

# COLLECTING SOCIETIES

Knowledge Toolkit



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## INTRODUCTION

Collecting societies are key business partners for songwriters and composers, yet many creators don't fully understand how these organisations work or how to maximise their benefits. These societies - also known as [Collective Management Organisations](#) (CMOs), [Performing Rights Organisations](#) (PROs), or [music licensing companies](#) - sit between you and the businesses that use your music. They issue licences, collect money, and [distribute royalties](#) for scenarios ranging from radio broadcasts and streaming to live performances and background music in shops.

In the UK, two collecting societies represent different aspects of your song rights. [PRS](#) for Music manages performing rights - covering any public performance or broadcast of your work - while [MCPS](#) handles mechanical rights, covering reproductions like physical sales and downloads. These organisations have evolved significantly in recent years, transforming from traditional collecting societies into sophisticated data and technology operations that process billions of performances annually. Understanding how they work, what they offer, and how to engage with them effectively is key to building a sustainable career in music.



This section will guide you through the UK collecting society landscape and explain how it connects to the [global network of CMOs](#). We'll explore when and how to join these organisations, how international royalty collection works, [what data you need to provide](#), and how to troubleshoot common problems. Whether you're a songwriter crafting pop hits, a media composer scoring for television, or a classical composer writing for concert halls, collecting societies are key partners in ensuring you're paid for every use of your music.

## UNDERSTANDING THE CMO LANDSCAPE: WHAT ARE COLLECTING SOCIETIES?

Collecting societies operate on a simple principle: [collective licensing](#). Rather than every radio station, streaming service, or live venue having to negotiate individual licences with millions of songwriters, these organisations offer blanket licences that cover vast repertoires of music. They then collect the fees, process usage data, and distribute royalties to their members.

Most collecting societies are not-for-profit organisations owned by their members. They cover their operational costs by deducting commissions from the money they process - typically between 6% and 15% depending on the society and revenue stream. This collective approach benefits everyone: music users get simple, comprehensive licences, while creators receive payments they could never efficiently collect individually.

The distinction between performing rights and mechanical rights is fundamental to understanding collecting societies. Performing rights cover any public performance of your music - from live concerts to radio broadcasts, streaming to background music in retail spaces. Mechanical rights relate to the reproduction of your music - traditionally physical products like CDs and vinyl, but now including downloads and certain streaming uses. Different societies often handle these different rights, and the rules vary significantly between territories.



## THE UK LANDSCAPE: PRS AND MCPS

### PRS for Music

[PRS](#) for Music is the UK's performing rights society, established over 110 years ago and now processing over £1 billion annually. Every songwriter and composer who wants to collect performing rights income in the UK needs to join PRS. Membership costs £100 (with a £50 online discount available) and is important for professional creators.

PRS has transformed significantly in recent years, evolving from a traditional collecting society into what CEO Andrea Czapyr Martin describes as "a data and digital society." This evolution includes:

- Monthly distribution of streaming royalties.
- Automated processing systems reducing costs.
- Joint ventures with [PPL](#) for public performance licensing.
- The ICE initiative for multi-territory digital licensing.
- Sophisticated data matching linking recordings to compositions.

Your writer's share of PRS income (minimum 50%) always flows directly to you, even if you have a publishing deal. This protection is important for songwriter income and cannot be assigned to anyone else.

### MCPS

The [Mechanical Copyright Protection Society](#) (MCPS) represents mechanical rights in the UK. Here's where it gets interesting: you only need to join MCPS directly if you're self-published. If you work with a publisher or administrator, they access MCPS on your behalf, collecting mechanical royalties and paying your share according to your publishing agreement.

While MCPS and PRS are separate organisations with different ownership structures, they work closely together with unified systems and processes. They share:

- One website and member portal.
- Combined registration systems.



- Coordinated international representation.
- Integrated customer service.

This close cooperation simplifies the process for UK creators while maintaining the legal distinction between different types of rights.

## THE GLOBAL NETWORK AND RECIPROCAL AGREEMENTS

Your music doesn't stop at borders, and neither should your royalty collection. Collecting societies worldwide are connected through reciprocal agreements - complex treaties that allow each society to represent foreign repertoire in their territory. This means PRS can collect money for your music used anywhere in the world, though the process and timeline vary significantly by country.

### How reciprocal agreements work

When your song is played on German radio, the German society GEMA collects the royalties. Through their reciprocal agreement with PRS, they then transfer your share back to the UK for distribution. This process typically takes 12-24 months, though digital innovations are gradually reducing these timelines.

The system works well for most scenarios, but has limitations:

- Each society deducts their commission before passing money along.
- Payment schedules vary significantly between societies.
- Data standards differ, potentially causing matching problems.
- Some income types may not be covered by reciprocals.

### Direct membership

For songwriters with significant international activity, direct membership in foreign societies can offer advantages:

- Faster payments (often 6-12 months sooner).
- Lower overall commission rates.



- Direct access to society databases and services.
- Better control over your data in that territory.

However, direct membership also means:

- Multiple registration requirements.
- Complex tax documentation.
- Increased administrative burden.
- Potential for conflicting claims.

Most successful songwriters limit direct membership to 2-3 key territories where they have substantial activity. Publishers often provide similar benefits through their sub-publishing networks without the administrative overhead.

## THE US MARKET

The [United States](#), the world's largest music market, operates quite differently from the UK and European models. Understanding these differences is important for UK songwriters seeking to maximise their international income.

The US market presents both opportunities and challenges:

- Rates are often lower due to consent decrees and statutory licences.
- The system is more fragmented with multiple societies.
- Copyright law differs significantly from UK/EU standards.
- But the sheer market size means even lower rates can generate substantial income.

Unlike the UK's single performing rights society, PRS, the US has five PROs:

**ASCAP and BMI** - The two giants, together controlling approximately 90% of the market

- Open to all writers.
- ASCAP is member-governed and operates on a not-for-profit basis.



- BMI is now owned by private equity (New Mountain Capital).
- Both operate under government consent decrees that regulate their practices.

### **SESAC, GMR, and AllTrack - Smaller, specialised societies**

- SESAC and GMR are invite-only.
- Often offer boutique services for certain repertoire types.
- All are privately owned.

UK writers accessing the US market through PRS must choose either ASCAP or BMI for representation. This choice affects:

- How quickly you receive US payments.
- The commission rates applied.
- The level of data visibility you have.

### **Mechanical rights in the US: The MLC**

The 2018 Music Modernisation Act created The MLC (Mechanical Licensing Collective), transforming how digital mechanical royalties are collected in the US.

Key features include:

- Funded entirely by digital services (no fees to writers, no commissions deducted).
- Monthly distributions.
- Completely transparent public database.
- Free membership for all writers globally.
- Only covers digital streaming and downloads.

UK writers can join The MLC directly for free, potentially accelerating their US mechanical income.

### **Practical considerations**

#### **Data is everything**



In the collecting society ecosystem, accurate data drives payment. Key elements include:

### Identifiers

- ISWC (International Standard Work Code) for your composition.
- Your CAE/IPI number as a writer.
- Correct matching to ISRCs for recordings.

### Registration best practices

- Register works immediately upon completion.
- Use consistent naming across all societies.
- Include all co-writer information with correct splits.
- Update information promptly when changes occur.

### Common data problems

- Misspelled names or variations.
- Missing or incorrect co-writer information.
- Unmatched recordings.
- Conflicting claims from multiple parties.

## WORKING WITH PUBLISHERS

Your relationship with collecting societies changes significantly if you have a publisher:

### What publishers handle

- MCPS registration and collection.
- International society registrations.
- Conflict resolution.
- Data maintenance across territories.

### What remains direct



- Your writer's share of PRS performance royalties.
- Your relationship with PRS.
- Ability to view your works in society databases.

### Key considerations

- Publishers should accelerate international collections.
- They don't eliminate the need for you to understand the system.
- You should still monitor your registrations.
- Communication with your publisher about registrations is essential.

### Timeline expectations

Understanding payment timelines helps manage cash flow:

#### Domestic Payments

- Radio/TV: 3-6 months after broadcast.
- Streaming: 3-4 months (now monthly distributions).
- Live: 3-9 months depending on venue reporting.
- Background music: 6-12 months.

#### International Payments

- Major territories: 12-18 months.
- Smaller territories: 18-36 months.
- Some usage may take even longer.
- Direct membership can cut these times significantly.

### Revenue streams through CMOs

Collecting societies handle diverse income streams, each with different rates, reporting mechanisms, and payment schedules:

### Broadcasting



- BBC Radio 1: £60-90 per play.
- Regional radio: £2-20 per play.
- Television: £30-1000+ depending on channel and time.
- International broadcasts generate separate payments.

## Digital

- Streaming: typically around £0.002-0.005 per stream (split between all rightholders) but can vary substantially depending on multiple factors. There is no 'per stream rate' despite what many people say!
- Downloads: 8.5% of dealer price (mechanical).
- Different rates for premium vs ad-supported streams.
- Complex international rate variations.

## Live Performance

- Typically 3-8% of box office receipts.
- Classical concerts: 4-8% of box office.
- Requires accurate setlist reporting.
- Festival rates can be different.

## Public Performance

- Background music in retail/hospitality.
- Complex tariff structures.
- Often undervalued but consistent income.
- Particularly important for production music.

## Production Music Specifics

- Heavy reliance on broadcast royalties.
- [Cue sheet accuracy](#) is key.
- Long tail income from repeat use.



- Different distribution patterns from commercial releases.

Understanding these revenue streams helps you make informed decisions about where to focus your creative efforts and how to maximise your collecting society income. Each type of use has its own ecosystem of licensing, reporting, and payment that successful creators learn to navigate.

## INTERNATIONAL CMO NETWORKS AND TRACKING YOUR DATA

### Understanding the global CMO network

Your PRS and MCPS memberships connect you to a worldwide network of collecting societies through reciprocal agreements. Understanding this network is crucial for maximising your international income.

### Major International Societies

#### United States

- **ASCAP and BMI:** The two giants, operating under consent decrees.
- **SESAC:** Smaller, invitation-only, not under consent decree.
- **GMR:** Newest, focusing on high-value catalogues.
- **The MLC:** Mechanical rights for digital (not a full mechanical society).

#### Europe

- **SACEM (France):** One of the world's oldest and largest.
- **GEMA (Germany):** Known for high collection rates.
- **SGAE (Spain):** Covers Spain and strong in Latin America.
- **SIAE (Italy):** Important for European touring artists.
- **STIM (Sweden):** Part of ICE Services with PRS.
- **BUMA/STEMRA (Netherlands):** Progressive in digital licensing.

#### Rest of World

- **SOCAN (Canada):** Close ties with US and UK markets.
- **APRA/AMCOS (Australia/New Zealand):** Efficient digital systems.
- **JASRAC (Japan):** Critical for Asian market access.



- **ABRAMUS, UBC (Brazil):** Growing streaming market.

## When to consider direct membership

### Consider joining a foreign society directly when:

- You have significant income from that territory (typically £10,000+ annually).
- You regularly work with creators from that territory.
- You live there for extended periods.
- Your music has particular success in that market.
- You want faster payment (avoiding inter-society delays).

## Benefits vs drawbacks of direct membership

### Benefits:

- Faster payments (3-6 months vs 12-18 months).
- Lower commission (avoiding multiple society deductions).
- Direct access to usage data.
- Local support and services.
- Better positioned for local opportunities.

### Drawbacks:

- Additional administration burden.
- Multiple tax forms and regulations.
- Need to exclude territories from PRS membership.
- Potential for registration conflicts.
- May need local bank accounts.

## Tracking your data across territories

### Essential Portals to Monitor

### Your Home Society (PRS/MCPS)

- Check monthly for new registrations.



- Verify all co-writer information is complete.
- Monitor for conflicts or disputes.
- Track international income by territory.
- **ISWC usage:** Verify your works have ISWCs.
- **IPI system:** Confirm all your identifiers.
- **CISAC tools:** Check your international presence.
- **Society portals:** Check data where you have direct access.

## What to Look For

### Green Flags - everything's working:

- Consistent song titles across territories.
- All co-writers properly credited.
- Regular income from expected territories.
- ISWCs assigned and matching.

### Red Flags - take action!

- Missing co-writers on registrations.
- Your name spelled differently.
- Songs registered with wrong shares.
- Zero income from territories where you know there's usage.
- Duplicate registrations with conflicts.

## Creating Your Tracking System

### 1. Master Spreadsheet

- Every work with its ISWC.
- Registration status by territory.
- Expected vs actual income.
- Last verification date.

### 2. Quarterly Reviews



- Check PRS for new international income.
- Verify high-earning works are registered everywhere.
- Look for missing territories.
- Compare to your usage reports.

### **3. Annual Deep Dive**

- Full audit of major works.
- Check foreign society databases.
- Verify publisher registrations.
- Reconcile against statements.

## **Fixing international problems - common issues and solutions**

### **Work registered with wrong shares**

1. Document the correct shares with evidence.
2. Contact your publisher (if applicable).
3. File formal dispute with local society.
4. May need all co-writers to confirm.

### **Missing from territory database**

1. Verify registration with PRS first.
2. Check reciprocal agreement exists.
3. File supplementary registration.
4. Follow up after 3 months.

### **Name variations preventing matching**

1. Register pseudonyms properly with IPIs.
2. Notify all societies of name variations.
3. Include all variations in new registrations.
4. May need to re-register older works.



## Translation title issues

1. Register all known translations.
2. Include original title as reference.
3. Use local society's title format.
4. Provide proof of ownership.

## Best practices for international success

1. **Think globally from day one:** Register with complete metadata immediately.
2. **Build relationships:** Connect with creators in your key territories.
3. **Understand local practices:** Some territories have unique requirements.
4. **Monitor exchange rates:** Currency fluctuations affect your income.
5. **Keep records:** Document all international uses and registrations.

**Remember:** Your songs can earn around the world, but only if the global system can identify and track them. Invest time in understanding and monitoring your international presence - it's often where the most surprising income appears.

## CWR: Common Works Registration

CWR is the music industry's standard format for registering musical works between publishers and collecting societies. Think of it as the common language that allows a UK publisher to register your works with societies in Japan, Brazil, or anywhere else in the world.

## What CWR does well

- Standardises work registration globally.
- Enables bulk registration of multiple works.
- Includes detailed splits and territory information.
- Supports complex publishing arrangements.
- Provides transaction tracking.



## CWR's limitations

- **No mechanism to relinquish rights** - Publishers cannot formally notify societies when they no longer control a work.
- **Designed for publishers, not writers** - Self-published writers cannot use CWR directly.
- **Text-based format from the 1990s** - Struggles with modern metadata needs.
- **Version conflicts** - Different societies support different CWR versions.
- **No real-time validation** - Errors only discovered after processing.

## Why this matters

When publishers use CWR to register your works, any errors in the file can delay registration by weeks or months. More critically, when publishing agreements end, the lack of a "relinquishment" function means your old publisher might continue receiving royalties until a new registration triggers a conflict.

## MRT: Music Recognition Technology

Music Recognition Technology (MRT) - also called audio fingerprinting - is revolutionising how performances are tracked and reported.

## How MRT works

1. Creates unique digital "fingerprints" of recordings.
2. Monitors broadcasts, streams, and venues.
3. Automatically identifies when your music is played.
4. Reports usage without relying on manual cue sheets.

## Where MRT is used

- **Radio:** Automated logging of all music played.
- **TV:** Identifying background music and themes.
- **Venues:** Tracking DJ sets and background music.



- **Streaming:** Verifying reported plays.
- **Live:** Identifying songs in concert setlists.

### Benefits for songwriters

- Captures uses that might otherwise go unreported.
- Reduces reliance on accurate cue sheets.
- Identifies covers and live versions.
- Provides evidence in disputes.
- Speeds up performance royalty distribution.

### Current limitations

- Requires recordings to be fingerprinted first.
- May struggle with live or heavily modified versions.
- Not universally deployed across all territories.
- Can't identify unpublished or unreleased works.
- Dependent on audio quality.

### Other industry standards

#### DDEX (Digital Data Exchange)

- Standard for communicating between DSPs and rights holders.
- Includes rich metadata about recordings.
- Links ISRCs to artist, label, and release information.
- Critical for streaming services.

#### MWL (Musical Work Licence)

- Newer standard being developed for digital licensing.
- Aims to streamline sync and digital licensing.
- Includes more detailed rights information.
- Still in early adoption phase.



## BWARM (Broadcast WAV Metadata)

- Embeds metadata directly in audio files.
- Used by broadcasters and production music.
- Includes composer, publisher, and rights info.
- Helps automate music reporting

## Future Developments

### CWR 3.0 and Beyond

The industry is working on next-generation standards that will:

- Enable rights relinquishment notifications.
- Support real-time validation.
- Include richer metadata fields.
- Better handle international characters.
- Integrate with blockchain initiatives.

## AI and Metadata

- Machine learning to identify and fix metadata errors.
- Automated matching of works across languages.
- Predictive analytics for royalty flows.
- Smart contracts for instant payment.

Find out more in The Ivors Academy career guide - [Assistive AI](#)

## What You Can Do Now

1. **Ask your publisher** which version of CWR they use and how they handle international registrations.
2. **Ensure your recordings are fingerprinted** - Check with your distributor or label.
3. **Include ISRC-ISWC links** in all your documentation.



4. **Stay informed** about new standards through The Ivors Academy.
5. **Document everything** in formats that can adapt to future standards.

Remember: While these systems are imperfect, understanding them helps you navigate their limitations and ensure your works are properly tracked worldwide.

## COLLECTING SOCIETIES FAQs

### Do I need to join both PRS and MCPS as a UK songwriter?

You must join PRS to collect performing rights royalties from broadcasts, live performances, and streaming. MCPS membership is only necessary if you're self-published - if you have a publisher or administrator, they'll access MCPS on your behalf. PRS membership costs £100 (£50 online discount available) and is essential for all professional songwriters and composers. MCPS membership is free but only handles mechanical royalties from physical products, downloads, and some broadcast uses.

### How do I register my songs with PRS and MCPS?

Join PRS first via their website. Once approved, register your songs through the online portal, providing song title, co-writer information, publisher details, and splits. For MCPS, if you're self-published, apply separately and register the same works. Registration requires accurate data: full legal names, IPI numbers, and percentage splits totalling 100%. Register songs as soon as they're complete - you can add ISRC codes later when recordings exist. Both societies use the same online portal for work registration.

### I'm self-published - what's different about my CMO registration?

As a self-published writer, you'll need both PRS and MCPS membership to collect all royalties. You'll receive 100% of royalties directly (no publisher's share going elsewhere). You must handle all registration administration yourself, including international registrations and data updates. Consider joining The MLC directly for US digital mechanicals, as MCPS's reciprocal coverage may be limited. You're responsible for registering ISWCs and ensuring your works appear in international



databases. Many self-published writers eventually work with administrators to handle the complex international registration requirements whilst maintaining ownership.

### **How long after joining PRS will I start receiving royalties?**

PRS distributes royalties quarterly, but your first payment depends on when your music was used and reported. Radio and TV typically report within 3-6 months. Live venues report quarterly. International royalties can take 12-24 months. Your first distribution will likely be 6-9 months after joining, assuming your music has been performed. Streaming services report monthly but payments are distributed quarterly. Register works immediately after joining - retroactive registration is limited. Major broadcasts pay faster than small venue performances. International income arrives irregularly depending on foreign society payment schedules.

## **UNDERSTANDING YOUR RIGHTS AND ROYALTIES FAQs**

### **How do PRS and MCPS collect different royalties for my songs?**

PRS collects performing rights royalties whenever your music is performed publicly: radio/TV broadcasts, streaming, live venues, DJ sets, background music in shops/restaurants. They issue blanket licences to users and distribute based on usage reports. MCPS collects mechanical royalties when your music is reproduced: physical sales (CDs/vinyl), downloads, some on-demand streaming, and certain broadcast uses requiring copies. PRS money comes faster and more regularly. MCPS income is declining with physical sales but still significant for downloads and broadcast mechanical uses. Streaming generates both types - PRS handles the performance element, publishers typically handle mechanicals directly with DSPs.

### **What's the difference between writer's share and publisher's share?**

The music industry operates on a fundamental principle that performing rights income is split 50/50 between writers and publishers. This split is so entrenched



that PRS pays these shares separately - your writer's share always comes directly to you, regardless of any publishing deal you might have. This protection ensures writers always receive at least half their performing rights income.

Publishers receive their 50% share directly from PRS, not through you. This is different from mechanical rights, where publishers typically collect 100% from MCPS and then pay your share according to your contract terms. The beauty of the system is that your writer's share is protected and cannot be assigned to anyone else, providing crucial income security.

When negotiating publishing deals, you might see different splits like 75/25 or 80/20 in your favour, but these only affect how the publisher's 50% share is divided between you. Understanding this split structure is essential for tracking your income accurately and ensuring you're receiving everything you're owed. It also helps in negotiations - any deal trying to take your writer's share should be rejected immediately as it goes against fundamental industry principles.

### **What royalty rates can I expect for different uses of my songs in the UK?**

Rates vary significantly by use. BBC radio plays typically pay more than commercial radio, with national stations paying more than regional ones. Television rates depend on the channel, time of day, and duration - primetime on terrestrial channels pays the most, while daytime on digital channels pays less. Live venues pay 3-8% of box office receipts to PRS, distributed based on setlist data.

For streaming, the per-stream rate is relatively low and split between all rightsholders - both performing and mechanical rights, writers and publishers. Background music venues pay annual fees that are divided based on usage reports. Classical concerts typically pay 4-8% of box office receipts. Downloads generate mechanical royalties at 8.5% of dealer price, while physical sales are at 6.5%.



International rates vary considerably from UK rates, and actual payments depend on multiple factors including audience size, time of day, and territory. It's worth noting that while individual streaming payments may seem small, they can accumulate into meaningful income with volume. Understanding these different rate structures helps you evaluate opportunities and track whether you're being paid correctly.

### **Why am I not receiving mechanical royalties directly from MCPS?**

If you have a publisher or administrator, they collect mechanical royalties from MCPS on your behalf, then pay your share according to your publishing agreement. This is different from PRS, which pays writer's share directly to you. Publishers need mechanical rights to negotiate direct deals with streaming services and handle international mechanical collections efficiently. If you're not seeing mechanical income, check your publishing statements - it should appear there. Self-published writers who join MCPS receive mechanical royalties directly. Some publishers account mechanicals separately from performing rights, potentially on different schedules.

## **REGISTRATION AND DATA MANAGEMENT FAQs**

### **What identification codes do I need for my songs in the UK?**

Essential codes include: ISWC (International Standard Work Code) - unique identifier for your composition, generated after PRS registration. CAE/IPI number - your personal identifier as a writer, issued when joining PRS. For recordings: ISRC (International Standard Recording Code) - unique per recording, obtained from PPL or distributors. Publisher codes if applicable. Society member numbers for all territories where you're registered. These codes ensure accurate tracking and payment across global systems. Always include ISWCs on cue sheets and in metadata. Keep a master spreadsheet of all codes. Incorrect or missing codes are the primary cause of lost royalties.



## **What happens if my song metadata is incorrect in the UK systems?**

Incorrect metadata can result in lost royalties, delayed payments, or money going to wrong parties. Common issues: misspelled names, wrong splits, missing co-writers, incorrect publisher information. PRS and MCPS allow amendments through their online portal, but changes can take 3-6 months to process internationally. Historical corrections may be limited by society rules. Conflicts between writers require resolution before payments resume. Always verify registration confirmations carefully. Major errors might require publisher intervention or formal disputes. Prevention is crucial - double-check all data before submission. International societies may have different data, requiring separate corrections.

## **How do I update my song information after registration?**

Log into the PRS/MCPS online portal to submit amendments. Changes include: adding co-writers, correcting splits, updating publisher information, adding alternative titles, linking ISRCs. Minor corrections process quickly; major changes (ownership disputes) require documentation. Notify your publisher immediately of any changes - they must update their systems too. International updates can take 6-12 months to propagate through reciprocal networks. Some societies require direct notification for significant changes. Keep records of all amendments. Update broadcast cue sheets separately. Changes don't always apply retroactively - societies have different rules about historical adjustments.

## **What is a cue sheet and when do I need one? (Media Composers)**

Cue sheets are the essential documents that enable broadcast royalty payments for media composers. They're detailed reports listing every piece of music used in a TV programme, film, or other audio-visual production, including crucial information like the production title, episode details, each music cue's duration and timing, usage type (theme, background, or featured), and complete writer and publisher information with percentage splits.

While producers are technically responsible for preparing and submitting cue sheets to PRS, composers must verify their accuracy as errors directly impact



payments. The sheets should be submitted within 28 days of first broadcast, and must include ISWC codes where available. Ensure all names match your PRS registrations exactly - even small discrepancies can prevent payment.

For production music, libraries often handle cue sheet submission for their placements, but you should still monitor this process. International broadcasts require separate cue sheet submissions to foreign societies, which your publisher should coordinate. Always keep copies of cue sheets for your records and follow up if you know something has aired but haven't received payment within the expected timeframe. Cue sheet accuracy is the single most important factor in ensuring media composers receive their broadcast royalties.

## INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIONS FAQs

### How do my works get registered internationally if I'm with PRS?

PRS has reciprocal agreements with societies worldwide, sharing your registration data through the CIS-Net system. However, international registration isn't automatic or instant. Data flows through various systems (ICE, CIS-Net) taking 6-18 months to reach all territories. Some societies require additional information PRS doesn't collect. Your publisher should handle international registrations directly for faster, more accurate coverage. For important territories (US, Germany, Japan), verify your works appear in their databases. Some countries require local language titles or specific documentation. Direct membership in key territories ensures better control but increases administrative burden.

### How do I ensure I'm collecting royalties from the US as a UK songwriter?

For performing rights: [Choose either ASCAP or BMI](#) for PRS reciprocal representation (notify PRS of choice). Consider direct membership if US is major market. For mechanicals: Publishers handle most digital mechanicals directly. Self-published writers should join The MLC for streaming mechanicals. Register directly with MRI/HFA for physical products. US rates are generally lower due to consent decrees and compulsory licences. Track US income separately - arrives



irregularly. Ensure your US co-writers register works properly. Consider US sub-publishing for significant catalogue activity. Streaming services must be properly licensed in each territory.

### **Why might I receive royalties from US organisations like ASCAP or BMI?**

You'll receive statements directly from [US societies](#) if: you have direct membership, you've written with US writers who registered the songs there, or certain income types flow directly rather than through PRS reciprocals. Film/TV royalties often come directly from US societies even without membership. Some publishers register works in US and you might receive writer's share directly. Streaming services sometimes pay through US societies for global usage. These aren't duplicate payments - they're instead of PRS foreign royalties. Keep all statements for accounting reconciliation. Direct payments arrive faster than reciprocal flows.

### **Should I join CMOs in other countries directly?**

Consider direct membership where you have significant activity - typically US, Germany, France, or Japan. Benefits: faster payments (6-12 months sooner), lower commission rates (avoiding reciprocal fees), direct database access, local language support. Drawbacks: complex tax forms, multiple registration requirements, increased administration, potential membership fees. Most writers only join 1-3 foreign societies maximum. Publishers often provide equivalent benefits through sub-publishing networks. Calculate if saved commissions justify extra administration. Some societies (GEMA, SACEM) have complex requirements. Start with one major territory and assess benefits before expanding.

### **How does the UK mechanical royalty system differ from other countries?**

UK/European mechanicals are copyright-based, requiring licences for most uses. US has compulsory licences with statutory rates for physical/digital. UK: MCPS licences on behalf of members. US: Harry Fox, MRI, and The MLC handle different uses. Europe: collective licensing standard. US: publishers negotiate directly with



streaming services. UK rates negotiated by MCPS. US rates set by Copyright Royalty Board. Continental Europe often has mandatory collective management. UK allows publishers to exclude digital rights. These differences affect how quickly and efficiently mechanical royalties flow from different territories.

### **How does the ICE database affect my royalty collection?**

ICE (International Copyright Enterprise) is a joint venture between PRS, STIM (Sweden), and GEMA (Germany), creating a shared database for multi-territory licensing. It processes digital royalties for major streaming services across Europe. Benefits: faster digital payments, consistent data across territories, reduced conflicts. Challenges: data must be perfect, conflicts can freeze payments across all ICE territories, limited direct access for writers. Ensure your publisher registers works correctly in ICE. Monitor for conflicts through your society portal. ICE primarily handles Anglo-American repertoire efficiently. Errors affect multiple income streams simultaneously. Understanding ICE helps troubleshoot missing streaming royalties.

## **SPECIFIC REVENUE STREAMS FAQs**

### **How do PRS broadcast royalties work for commissions? (Media Composers)**

Broadcast royalties depend on several factors: the channel (BBC typically pays more than commercial or satellite channels), time of day (primetime rates are higher), duration of music use, and type of use (theme, featured, or background). Commissioned composers typically retain their writer's share of PRS royalties unless specifically bought out, though buyouts of performing rights are not enforceable in the UK.

For payment to flow correctly, productions must submit accurate cue sheets to PRS. The BBC has special tariffs for commissioned music that recognise its value. Themes generate significant income through repeated use across multiple episodes and series, while background music is paid per minute of use. International broadcasts generate separate royalties through local societies, adding another income stream that can continue for years.



When negotiating commission agreements, ensure contracts don't inadvertently attempt to sign away performing rights - these should remain yours even in work-for-hire agreements. While producers may own the master recording and synchronization rights, your PRS performing rights are protected by UK law and cannot be assigned.

### **How are live performance royalties collected and distributed?**

Live music venues pay annual blanket licences to PRS based on their capacity and frequency of live music events. These fees typically range from 3-8% of box office receipts, creating a pool of money that's distributed to writers based on what was actually performed. However, this distribution only works if PRS knows what was played, which is where setlist reporting becomes crucial.

Setlists can be submitted by you, the venue, or the promoter, but relying on others often leads to missing payments. Major venues and festivals tend to report automatically, but smaller venues frequently need chasing. You have up to three months after a performance to submit setlists through the PRS website. Both covers and originals earn royalties, with festival performances often generating higher payments due to larger audiences.

International touring adds complexity, as performances generate royalties through local societies that can take 12-24 months to flow back through the reciprocal system. While individual gig payments might seem modest, touring artists who diligently report all performances can earn substantial PRS income over time. The key is consistent reporting - treat setlist submission as part of your regular tour administration to ensure you're not leaving money on the table.

### **What happens with streaming royalties through CMOs?**

Streaming services pay PRS for UK performing rights based on usage data. Payments flow quarterly but based on monthly reporting. Your share depends on total UK streams versus your stream count. Premium streams pay more than ad-



supported. PRS distributes performing rights only - publishers handle mechanical rights directly with DSPs or through ICE. International streams generate royalties through local societies, arriving 12-24 months later. Streaming royalties seem small individually but aggregate significantly. Different services pay different rates. CMO streaming income is just one part - publishers may collect additional mechanicals separately.

### **How do revenue streams differ for production music versus commercial releases?**

Production music and commercially released songs generate income through fundamentally different patterns. Production music - tracks created specifically for use in TV, film, and advertising - relies heavily on broadcast royalties with minimal mechanical income. These tracks earn primarily from background use in television programmes, where accurate cue sheet reporting is essential. Library deals typically involve 50/50 splits between composer and library for all royalties.

In contrast, songs released as artist recordings have diverse income sources including radio play, streaming, physical sales, and sync opportunities. These releases can generate significant mechanical royalties through sales and streaming, plus performance income from touring. While a hit song might peak quickly and then decline, production music often has a longer earning life through repeated broadcasts over many years - a single library track might generate steady income for decades through re-use in different programmes.

Both types can generate international income, but the focus differs considerably. Production music composers typically concentrate on volume, building large catalogues to maximise placement opportunities. Artists and songwriters releasing their own music often focus on creating potential hits that can break through in the streaming and radio markets. Understanding which model suits your skills and goals helps you develop the right strategy for your career and optimise how you work with collecting societies.



## **How do royalties work for production music created for libraries? (Media Composers)**

Libraries typically register works with PRS on your behalf, sharing writer/publisher splits 50/50. You retain writer's share paid directly from PRS. Libraries collect publisher's share. Some libraries take 100% publishing but shouldn't affect your writer's share. Ensure library agreements clarify PRS registration responsibilities. Libraries handle cue sheet submission for their placements. International registration through library's sub-publishers. Multiple libraries can represent different tracks but not same track. Some libraries re-title tracks for tracking - verify PRS accepts this. Library deals vary widely - understand royalty implications before signing.

## **How are classical concert performances licensed? (Classical Composers)**

Concert venues pay PRS based on box office receipts (typically 4-8%). Distribution uses programme information - ensure accurate submission. Distinguish between small rights (concerts) and grand rights (dramatic performances). Multiple performances in same programme count separately. Premieres may attract higher rates. Educational performances have reduced rates. Rehearsals generally aren't licensed. International performances depend on local society reciprocals. Commissioned works should clarify PRS rights remain with composer. Arrangements of copyright works share royalties with original composer. Publisher hire fees separate from PRS royalties. Classical composers often see delayed but substantial concert royalties.

## **WORKING WITH PUBLISHERS AND OTHER PARTNERS FAQs**

### **I've just signed a publishing deal - what changes with my CMO membership?**

Your [publisher](#) now handles MCPS registration and collection - remove any self-published works from MCPS. PRS membership continues unchanged - writer's share still comes directly to you. Update all works with publisher information in PRS database. Publisher receives their share directly from PRS. They'll handle international registrations and mechanical collections worldwide. Notify PRS of publishing deal formally. Check contract for any territorial exclusions. Publisher



should improve international collections and resolve registration issues. Your CAE/IPI number remains the same. Monitor that publisher registers works promptly. Publishing deals significantly reduce your administrative burden while potentially increasing collections.

### **Can my publisher register my works or do I need to do it?**

Publishers can and should register works on your behalf, but practices vary. Some register everything; others require writer notification. Best practice: register works yourself in PRS immediately, notify publisher to add their details. This ensures fastest processing and accurate splits. Publishers handle international registrations and mechanical rights societies. Verify publisher's registration matches yours. Major publishers have dedicated registration departments. Smaller publishers might need prompting. Always keep your own registration records. Publishers can amend existing registrations to add their share. Clear communication about registration responsibilities prevents lost royalties.

### **How do sync fees relate to CMO royalties?**

Sync fees and CMO royalties represent two distinct income streams from the same usage, and understanding this distinction is important for maximising your income. The sync fee is an upfront payment for permission to synchronise your music with visual content - this is negotiated between your publisher (or you directly) and the production company. CMO royalties then flow from the actual usage of that synchronised content.

Once your music is synchronised and the production is broadcast, performed in cinemas, or distributed on streaming platforms, it generates performing rights royalties through PRS. A single sync placement can generate years of backend royalties that often exceed the original sync fee. For example, a modest sync fee for a TV placement might be followed by substantial PRS royalties every time that show airs, internationally and in repeats.

High-profile syncs also boost your other revenue streams by increasing recognition of your music, leading to more streams, radio play, and cover versions. When evaluating sync opportunities, consider both the immediate fee and the



long-term royalty potential. Your publisher handles sync negotiations but cannot waive your performing rights - these remain protected through your PRS membership regardless of sync deal terms.

### **What if I have different publishers in different territories?**

Sub-publishing deals create complex registration chains. Each publisher registers in their territory. Ensure consistent splits across all territories. PRS shows your original publisher; foreign societies show local sub-publisher. Income flows through publisher network before reaching you. Potential delays and additional commissions. Verify works registered correctly in each territory. Conflicts between publishers can freeze royalties. termination requires updating multiple societies. Some income might come from unexpected sources. Keep detailed records of all territorial deals. Consider administration deals for simpler structures. Multiple publishers require careful coordination to maximise collections.

## **TROUBLESHOOTING AND COMMON ISSUES FAQs**

### **Why haven't I received royalties for a broadcast I know happened?**

Missing broadcast royalties usually stem from a few common issues, and systematic investigation can help identify the problem. First, check whether your work was registered with PRS before the broadcast date - retroactive registration has limitations. Then verify the broadcast date against PRS distribution schedules, as payments typically arrive 3-6 months after broadcast, though some channels report quarterly or even annually.

The most common culprit is cue sheet problems. Either the cue sheet wasn't submitted, contains incorrect information (misspelled names, wrong splits, missing publisher data), or hasn't been processed yet. Contact the production company to request a copy of the cue sheet they submitted, then check it matches your PRS registration exactly. Even minor discrepancies can prevent payment.



If the cue sheet is missing, submit it directly to PRS yourself - you have the right to do this even though it's technically the producer's responsibility. For international broadcasts, expect longer delays of 12-24 months as royalties flow through reciprocal agreements. Small broadcasts might also fall below PRS's distribution thresholds. Keep evidence of all broadcasts (screenshots, schedules, your own records) to support any claims, and chase persistently - broadcasters often miss their reporting obligations, but the money is recoverable if you can prove the usage.

### **What do I do if another writer is claiming my song?**

Contact PRS immediately to formally dispute the conflicting claim. They'll freeze all payments on the work until the dispute is resolved, so acting quickly is essential. You'll need to provide evidence of your authorship, which might include original recordings, dated lyrics or demos, registration documents, and witness statements from collaborators or others present during the writing process.

These disputes can arise from honest mistakes - such as songs with identical titles or similar melodies - or from deliberate infringement. PRS has formal procedures for handling disputes, but complex cases may require legal intervention and can take months to resolve. If you have a publisher, they can assist with the dispute process and may have more resources to pursue the matter.

International claims require separate challenges in each territory where the conflict exists. To prevent future issues, always register works promptly after creation and maintain comprehensive documentation of your writing process. This might seem excessive, but having dated evidence readily available can mean the difference between a quick resolution and a protracted legal battle that freezes your income for months.



## How do I track down missing international royalties?

Start by identifying the major territories where your music was used, then check whether your works appear correctly in their local society databases (like ASCAP/BMI for the US, GEMA for Germany, or SACEM for France). International registration problems often stem from translation issues, different title registrations, or missing IPI numbers that prevent societies from matching your works.

If you have a publisher, they should investigate through their sub-publisher network, as local partners are often most effective at resolving territory-specific issues. Without a publisher, you'll need to contact foreign societies directly, though language barriers can make this challenging. Request detailed foreign royalty statements to identify which territories aren't reporting, and consider direct membership in consistently problematic territories. Keep in mind that some international income genuinely takes 2-3 years to flow through the reciprocal system, so maintain careful records of all international uses to track what's truly missing versus simply delayed.

## Why are my streaming royalties lower than expected?

Streaming generates significantly lower per-use payments than traditional broadcasts, which often surprises songwriters. Your royalties are calculated by dividing your total streams by all UK streams, then multiplying by PRS's total streaming revenue and your ownership share. This means a million streams might generate far less than a single BBC Radio 1 play.

The type of streaming also matters enormously - ad-supported streams typically pay only 10-20% of what subscription streams generate. International streams add another layer of complexity, as they're reported through local societies and can take years to arrive. Remember too that PRS only handles performing rights; mechanical royalties from streaming are usually handled separately by publishers through direct deals or ICE.

Many writers also underestimate how co-writer splits dilute their income - a 25% share of a four-way split means you're only earning from a quarter of already



modest payments. While individual streaming payments seem small, they can aggregate into meaningful income with sufficient volume. Focus on building your streaming presence across multiple platforms rather than fixating on individual payment rates.

### **What happens if I'm credited incorrectly on a recording?**

Incorrect recording credits won't automatically affect your PRS royalties since these are based on your work registration rather than recording metadata. However, incorrect credits can impact other revenue streams and should be corrected quickly to protect all your rights.

Start by contacting the distributor or label to request corrections for digital releases. Most digital platforms update metadata regularly, though some like Spotify allow direct credit corrections while others require label involvement. For physical releases, ensure future pressings include correct credits. You'll also need to update any broadcast cue sheets that might have pulled the incorrect information from the recording.

Beyond PRS royalties, incorrect credits can affect mechanical royalty payments, neighbouring rights income if you're also a performer, international collections where societies rely on recording data, and sync opportunities where music supervisors search by artist names. Document the correct credits everywhere and maintain evidence for potential disputes. While fixing credits can be time-consuming, it's essential for protecting your long-term income and reputation. Always credit collaborators accurately from the start to prevent these issues.

## **MEDIA COMPOSER SPECIFIC FAQS**

### **How do I ensure proper registration for library music tracks?**

Library music requires meticulous registration practices because of the high volume of tracks and potential for confusion. Register each track individually with clear, unique titles that will help identify them years later when they appear on cue sheets. If your library uses specific prefixes or suffixes, include these



consistently. Instrumental and vocal versions of the same track need separate registrations as they'll be reported differently on cue sheets.

The timing of registration is crucial - ideally, register tracks immediately upon delivery to the library, before they enter circulation. Many libraries handle registration themselves, but you should verify their process and ensure their registrations match your own records. This is particularly important for international registration, which typically flows through the library's sub-publisher network.

Maintain your own comprehensive database of all library tracks including their titles, registration dates, and which libraries represent them. Be especially careful with re-titled tracks (where libraries add their own identifiers) to avoid duplicate claims that can freeze royalties. Clear agreements about who handles registration will prevent gaps that could cost you years of income.

### **What's the difference between PRS royalties for a TV theme versus background music?**

TV themes generate substantially higher royalties than background music due to several factors. Themes are considered prominent use, they air repeatedly with every episode, and they receive higher point values in PRS's distribution system. Main title themes earn the most, followed by end credit themes, with background music earning the least per minute of use.

The value difference is significant - a main title theme for a primetime show on a major channel will earn considerably more than the same duration of background music. This is because themes are integral to a programme's identity and are heard by every viewer, while background music serves a supporting role. International format sales make themes particularly valuable, as they generate royalties in every territory where the show airs.

For media composers, this means that securing theme commissions can provide steady income for years through repeats and syndication. Background music



earnings depend more on the volume of music you produce and how frequently it's used. Regardless of the type of music, cue sheet accuracy is key - ensure your music is correctly categorized as theme, featured, or background to receive appropriate payment. Some composers also negotiate additional theme bonuses outside the PRS system as part of their commission agreements.

### **How do buyout deals affect my CMO royalties?**

The term "buyout" causes significant confusion in media composition, particularly regarding performing rights. In the UK and Europe, performing rights cannot be assigned or bought out - they remain with the writer regardless of contract language. Even contracts stating "all rights" or "complete buyout" don't override your PRS membership rules, and you'll continue to receive your writer's share of performance royalties.

What can be bought out are synchronization rights and mechanical rights, and sometimes the publisher's share of performance royalties may be directed to the production company or library. The key is understanding what rights you're actually selling. US buyouts operate differently and can be more comprehensive, though they only affect US income.

Before signing any buyout agreement, clarify that performing rights remain yours and negotiate your fee accordingly. Some commissioners unfamiliar with music rights may insist on complete buyouts - in these cases, explain the legal position or negotiate a higher upfront fee to compensate for any publishing rights you're granting. Always seek legal advice if contracts seem to contradict your CMO membership rights, as protecting your ongoing royalty streams is crucial for sustainable income.

### **Should I register individual cues or complete works?**

The decision between registering individual cues or complete works depends on how the music will be used and reported. Best practice is to register complete works (such as full episode scores or film soundtracks) as single works, then break



them down into individual cues on the cue sheet. However, significant themes that may have life beyond the original production should always be registered separately.

For background music suites, you can register them as a single work and then specify individual cue timings on cue sheets. Short stings and brief transitional cues might not merit individual registration unless they're likely to be reused. Library music is different - since tracks will be used independently, each needs its own registration to ensure accurate tracking and payment.

Consider the administrative burden against the potential benefits. Some composers register everything individually for precise tracking, while others find this creates unmanageable databases. Production companies often prefer complete work registration as it simplifies their cue sheet preparation. International societies may handle cue-level detail differently, so find a balance that ensures accurate tracking without overwhelming your administrative capacity. The key is consistency - whatever approach you choose, apply it systematically across your catalogue.

## CLASSICAL COMPOSER SPECIFIC FAQs

### **How are arrangements of public domain works handled by CMOs?**

Arrangements of public domain works can earn royalties, but only if they demonstrate sufficient originality to create a new copyright. PRS assesses each case individually, looking for creative contributions beyond simple transcription. A straightforward piano reduction of an orchestral work likely won't qualify, but a creative reharmonization or substantial reworking would.

When registering arrangements, clearly mark them as "arrangement of [original work] by [original composer]" and document your creative contributions. For performance royalties, successful arrangements earn the full royalty as if they were original works. However, mechanical rights are more complex - in some



territories, you may need to split royalties with the original work's publisher if it remains in copyright there, even if it's public domain in the UK.

International treatment varies significantly, so understanding the copyright status in different territories is crucial. Some publishers incorrectly claim arrangement rights, so maintain clear documentation of your creative input. Commission agreements for arrangements should explicitly address who owns the arrangement rights and how they'll be registered. This clarity prevents disputes and ensures you receive appropriate recognition and payment for your creative work.

### **What constitutes a 'serious music' work for PRS distribution?**

PRS operates special distributions for classical and serious music that recognize these works' unique cultural value and performance contexts. These distributions use different point values that reflect musical complexity and significance rather than purely commercial metrics.

To qualify, works typically need to be performed in concert halls and follow classical forms such as symphonies, concertos, chamber music, or other through-composed pieces. Duration is often a factor, with most qualifying works lasting 10 minutes or more. The registration should include full instrumentation details to support the serious music classification. This category encompasses traditional classical music, contemporary classical composition, and often jazz performed in concert settings. Even film music can qualify when performed as concert works rather than with the film.

These distributions happen annually and provide important supplementary income for classical composers whose works may not generate the broadcast or streaming plays of commercial music. When negotiating commissions, it's worth specifying that works should be registered for serious music distributions. This ensures they're valued appropriately within the PRS system and receive the enhanced point values that reflect their artistic significance.



## How do CMOs handle commissioned works for orchestras?

Commission fees and performing rights royalties are entirely separate income streams. When you're commissioned to write for an orchestra, the commission fee is your payment for creating the work, while PRS royalties provide ongoing income every time it's performed. In the UK, composers retain performing rights unless explicitly waived in writing, which is rare and should be strongly resisted.

Orchestras pay PRS for licences to perform your work, and you'll receive royalties for the premiere and all subsequent performances. International tours generate additional foreign royalties through reciprocal agreements, while broadcasts or recordings create further income streams. Register commissioned works immediately with full orchestration details, and include information about the commission in your registration to help track performances.

For works with multiple movements, you can register them as a single work or separately depending on whether they're likely to be performed independently. Remember that publisher hire fees for performance materials are separate from performing rights and provide another income stream. Well-commissioned orchestral works can generate income for decades through repeat performances, making it crucial to ensure your contracts protect these ongoing rights rather than trading them for a higher upfront fee.

## Are rehearsals and educational performances licensed?

The distinction between public and educational performances determines whether PRS licences apply. Closed rehearsals without an audience don't require licensing, but open rehearsals where the public can attend do generate royalties. This includes professional orchestras' open rehearsals, which are treated as public performances.

Educational institutions operate under PRS's Educational License scheme, which provides blanket coverage at reduced rates for performances within academic settings. This covers school concerts, student recitals in university halls, and curriculum-based performances. However, when students perform in public



venues outside the institution, standard licensing applies. Masterclasses and workshops are usually exempt as they're considered teaching rather than performance, as are examination performances.

Youth orchestras present an interesting case - their performances in proper concert halls require standard licences despite their educational nature. The key question is whether an event is genuinely educational or essentially a public performance. Even though educational performances may generate minimal royalties, it's important for emerging composers to register all their works regardless of performance context, as this establishes their presence in the PRS system and ensures they receive royalties as their careers develop.

## IVORS ACADEMY RESOURCES

[On demand content – Andrea Czapary Martin in conversation](#)

[Career guide - Introduction to collective licensing](#)

[Career guide - Rights and revenues](#)

[Career guide - Licensing](#)

[Career guide - What is PRS?](#)

[Career guide - What is PPL?](#)

[Career guide - What is MCPS?](#)

[Career guide - Neighbouring rights 1 - simple UK guide](#)

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