

PRS

For a while, we unfortunately didn't have strong oversight or control over our PRS requirements and responsibilities. However, Jackie Stopyra and I have now taken responsibility for this, and after a couple of in-depth meetings with our PRS account manager, we believe we finally have a solid handle on the situation.

There have been a lot of assumptions and varying understandings, so I've put together a few notes to explain some key terminology, outline the general requirements, and show how we've set things up for PLT to make the process as straightforward as possible for everyone.

The PRS (Performing Right Society) collects royalties for the use of music and other copyrighted works.

By law, we're required to report to PRS any music or other works we play in public. There are quite a few rules, regulations, tariffs, and bits of terminology involved—so I'll aim to explain the key points as clearly as possible.

What do we need to declare?

We need to declare what's known as **OEX music**. OEX stands for **Overture, Entr'acte, and Exit** music—often informally referred to as "*chatter music*." This also includes **curtain music**, played as the curtain rises or falls, including music during the final walk-down at the end of a performance.

Also in this category is **incidental music**—used to guide the audience's emotions (e.g., to create tension, suspense, joy, or fear).

- ◆ **Note:** Both *OEX music* and *incidental music* are heard **only** by the audience, not the characters on stage.

The other main category is **Interpolated music**, which is quite different. This is music that characters on stage can hear and respond to—e.g., a character turns on a radio or plays a record, and others sing or dance along. That's **Interpolated music**, and it must also be declared.

We must declare **all music that is in copyright and registered with PPLPRS**. It's sometimes hard to know what needs to be included, so the simple solution is: **declare everything!** PRS will ignore anything that doesn't apply.

Exceptions

Musicals (including pantos, G&S works, and others) that come with a licensed score **do not need to be declared**.

However, if pieces are **extracted from the score** and used as overture or background music **outside the script**, then they **do** need to be declared.

Similarly, **any music used as an overture or encore** that is not in the script must be declared as it is separately copyrighted.

What counts as "copyrighted"?

This is where things can get tricky!

The copyright on a piece of music or a song written by one person expires **on December 31st, 70 years after the composer's death**. If there's more than one composer, it expires 70 years after the **last** contributor's death.

Someone recently asked me:

"A piece written by Beethoven is definitely out of copyright, right?"

Well... no, **not necessarily!**

A **new arrangement** or a **new recording** starts the clock again:

- A new **arrangement** is copyrighted for 70 years after the **arranger's** death.
- A **recording** is copyrighted for 60 years from the year of 1st publication or its **release date**.
- A **live recording** is protected for **50 years** from the end of the year in which the performance took place, or 70 years if the performance is recorded and published.

And we all thought this was simple...

So, back to the earlier point:

If in doubt—include it and let PRS sort it out!

What does it cost?

We pay a **standard licence fee for OEX music**, which is currently **£13.23 per show** for most performances.

The calculations are a bit arcane—it's based on venue capacity, attendance, number of performances, ticket price, and other factors. (Yes, doing the returns is indeed a bit of a headache!)

Interpolated music is charged differently, and we'll only know the cost once we receive the bill.

Other types of shows (e.g., tribute acts, stand-up comedians with walk-on/off music etc) use **different tariffs**, and for those we submit a full set list as well as other financials.

So why do we need to declare OEX music if there's a set fee?

It's simple:

PPLPRS, after taking their cut, distributes royalties to the artists.

If we don't declare what we've used, they don't know who to credit—and the artists lose out.

Do we declare everything?

Yes is the easy answer! It makes sure we don't miss anything and if it isn't relevant the PRS will ignore it!

What if we only play it for 5 seconds?

This is a common question and one of the common misconceptions that seem to get spread around!

5 seconds, 50 seconds, 5 minutes – it makes no difference! It's someone else's work and they deserve credit (and the cash!!) for it!!

The forms ask for how long a piece is played in each performance and then, through the magic of spreadsheets, it works it out for the full run so you don't have to

How do we declare everything?

There are forms! Different forms are used depending on which tariff applies.

The most common for us is the Theatrical Tariff (Tariff T). However, pantomimes, G&S works, musicals, and some classical shows fall under different tariffs and therefore require different forms.

- The form for Tariff T is blue and can be found on the website under: About Us → All PLT Members.

You'll need to download and print it, then fill it in and give it to either Jackie or me.

- Preferred method: We now also have an online form (also on the website), which gathers all the required information and submits it to us in a format that the PRS will accept. It will also email you a copy for your records—this is our preferred method for obvious reasons!

- The form for the other tariffs is red. We don't yet have an online version for that one, but I'm looking into it!

What about Interpolated Music?



We *should* seek prior permission to use **Interpolated music** before the performance. I use the word “should” deliberately as I know many of us don’t but simply declare it after the event. We did ask the PRS about this and they, too, were rather “vague” on the subject so we may perhaps continue to presume that this will suffice. Until we are told otherwise, of course!

Interpolated music is not covered by our standard licence and will be charged separately.

Any other questions?

Just ask! If we don’t know the answer, we’ll check with our PRS account manager—who is, thankfully, a very helpful chap!

Summary – Preston Little Theatre (Issued 19/05/2025)

What is PRS?

- PRS = Performing Right Society
 - Collects royalties for the use of copyrighted music and works
 - We are legally required to report all public music use
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What Needs to Be Declared?

- **OEX Music** (Overture, Entr'acte, Exit music)
 - Includes curtain and walk-down music
 - Only heard by the audience
 - **Incidental Music**
 - Supports mood/emotion (e.g., suspense, joy)
 - Not heard by the characters
 - **Interpolated Music**
 - Heard by characters (e.g., radio played on stage)
 - Always needs to be declared
 - **Best practice:** Declare *all* music to avoid missing anything
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Exceptions

- Musicals, pantos, and G&S works with a licensed score do **not** need to be declared
 - **BUT:** Music used separately (e.g., overture/encore not exactly as in the script) **must** be declared
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What Counts as Copyrighted?

- Standard copyright = 70 years after the last creator's death
 - **New arrangement** = 70 years from arranger's death
 - **New recording** = 60 years from release
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- Rule of thumb: **If unsure, include it!**
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What Does It Cost?

- OEX music licence: **£13.23 per show** (as of now)
 - Cost based on venue size, ticket price, number of shows, etc.
 - **Interpolated music** is charged separately after billing
 - **Tribute acts/comedians:** Require a full set list and use different tariffs
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Why Do We Declare It All?

- To ensure royalties reach the correct artists
- PRS can't credit anyone if we don't tell them what was used