



Commissioning Brief



Commissioning Brief No. 31234

Sunday Feature

For BBC Radio 3 for Sept 2027- Sept 2028

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SECTION A: EDITORIAL OPPORTUNITY

Commissioning Brief ID / Title: 31234: Sunday Feature

Commissioning Editor	Matthew Dodd
Commissioning Contact	Matthew Dodd/David Ireland
Commissioning Brief Title	Sunday Feature
Network	Radio 3
Guide Price	£9,500-£11,500 per programme, depending on scope
Genre	Factual – Arts, Culture and the Media
Duration	44'
No. of Episodes	c.26
Transmission Period	September 2027 – September 2028
Slot Day	Sunday
Slot Time	1900-1945
Production Location	No restriction
Commissioning Round	2027/28 Round 2 - Speech Programming

Important Points to Note:

- All proposals must be submitted via **PiCoS** and will go through **production eligibility checks**.
- The **Production Eligibility Questionnaire** can be found in **Appendix 1**, but only needs to be completed if you do not already make regular speech output for the network. This is the first part of your submission that the BBC will consider as part of the process.
- **Short Proposals** and your responses to the **Production Questionnaire** must be submitted via **PiCoS** before the deadline at **noon on Tuesday 17th November 2026**.

More information relating to all commissioning briefs and rounds, regardless of Network can be found on the [‘Pitching Ideas’](#) page of the Radio Commissioning Website.



1. About BBC Radio 3

Radio 3 is the BBC's classical music station, also offering a range of broader cultural programming to entertain and absorb audiences. Classical music leads its daytime schedule, complemented by a host of live concerts and live performance every day. Alongside this are distinctive programmes on jazz, world music, as well as documentaries and speech programmes.

Network Editorial Strategy & Objectives

Cultural programming is a central part of Radio 3's mission.

- We believe classical music is for everyone. We aim to create an inclusive, welcoming space for all listeners that brings people together through shared experience and understanding, providing a place of inspiration, and a means to navigate a complex world.
- We pride ourselves on being a commissioner of distinctive classical music programmes, shining a new light on well-loved artistic works and investing in new talent.
- We are one of the most significant commissioners of contemporary classical music anywhere in the world and the biggest broadcaster of live classical concerts including the BBC Proms.

2. The Editorial Opportunity

Radio 3's documentary is a stand-out 45 minutes in the station's weekly programmes. A moment when the audience stops and pauses to be engrossed in a rich piece of storytelling about music and the arts.

We're looking for classical music stories with a difference – not only biographies of musicians but also imaginative, unconventional and unexpected treatments of individuals. We welcome ideas on jazz, world and folk – and the arts, science and history, but primarily they should explore the way those subjects relate to music or are seen through classical music's perspective.

We are seeking programmes that achieve several of the following:

- Create gold-standard, in-depth documentaries about classical music and culture – of interest to all listeners, not just specialists
- Use human stories as an engrossing way to understand music
- Create original and surprising perspectives on a broad range of music and cultural issues
- Build intellectually stimulating treatments with sophisticated insight



- Act as a showcase for the skills of documentary-makers and BBC music stations, with award-winning programmes
- Offer a high-point for anniversaries and special seasons on BBC Radio 3

The Sunday Feature's Style

- Every programme should be an aural treat. Full of texture. Sophisticated mixes. Delightful scripting. Bold use of music. Authoritative, but a pleasure to listen to, not just a source of information
- Presenters are rarely the key expert in their field. They have a different relationship with the topic. They should feel like they are sharing their experience, offering their enthusiasms and recommendations but not lecturing, and be responsive to guest contributors.
- Storytelling: The best programmes have been those that are built around a single strong story: with drama, intriguing characters, jeopardy, tension, emotional range, and make full use of the 44 minutes to take listeners on a multi-layered journey. Please avoid analytical overviews of a topic or surveys of a single theme.
- We are looking for rich treatments that get Radio 3 outside the studio and the concert hall and create a whole sound world for each programme: location recordings, personal testimony eye-witness accounts; archive, beautiful sound mixes – and more.
- Originality, surprise and relevance are vital. This is not the place on Radio 3 for the textbook guide to classical musicians or art movements. We need to know what makes this idea stand out from the crowd and appeal now.
- The audience is broadly interested in classical music and the arts – but producers and presenters shouldn't presume any knowledge or be complacent about the audience's engagement. Each edition needs to be interesting by virtue of the actual programme and not assume the audience will stay listening because of the topic.
- Contributors to programmes should be diverse in background, age, voice and opinions. The best programmes avoid a plethora of interviews in the offices of experts.



- Every subject needs to be a rich seam for the programme to mine. It needs historical resonance and intellectual layers, and crucially to provide critical assessment, not storytelling alone. This is not the place for promoting this year's trends or subjects that run out of steam after 28 minutes.

The range of subjects that might be covered could include:

- Cultural biography. Programmes that put the case for re-appraising the life and work of musically influential individuals or groups of people from the recent and distant past. We are interested in (i) new perspectives on key figures – female and male - in classical music and the arts (ii) the story of less well-known composers or performers who deserve listeners' attention and who are now generating broader interest.
- We're always interested in programmes about twentieth-century figures; women and men from a range of backgrounds who have been overlooked, but whose significance is now coming into its own. These programmes often make great use of first-person testimony and audio archive
- Cultural journalism – we're looking for more up-to-date stories that reflect contemporary pre-occupations in classical music.
- Global musical culture – explored with insight and introducing us to influential people, places and movements around the world. We're keen for more ideas from outside Western Europe and America.
- The history of music and culture around the UK, away from more familiar centres of cultural activity. We're very keen to see more proposals in this category.
- Offbeat, quirky and unexpected features about a piece of music, a theme, or a work of art, with good reason to be re-appraised. We aim to be open-minded about opportunities so please do try things out on us! These can lead to some of the most memorable programmes in this slot.
- Musical anniversaries remain a key source of commissions – not just birth centenaries, but the anniversaries of first performances of classic works, publications, famous concerts etc.
- Strong series ideas, which will act as stand out moments on Radio 3. These will probably be 2 - 4 programmes and will usually mean one presenter across the whole series although different presenters bringing personal perspectives to a single theme might also be considered. We're looking for more ideas that have this sort of ambitious reach of subject.

We welcome ideas which link a documentary to other parts of the Radio 3 schedule.

Recent Highlights:

(Listen to get a flavour of the kind of programmes we've been commissioning:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006tnwp>)



Shostakovich and Us: The comedian, actor and keen amateur musician Nick Mohammed explores how British audiences responded to the music of the Russian composer Shostakovich during his lifetime. Part of a three-part series that included Bartok and Us, Strauss and Us.

One Singular Sensation: Katie Derham celebrates the 50th anniversary of a musical theatre classic. Behind the sparkle and the high kicks, 'A Chorus Line' was a revolution that revived Broadway. Katie listens back to the original recordings of the renowned workshop sessions that gave birth to the musical – with the help of original cast members.

James Blades - Pandemonium of the One-Man Band: In a fictional recreation of one of his lectures, we take a journey through the life and work of James Blades, one of the most accomplished and highly regarded percussionists of the 20th century. James supplied the gong-strokes for the J. Arthur Rank Organisation and the 'V'-for Victory drum-beat for BBC radio in WWII. He subsequently collaborated with Benjamin Britten, creating unique percussion effects for his operas.

Requiems for the Firestorm - Dresden's Musical Aftermath: Historian Katja Hoyer explores 80 years of requiems, motets and berceuses forged in the aftermath of Dresden's fiery destruction during WWII and the music's complex interaction with memory politics.

The Waltz Paradox: Johann Strauss II expert John Suchet unlocks the complex makeup of the Waltz King in his 200th anniversary year. His most famous works are perhaps The Blue Danube Waltz, The Kaiser Waltz, Wein, Weib und Gesang, Die Fledermaus, Tales from Vienna Woods. But this man who wrote over 140 shiny, glittering, happy Waltzes, and who was largely responsible for an unprecedented dance craze that swept through Europe, paradoxically was in fact a lifelong hypochondriac whose life was plagued by phobias, pessimism, melancholia, an intensely morbid fear of death, and who always composed at night.

The Artificial Composer - Music and AI: Composer Tarik O'Regan explores the fast-growing field of AI music creation in Silicon Valley, near where he lives in California. Will he ultimately be replaced by AI, or can he employ it as a creative tool? Tarik takes a personal journey around the city he now calls home, riding a driverless taxi to talk to figures from both the tech and classical music worlds.

Finding Florence Mills: Allyson Devenish goes in search of Florence Mills. In the 1920s, Florence Mills was probably one of the most famous women alive and certainly the first black international celebrity, and yet she has faded from the collective cultural memory.



This is partly because there are no recordings of her: no 78s of her singing nor film of her dancing, and she's almost entirely absent from histories of jazz. The pianist Allyson Devenish doesn't think Florence Mills has been remembered or celebrated in the way that she deserves and sets out to look for her in the traces that she left: the memories of people that knew her, the accounts of her performance and the music written especially for her.

The Music Man for Africa: Leo Sarkisian created Voice of America's acclaimed show Music Time in Africa. He recorded hundreds of musicians and helped newly independent African states find their musical voice. Maria Margaronis immerses herself in Leo's life and adventures, his double life as broadcaster and US government ambassador'- and his extraordinary collection of African music, now archived at the University of Michigan.

The Mysteries of Gwen John: Poet Gwyneth Lewis explores the mysteries surrounding the Welsh painter Gwen John - an uncompromising artist who challenged convention and led a strange and fascinating life

Afterwords: Elgar Howarth: One of the five musicians who constituted the 'Manchester School' in the 1950s (with composers Harrison Birtwistle, Alexander Goehr and Peter Maxwell Davies, and pianist John Ogdon), Elgar - or, widely, Gary - Howarth was a distinguished trumpet player with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and, notably, the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble before becoming a hugely respected conductor, composer and arranger. Musical colleagues together with his son Patrick reflect on Gary's humble origins and international achievements

King of the Beggars - The Music of Billy Waters: Actor and author Paterson Joseph explores the extraordinary life and legacy of Billy Waters – Britain's first popular black musician – who was famous as the 'King of the Beggars' in the Regency era but who died in poverty busking outside the Adelphi Theatre, which hosted the hit musical that made his name.

Whitman and Vaughan Williams: The composer Ralph Vaughan Williams was a lifelong devotee of the American poet Walt Whitman, carrying a volume of his work to the First World War and setting his words across the course of three decades. Indeed Whitman featured heavily in two of Vaughan Williams' most important choral works - 'A Sea Symphony' and 'Dona Nobis Pacem' - as well as numerous smaller pieces. Laura Barton sets out to find out what it was about Whitman's work that so appealed to the composer, exploring the various ways in which the poet's expansive style and worldview both complemented and inspired Vaughan Williams' approach.



Keepers of the Light: James Crawford explores how Robert Louis Stevenson rejected his family's lighthouse dynasty for literature, and how the sea and its lights continued to shape his imagination. Keepers of the Light explores the sometimes uneasy boundary between art and engineering, and how one extraordinary family expressed a shared impulse to create in very different forms.

3. Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity and Inclusion is a priority for all of us. We want BBC Music demonstrably to be the best organisation in the audio sector to work for and with; one which reflects the diversity of the UK; and where people feel welcomed, appreciated, respected, and can be themselves and produce their best work.

Radio 3 is dedicated to improving diversity and inclusion across the station through a long-term strategy which will lead to an even richer musical and cultural offering. Radio 3 monitors representation across the network and has launched several creative initiatives on diversity – including our partnership projects with the Arts and Humanities Research Council to support research on and performance of composers from diverse backgrounds, and the Open Music scheme designed to bring creatives and musicians of all genres, styles and backgrounds from across the UK to the BBC.

The station is integral to BBC Radio's Diversity and Inclusion commitment, looking for new approaches to evolve listener engagement which will broaden the appeal of the network to new audiences. It also contributes to a more diverse and inclusive classical music industry as a whole, as well as other genres of music and culture. We are interested to hear your inclusive content ideas and how they might be expressed across the music played, stories told and voices heard. You may wish to consider how your company aligns with the BBC's D&I Commissioning Commitments, or could do so in the future (See Appendix 2).

4. Sustainability

The BBC is committed to informing and inspiring listeners about how they, as individuals, can take steps towards more sustainable living.

Your proposal should consider how the editorial and production methods contribute towards the BBC's Net Zero strategy – you can read about this [here](#).

Where appropriate sustainability themes should be woven into the editorial – either implicitly or explicitly. Unsustainable portrayals should be avoided in favour of showing more sustainable practices, e.g. if the narrative allows maybe a character takes a train journey instead of a flight, or presenters use re-usable cups instead of disposable ones.



The BBC Radio Commissioning site contains inspiration across genres: [Sustainability In Programme Editorial](#)

Production methods should demonstrate good practice – minimising negative environmental impacts (e.g. from energy, waste, travel) and where possible making a positive contribution.

For further information please discuss sustainability with the Commissioning Editor, and see our Radio Commissioning site [here](#).

5. Key Deliverables

Audio four weeks ahead of broadcast; Proteus description that is designed for BBC Sounds; readiness to co-operate with BBC Radio 3 Comms and Marketing teams.

Music is central to these programmes, and the proposals commissioned in this slot will need to align with the BBC's music policy guidelines for availability beyond 30 days on BBC Sounds. The policy is available here [Using Music in BBC Speech Audio Content](#). The commissioning editor is keen to ensure those music guidelines work effectively for your proposal, so please don't hold back or restrict the scope of any idea because you are uncertain of what can be achieved within them. If your short proposal is selected for development, the music element can then be discussed.

6. Success Measures

Clear audience impact; strong on-demand performance on BBC Sounds – particularly for over-45s; critical and press attention; Reinforcement of The Sunday Feature as an appointment to listen.

7. Compliance and Editorial Guidelines

You will be required to deliver programmes that are in line with the BBC's Editorial Guidelines and be able to adapt to the BBC's changing editorial and business needs during the period of the commission.



SECTION B: PROCESS, ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION

STAGE 1: Short Proposal and Shortlisting

Step 1: Production Experience

- Review the Production Experience Questionnaire section in Appendix 1.
- Enter your responses in the 'Production Experience' section in PiCoS.
- The questionnaire is designed to allow the BBC to understand more about your company and your experience of producing Radio 3-style programmes.
- The evaluation team (see full list below in Section 2), will review all production questionnaires against the editorial brief set out in Section A before evaluating the Short Proposal.
- Note: your short proposal may be declined at this stage if the information provided indicates you do not meet the criteria, so please answer these questions carefully.

Step 2: Short Proposal

- Suppliers who performed best on their production questionnaire (by best demonstrating their experience and capability in producing (inset network/department) style programmes) will have their Short Proposal assessed and a shortlist will be compiled.
- Your Short Proposal should be no more than 250 words and summarise your specific ideas. (PiCoS will allow you to enter more words but you should still stay within the word count for this commissioning round in order for your proposal to be fully considered) The proposal should demonstrate your ability to produce the programme, and answer the editorial objectives and other requirements as set out in the Editorial Opportunity.
- Enter your proposal in the 'Short Proposal' section in PiCoS before the deadline at noon on **Tuesday 17th November 2026**.

Step 3: Shortlisting notification

You will be notified of the outcome of Stages 1 & 2. Shortlisted suppliers will be asked to submit a Full Proposal. No feedback will be provided for unsuccessful proposals at this stage.



STAGE 2: Full Proposal

Step 1: We may issue further relevant programme production information to all producers reaching this stage. If sensitive information is being released then producers will be asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA).

Step 2: Producers will be invited to provide Full Proposals, via PiCoS, responding to this commissioning brief, which includes all the elements outlined in Section D (“Full Proposals”). For guidance, your Full Proposal should not exceed **two sides of A4** when printed using Arial font, size 11. (Any scripts or samples can be in addition).

Step 3: Producers will be offered the opportunity to discuss the programme brief with Commissioning Editor, Arts prior to submitting their Full Proposals.

Step 4: We will evaluate all full proposals against the editorial brief, as given above, and commission those we feel most successfully fulfil the brief and help to make up the most varied and balanced season of The Essay.

Step 5: Producers who are successful will be notified on PiCoS. Feedback for rejected proposals will be also be given here. Further feedback can be requested at a later stage.

Note: At any stage of the process, we may need to come back to you to seek clarification. Your answers will be factored into the evaluation process as appropriate.

STAGE 3: Commission Awarded and Contract Signed

THE EVALUATION TEAM

The following people may be involved in the evaluation of your proposal at various stages:

Sam Jackson, Controller, Radio 3

Matthew Dodd, Radio 3 Commissioning Editor, Radio 3

David Ireland, Senior Planning Manager, Radio 3

Subject matter experts (e.g. production experts, network management, diversity, finance, etc.) may also be consulted.



SECTION C: THE COMMISSIONING TIMETABLE

The commissioning process for this opportunity consists of a number of stages, as set out in the timetable below:

Stage	Timings	Activities
Launch	Thursday 8th October 2026	Publication of commissioning brief documentation and round opens in PiCoS.
Short Proposals and shortlisting	Noon on Tuesday 17th November 2026	Deadline for Short Proposals to be submitted via PiCoS.
	Thursday 10th December 2026	Suppliers shortlisted, notified of outcomes and asked to prepare Full Proposals.
Full Proposals and shortlisting	14th December 2026 – 20th January 2027	Opportunity to discuss commissioning brief with Commissioners prior to submitting Full Proposals.
	Noon on Thursday 21st January 2027	Deadline for Full Proposals to be submitted via PiCoS. Evaluation panel shortlists Full Proposals.
Conditional Commissions offered	Late February 2027	Commissioning decisions made, subject to contract. Editorial specifications agreed. Feedback submitted on PiCoS.

We will assess your proposal according to this timetable. **Late submissions cannot be accepted.**

If you have any questions about this commissioning brief that need answering before you submit your Short Proposal, please ensure you email them to david.ireland@bbc.co.uk by 12th November 2026 at the latest.



SECTION D: FULL PROPOSALS AND REFERENCE INFORMATION

Please refer to this [important information](#) on the Radio commissioning website, regarding submission of your full proposal, including guidance on how to set out your budget.

Proposals must be submitted in accordance with the requirements contained in this commissioning brief and on the commissioning website. Proposals not complying may be rejected by the Commissioner whose decision in this matter will be final.

All the information required should be included in the two pages of your proposal (plus any supporting information).

The BBC reserves the right at any time prior to award of a commission, and without incurring any liability to the affected suppliers, to accept or reject any proposal, or to annul the commissioning process, rejecting all proposals.

This title will be commissioned under the [BBC Audio Terms of Trade](#).

More information relating to all commissioning briefs and rounds, regardless of station, can be found on the [Pitching ideas](#) page of the Radio commissioning website.



APPENDIX 1: Production Eligibility & Experience

Guidance

The Production Eligibility Questionnaire is the first part of your submission that the BBC will consider as part of the process.

Once completed, please copy and paste your responses into the ‘**Production experience**’ section of the Create Proposal page in PiCoS – as per the screen-shot below.

Eligibility

Production experience

i Tell us about your relevant experience, responding to the questions on the brief

1000 words remaining

B *I* U   

Note: The answers given in response to the above questions will only be considered during Stage 1 of the commissioning process. If you are shortlisted and invited to submit a Full Proposal, you may wish to consider repeating some, or all of the information given, in your Full Proposal.

Questionnaire

Complete Part 1 **ONLY** if you plan to submit a full proposal as part of a partnership.

Part 1: Partnerships

Please list each partnership and describe the responsibilities each partner will take.

[Insert details]

Please indicate the lead company with whom the BBC will contract.

[Insert details]



Please include the key personnel responsible for the production and delivery of the programme and details of the partnering company they are currently contracted to.

[Insert details]

You MUST complete this section:

Part 2: Production Eligibility & Experience

In no more than 100 words per question, please outline your relevant production experience, using recent examples, in the following areas:

2.1 We require a production base with relevant experience and staffing depth in national music-radio production, particularly within classical music – both studio-based and in the live event/OB environment.

[Insert details]

2.2 We require a production base with relevant ‘production team’ experience of producing a non-mainstream music radio programme, with strong current relationships with record labels and artists, as well as an understanding of the BBC Archive.

[Insert details]

2.3 We require a production base with an understanding of the importance of multi-platform content, and recent company/production team experience of producing engaging content for online and social platforms.

[Insert details]

2.4 We require a production base with relevant production team experience of presenter management to the level required and the ability to build those relationships quickly and effectively.

[Insert details]

2.5 This programme airs outside normal working hours, so we are particularly interested in hearing how any unexpected absence from the production team would be managed at short notice.

[Insert details]



APPENDIX 2: Diversity & Inclusion

We want BBC Music to be the best organisation in the audio sector to work with and for - with an inclusive culture, diverse teams and representative programmes. That's why, across radio and television, we are prioritising £80m annually of our commissioning budget on commissions that meet our criteria for diverse and inclusive content.

Programmes must meet two of the three criteria to count towards the commitment:

- Diverse stories and portrayal on-air: Representing all audiences around the UK
- Diverse Production Leadership: Influential roles off-screen or off-air involved in shaping and making programmes for the BBC
- Diverse Company Leadership: Senior roles involved in shaping and leading production companies making programmes for the BBC

There will be opportunities throughout the commissioning process to discuss how programme-makers and suppliers are meeting the criteria. This will not affect whether or not your commission is accepted, and our commissioning teams will be on hand if you need any further support or advice. It is important to note that this commitment is not a commissioning criteria, but rather a way for us to invest a proportion of our existing commissioning budget to increase representation both on and off air.

The full definitions supporting each priority can be found [here](#) and some FAQs [here](#).

