

Musician - Classical

Classical musicians play a musical instrument as a soloist or as part of a musical ensemble or orchestra. They perform live to an audience or record music.

The Work

You could be:

- playing in an orchestra or smaller group, or maybe as a soloist — directed by a conductor
- performing live after many hours of rehearsal — actual performances take up only a small part of your time
- spending long hours in the studio in recording sessions
- practising regularly to keep up your skills and learn new music
- looking after and tuning your instrument or equipment
- often playing with more than one orchestra or group of musicians at a time to make a living
- taking part in education or outreach programmes to take music into the community
- going on tour, performing in places around the country or the world
- getting help from your agent to find work and attending auditions.

Pay

The figures below are only a guide. Actual pay rates may vary depending on:

- whether you have a permanent position or work freelance
- the type of company or organisation you work for.

Pay rates vary, depending on the orchestra or the venue (club, London theatre, regional theatre, TV or recording studio, for example).

There are agreed freelance rates between the [Musicians' Union](#) and organisations such as the BBC and the British Recorded Music Industry (BPI). These cover live performances and recorded sessions. Information is available on the Equity website.

For example, a freelance musician working for the BBC Symphony Orchestra would earn £187.50 per concert as Tutti, £204.50 for Sub-Principal, and £214.50 for Principal. You would earn extra for overtime, for overnight trips and concert tours, or for playing more than one instrument.

You could earn more with other orchestras and those based in London, and perhaps at least twice as much in a major American orchestra.

Recording artists can earn much more. For the very few soloists that make it to the top, earnings can be very high.

Salary as a full time musician in the armed services varies depending on the individual service. An RAF musician earns £31,460 after 6 months basic training.

Conditions

- Classical musicians perform in a variety of places, from hotels and restaurants, to concert halls, churches, cathedrals, opera houses and theatres.
- If you are in a military band, you have to commit to the armed services, in return for study bursaries and a regular job.
- You may have to go on tour in the UK or abroad and be away from home for long periods at a time.
- You need to put in many hours of practice as part of your routine.
- You may have to work long and unsocial hours, including evenings and weekends.
- Many musicians are employed on short term contracts, and take on extra jobs to support themselves, such as giving private tuition.

Getting In

- Almost all classical musicians start training in at least one instrument at a very early age. You need to reach very high standards of performance in your chosen instrument to become a professional classical musician. Most will also have studied at a university or conservatoire (music college).
- Classical singers have trained their voices for many years, and most will have studied at a university or conservatoire (music college). The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland offers a degree (SCQF Level 9-10) and postgraduate course (SCQF Level 11) in vocal studies.
- There are NC (SCQF Level 4-6), HNC and HND (SCQF Level 8 and 9) and degree courses in music, music performance and performing arts. Entry qualifications vary, depending on the level of the course.
- There is an audition and interview for most courses.
- Entry for degree courses is competitive. As well as the required academic qualifications, you usually need qualifications in music. For degree courses in Scotland, you usually need 3-4 Highers preferably including Music and Grade 7 or 8 on your main instrument from a body such as the [Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music \(ABRSM\)](#).
- For some courses, you must be able to play two instruments which can include the voice.
- You normally need to show that you have amateur experience.
- You could get involved with a youth or community orchestra.
- British orchestras have a trial system. For some positions this process can last up to a year.

What Does It Take

You need to be:

- exceptionally talented in music
- confident, to perform in front of an audience
- skilled at sight reading music (being able to read and play a piece without having seen it before)
- determined to succeed and improve your performance
- able to take criticism
- motivated and disciplined, to spend long hours practising
- able to adapt to different styles of music
- good at working with others

- able to deal with business and financial issues when working freelance.

Training

Classical musicians usually continue to take private classes throughout their careers to maintain and improve their performance.

Getting On

- This is a highly competitive career, so expect job insecurity.
- You will need talent, dedication and luck to succeed.
- For musicians on the permanent staff of an orchestra there is a promotion structure, which is highly competitive: it starts at tutti (rank and file players), then principal and finally section principal.
- Some classical musicians compose or conduct music.
- Some musicians go on to train for related careers such as music therapy (see [Music Therapist](#)) or teaching.
- Networking and making contacts are very important aspects of your career development.
- Joining organisations such as the Incorporated Society of Music (ISM) and the Musicians' Union (MU) is useful.

Contacts

Independent Society of Musicians (ISM)

Tel: 020 7221 3499

Email: membership@ism.org

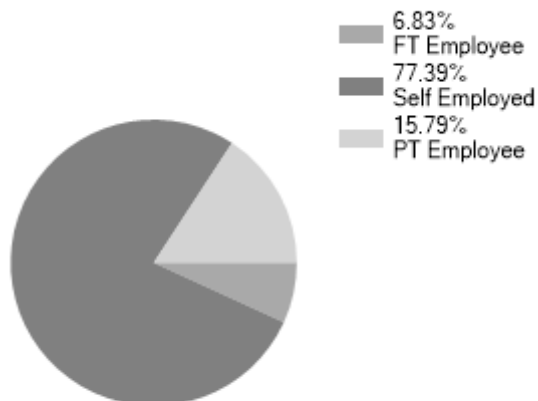
Website: www.ism.org

X: @ISM_music

Facebook: www.facebook.com/ISMusicians

Statistics

Employment Status UK %

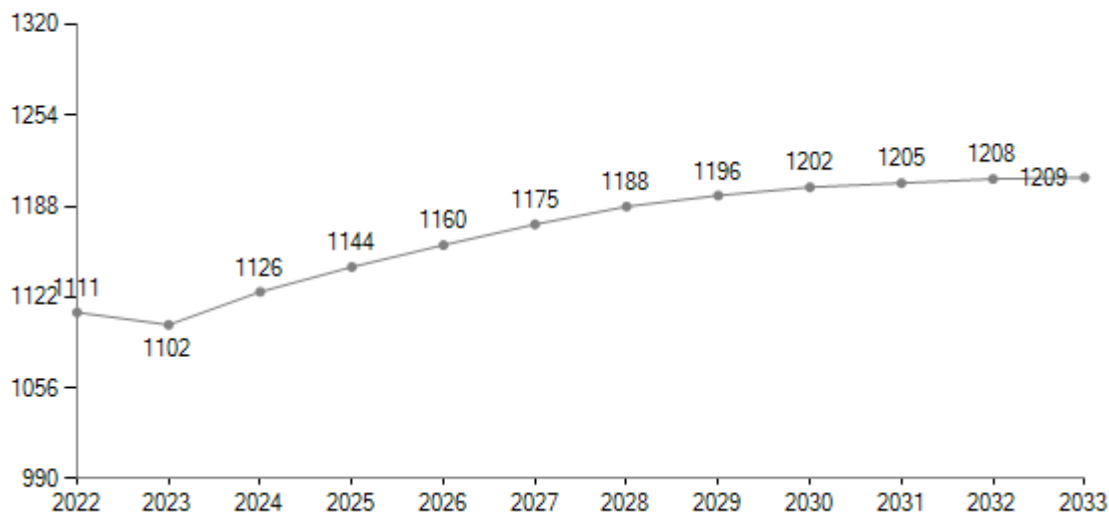


Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

LMI data powered by [LMI for All](#)

Predicted Employment in Scotland



LMI data powered by [Lightcast](#)