



It's a deal

Arcomis is a new setup which aims to make music commissioning a straightforward and attractive prospect, for individuals and businesses alike. Founder Adrian Hull explains all to Glyn Môn Hughes

Adrian Hull is nothing if not optimistic. While newspapers talk of recession, depression, market doom and financial gloom, Hull – a PhD from Cardiff University's School of Music – has set up a company to foster closer links between business and arts communities nationwide.

Sponsorship remains big business and keeps many musical organisations afloat. But many businesses fight shy of getting involved, believing they will have to write bank-busting cheques. While that might be true of big players in the music business, what about smaller companies? Can small businesses get involved? Is there still room for individuals to play the philanthropist – or did that notion vanish into thin air when Brahms was a boy?

This is where Hull spotted an opportunity. 'Composers study, get famous and are signed up by publishers and conductors,' he says, 'but it's not the same for everyone. When I was half way through my PhD, I set up the London Contemporary Music Group because I wanted people to hear what composers were doing. There was also an element of teaching involved. Composers could "get out there and do it". They could learn by sounds they created – and by their mistakes.'

It is partly from that idea of letting people hear contemporary classical music that Arcomis – short for arts commissioning – was born. The only company of its kind in the UK, Hull says Arcomis bridges the gap between composers and the business community, as well as not-for-profit and public sector organisations.

'For years, companies have been commissioning artworks, paintings and sculptures as extensions of their brand, cause-related marketing, corporate communications or as part of corporate social responsibility programmes,' says Hull. 'Music commissioning is a more distinctive way of effectively using marketing budgets to gain added value and differentiation while also engaging with the expanding sector of the creative industries.'

'We became a limited company in November 2007,' adds Hull. 'Being based in Wales, we've access to a number of funding strands. The Welsh assembly government, for instance, distributes European funding. There's also the Knowledge Enterprise Funds which are for spin-out companies from universities.'

Arcomis was recently awarded more than £5,000 through the assembly's Entrepreneurship Scholarship programme and has also received support through the Finance Wales Early Stage Development Programme as well as from Cardiff University's Research and Commercial Division.

'I've been determined to set up a business, not a charity,' says Hull. 'I feel strongly there is no need for arts to rely on handouts from government. We have a world-class product. There's a perceived need. It therefore has value. That's the foundation for a strong business.'

The appeal of Arcomis to businesses is that organisations can commission unique pieces of music for occasions such as corporate hospitality events,

advertising or marketing campaigns and brand development. It could be a short, solo piece right up to a large-scale opera and every commission can potentially be performed and recorded. In order to support future classical talents, Arcomis is also presently working with a wide range of composers.

There is a specialised marketing plan, guiding clients through the entire commissioning process, from identifying a composer, to staging a performance and recording the finished piece.

'I suppose you could call it back-to-front, or bespoke, sponsorship,' says Hull. 'People come to us with an idea and we make that idea work. We're not the end product going along and asking for funding. We're also getting away from the idea that commissioning a new work is seen as patronage. We're trying to promote the whole process, through to the end product. For instance, if someone wants to commission music for a wedding, they'll hear it at the ceremony and, possibly, several times again at the reception.'

The company is working closely with what it calls the 'rapidly expanding pool' of British composers which, it claims, are 'internationally acknowledged as some of the most highly trained and exciting in the world.'

An example of a previous project set up by Arcomis was a series of one-off concerts and multi-event celebrations which spanned the country with movements of a new work performed at each venue before the entire work received its world premiere at a professional public concert in Covent Garden, London. Even the company's launch was somewhat unprecedented, as LCMG performed eight world premieres as 'homages' to the American composer Elliott Carter, celebrating his centenary this year.

Is the Arcomis concept working? 'We're working hard, calling businesses and telling them what we do,' says Hull. 'We're working in a range of markets presenting ourselves less as dealing with sponsorship but more with cause-related marketing. Yes, it is difficult right now and we are getting knocked back on occasion. But, broadly, companies see us as doing something different and they are prepared to listen. We're opening doors for people. They can choose whether they go through that door.'

Arcomis has also set up a publishing arm for composers where, for a small fee, they can upload a score where it will be proof-read, given a 'star rating' to assess suitability for publication and, if the rating is favourable, the score is published online.

'That helps expand our composer database and builds a new community of artists,' says Hull.

In many ways, however, Arcomis is continuing a noble tradition where individuals – and, these days, corporations – commission new music.

'It's something which has been done for centuries but it's fallen by the wayside,' observes Hull. 'We'll change that.'

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