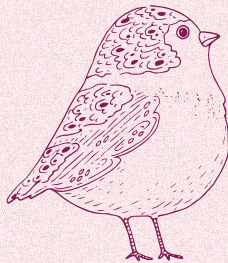
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Q&A

What are you curious about?





**Thank
you!**

Keep in touch!

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