

MPA response: BBC New music radio stations Public Interest Test consultation

The Music Publishers Association (MPA) is the representative body for the UK music publishing industry. We provide representation, support and training to over 95% of the country's major and independent music publishers and represent over 95% of the UK's song-rights.

The MPA Group also includes the Mechanical Copyright Protection Society (MCPS), which is responsible for licensing the mechanical rights of composers, songwriters, and music publishers when their music is reproduced as physical products or made available for digital download or streaming.

The MCPS has enjoyed an almost 100-year partnership with the BBC, providing the public service broadcaster with a blanket license for its radio channels in the UK (e.g. BBC1, BBC2, Radio 3, BBC 6 Music) as well as its on-demand service, BBC Sounds. The MPA's members also hire performing materials for performances by BBC orchestras and choirs and license the use of their repertoire of dramatic-musical works, such as operas and ballet music, under tariffs which are brokered by the MPA under a long-standing protocol with the BBC. This symbiotic relationship has boosted the UK music industry and helped the BBC's deliver value to its audiences. The MPA and MCPS welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation. As our members are licensors to the BBC inclusive of mechanical rights, grand rights, hire etc. in musical and associated literary works, we note that all responses to this consultation are subject to commercial negotiations and the costs associated with the use of our members' rights in the UK market.

What do you think about the potential public value of our proposals for the launch of new music radio stations on DAB+, including the extent to which our proposal contributes to the BBC's mission to serve all audience through the provision of high quality and distinctive output and services which informs, educates and entertains?

The MPA believes that the proposals will deliver great value for the public purse. The proposed £3.1 million per year budget for the four new stations (excluding the additional music rights costs) is a relatively modest cost, and a small fraction of the overall BBC's budget for radio. The MPA are pleased to help support the BBC as a willing licensee that acknowledges the proper value of music in its programming.

The BBC's Radio 3 Extension proposal is particularly welcomed by the MPA. The UK has the largest number (per capita) of orchestras, youth orchestras and opera houses worldwide, excluding Japan, the USA and only just falling short of Germany¹. The UK is a world leader in classical music and the broadcast of classical music by the BBC is central to the UK's strong position in this international market.

¹ Research into the classical music ecosystem, BOP consulting (May 2022) <https://abo.org.uk/assets/files/News-and-Press/BBC-Classical-Music-Review-BOP-Consulting-March-May-2022.pdf?v=1678811834>

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To help broaden the audience of classical music in the UK, the MPA also recommends that the BBC radio 3 Extension targets not only those aged 35-54 but also those under 35.

According to survey published in December 2023 by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO), under 35-year-olds are more likely to listen to orchestral music than their parents. The survey also found a growing interest in classical music from young audiences aged 25 and under. Younger audiences are developing a keen interest in classical music due to its usage in film soundtracks and video games.

The BBC Radio 3 Extension presents a golden opportunity for the BBC to build on this trend and help more young audiences discover classical music. No other broadcaster has the reach or influence the BBC has in classical music, and due to its size and funding structure the BBC is uniquely placed to act as a point of entry for younger audiences seeking to explore classical music.

What do you think about the benefit to audiences who will listen to the stations, as well as wider potential social and cultural impacts?

The BBC's proposals to play a third of new music on BBC Dance and 15 per cent of new music on the BBC Radio 3 Extension, will give audiences access to new emerging musical talent and in turn help break new artists, songwriters and composers.

Despite record number of number of songs being released daily (100,000 new tracks are uploaded to streaming services every), the number of new music among the UK's top 'selling' singles and albums is decreasing. And despite the growth of music streaming, radio remains the most popular source for music discovery among all audiences in the UK.

The BBC, by virtue of its funding structure, provides audiences with exposure to new talent in a way that commercial radio does not. According to PRS for Music, 149,059 unique works were played across all BBC radio stations in 2023. 77% of these works were not played on commercial radio.

In giving oxygen to new talent, BBC radio has broken many new artists and helped the composers and songwriters associated with them become better known over time. In the arena of classical music, where much new repertoire is written to commission, Radio 3 is an important commissioner of new works. The BBC Radio 3 Extension has potential to widen the breadth of works which the BBC commissions.

It is therefore disappointing that only two of the four proposed new stations will provide any new content. Both the BBC Radio 1 Extension and BBC Radio 2 Extension will be focussed entirely on music from previous decades and provide no new musical content. Last year's cuts to BBC introducing make support for new music even more pressing.

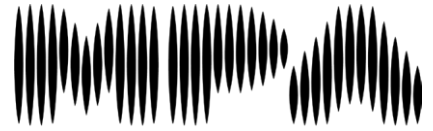
The MPA recommends that the BBC commits to at least a third of tracks across each of the four new stations being new music.

What impact (positive or negative) do you think our proposal for new music radio stations on DAB+ might have on fair and effective competition on commercial radio stations providing music content on radio?

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The MPA believes that the BBC and the commercial sector deliver distinct and complementary services to radio audiences. BBC radio provides output that the commercial radio sector often lacks the ability or willingness to supply. This includes live concerts, extended playlists, highlighting new acts, and documentary and current affairs across its music services.

The commercial sector should not be negatively impacted by the BBC offering a range of music services, as the new content offered by the BBC is sufficiently unique.

Are there any steps you think we could take to minimise any potential negative effects on fair and effective competition or to promote potential positive impacts?

To minimise any potential negative effects on fair and effective competition the BBC should increase the allocation of new tracks per year. This would protect the commercial sector by reducing the risk of directly competing with them for the same audience and content. It will also improve the BBC's offering by allow for broader selection of music and support the growth of emerging British talent.

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