

# Thomas Nicholson

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## Short biography

I was born in Fredericton, Canada in 1995. In addition to music and interdisciplinary artistic experiments, I find myself guided by many practices from a wide range of fields and periods – these include mathematics, Transitional and Grotesque typography, graphic design, Renaissance artwork, and web development. I studied composition with Christopher Butterfield and piano with Arthur Rowe at the University of Victoria (Canada). In 2017, I moved to Berlin to study at the Universität der Künste with Marc Sabat, whom I assisted in teaching intonation theory. Since its inception in 2019, I have been a core member of the *Harmonic Space Orchestra*, a Berlin-based ensemble of performers and composers focusing on music in extended just intonation.

My compositions since 2014 have examined the interaction between counterpoint (melodies), harmony (chords), and the unique gradations of spectral fusion evoked through microtonal just intonation (auditory perception). I compose primarily for smaller settings of musicians and occasionally collaborate on film and installation. I am actively researching as well as developing tools and methods for navigating the practical challenges of realising microtonal music on acoustic instruments – strings, in particular. My awards and honours include prizes from the SOCAN Foundation for my compositions *MOTTE* and *ABOUT* (2017) as well as SOCAN's John Weinzwieg Grand Prize (2017), the DAAD Prize from the Universität der Künste Berlin (2018), and a feature in CBC Music's "30 hot Canadian classical musicians under 30" (2018).

### *Deutsch*

Ich wurde 1995 in Fredericton, Kanada geboren. Neben Musik und interdisziplinären Experimenten finde ich Inspiration in vielen Praktiken aus den unterschiedlichsten Bereichen und Epochen – darunter Mathematik, Typografie, Grafikdesign, Renaissance-Kunstwerke und Webentwicklung. Ich studierte Komposition bei Christopher Butterfield und Klavier bei Arthur Rowe an der University of Victoria (Kanada). 2017 zog ich nach Berlin, um an der Universität der Künste bei Marc Sabat zu studieren, den ich bei Intonationstheorie-unterricht unterstützte. Seit seiner Gründung in 2019 bin ich Kernmitglied des *Harmonic Space Ochersters*, ein Ensemble bestehend aus Interpreten und Komponisten, das sich auf Musik in Extended Just Intonation konzentriert.

Meine Kompositionen seit 2014 untersuchen die Wechselwirkung zwischen Kontrapunkt (Melodien), Harmonie (Akkorde) und den einzigartigen Abstufungen der „spektralen Fusion“, die durch mikrotonale Just Intonation evoziert werden (auditorische Wahrnehmung). Ich komponiere vor allem für kleinere Besetzungen von Musikern und arbeite gelegentlich an Film und Installation zusammen. Ich erforsche und entwickle aktiv Ressourcen und Methoden, um die praktischen Herausforderungen der Umsetzung mikrotonaler Musik auf akustischen Instrumenten – insbesondere Streichern – zu bewältigen. Zu meinen Auszeichnungen zählen Preise der SOCAN Foundation für meine Kompositionen *MOTTE* und *ABOUT* (2017) sowie der John Weinzwieg Grand Prize (2017), der DAAD-Preis der Universität der Künste Berlin (2018) und ein Feature in CBC Musics „30 hot Canadian classical musicians under 30“ (2018).

## Studies

- ➔ Universität der Künste Berlin (Master of Music: composition, just intonation research) since 2017
- ➔ University of Victoria, Canada (Bachelor of Music: composition and piano) 2013–2017
- ➔ St. Thomas University, Canada (Independent study: composition, theory and piano) 2009–2013
- ➔ Mount Allison University, Canada (Independent study: piano) 2009–2012

## Awards, honours, grants

➤ Canada Council for the Arts travel grant (Germany–USA, \$3,500 CAD)	2020
➤ Feature in CBC Music’s “30 hot Canadian classical musicians under 30”	2018
➤ DAAD Prize from the Universität der Künste Berlin (€1,000)	2018
➤ The John Weinzweig Grand Prize from the SOCAN Foundation (\$3,000 CAD)	2017
➤ The Sir Ernest MacMillan Awards (1st prize) from the SOCAN Foundation (\$3,000 CAD)	2017
➤ The Serge Grant Awards (1st prize) from the SOCAN Foundation (\$3,000 CAD)	2017
➤ The Martlet Award from the University of Victoria (\$5,000 CAD)	2015
➤ Yearly arts stipend from the New Brunswick Arts Council (\$2,500 CAD / year)	2014–2016

## Professional and teaching experience

➤ Teaching assistant for Marc Sabat (intonation theory, Universität der Künste Berlin)	2018–2020
➤ Tutor for the electronic music studio (Universität der Künste Berlin)	2018–2020
➤ Assistant to the Director of Music (Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria)	2016–2017
➤ Teaching assistant and rehearsal pianist (University of Victoria)	2014–2017
➤ Summer Music Program Coordinator (University of New Brunswick)	2012–2016

## Conference presentations

- “Farey sequences map playable nodes on a string”  
*Beyond 2020 Microtonal Music Festival and Symposium, Pittsburgh, PA (29 February 2020).*

## Research, resources, and publications

- Revision of the Helmholtz-Ellis JI Pitch Notation and fonts (with Marc Sabat, 2020)  
[marsbat.space/pdfs/HEJI2legend+series.pdf](https://marsbat.space/pdfs/HEJI2legend+series.pdf)
- The `helmholtz-ellis-ji`-notation package for LaTeX (2020)  
Archived on CTAN [ctan.org/pkg/helmholtz-ellis-ji-notation](https://ctan.org/pkg/helmholtz-ellis-ji-notation)
- “Farey sequences map playable nodes on a string” (with Marc Sabat, 2019)  
Published in *TEMPO* 74, no. 291 (January 2020), pages 86–97
- “Microtonal playback in Dorico” (2018)  
Published on Scoring Notes [scoringnotes.com/reviews/microtonal-playback-in-dorico](https://scoringnotes.com/reviews/microtonal-playback-in-dorico)
- “Fundamental Principles of Just Intonation and Microtonal Composition” (with Marc Sabat, 2018)  
Published on Plainsound Music Edition [marsbat.space/pdfs/JI.pdf](https://marsbat.space/pdfs/JI.pdf)
- “Plainsound Harmonic Space Calculator | basic”  
JavaScript tool for analysis/composition of music composed in microtonal just intonation.  
(Version 2.5 2020-05-11, in collaboration with Marc Sabat) [plainsound.org/HEJI](https://plainsound.org/HEJI)

## Catalogue of compositions and first performances

- 34 **WENN** (2020) for mezzo-soprano, violin, clarinet in A, bass clarinet [8’]  
· Upcoming performance in October 2020 – *Harmonic Space 2020: James Tenney* festival at KM28, Berlin
- 33 **PORT (Plainsound Rondo)** (2020) for SuperCollider [32’16”]
- 32 **WITHIN (98 Chords for Catherine Lamb)** (2020) for viola accompanied by suspended cymbal and vocal or instrumental obbligato [10’]
- 31 **DVAE INTONATIONES POLYPHONIAE ITALAE** (2019/20) for SATB, SSATTB [10’]
- 30 **BERCER** (2019) for cello [13’]  
· First performance on 23 June 2019 – Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler, Berlin ([listen](#))
- 29 **CONE** (2019) for fixed media [12’]  
· First performance on 30 August 2019 – KM28, Berlin

- 28 **ANSTATT** (2019) for clarinet, accordion, violin and cello [5']  
 · Commissioned by the Musikschule Paul Hindemith Neukölln  
 · First performance on 4 May 2019 – *Neuköllner Originaltöne*, Berlin
- 27 **JUST (Chords, melodies)** (2018–19) for piano tuned in Sabat II well-temperament [13']  
 · First performance on 7 January 2019 – *chords, melodies* festival at KM28, Berlin ([listen](#))
- 26 **STILL** (2018) for violin and viola [5']  
 · First performance on 7 January 2019 – *chords, melodies* festival at KM28, Berlin ([listen](#))
- 25 **DRIFT** (2018) for any four sustaining instruments [3'] ([listen](#))
- 24 **PER** (2018–) for orchestra (3.3.3.3/4.3.3.1/bd.hp/strings) [ca. 15'] – work in progress
- 23 **SCHWER ABSCHIED NEHMEN WENN ICH TASCHENTUCH SEHE** (2018)  
 for three female dancers, violin and microtonal keyboard [45']  
 · Co-created with dancer Luisa Rüster  
 · First performance on 23 September 2018 – Urbanraum, Berlin ([see](#))
- 22 **GRAM** (2018) for “split key” keyboard (velocity controlled), alto recorder and viola [15']  
 · First performance on 25 November 2018 – *MEHRLICHT!MUSIK* Festival, Berlin ([listen](#))
- 21 **ROUND** (2017–18) for any odd number of musicians able to produce sustaining tones [30']  
 · First performance on 21 July 2017 – Experimental Music Orchestra, Universität der Künste
- 20 **BRANCH (Plainsound Trio)** (2018) any three sustaining instruments (or voices) [8']  
 · First performance on 14 July 2018 – Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler, Berlin ([listen](#))
- 19 **MASS** (2017) for SATB choir and organ [8']  
 · First performance on 10 September 2017 – Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria
- 18 **servicemaster** (2016–17) video/sculpture/music installation [55']  
 · Co-created with artist Kimberley Farris-Manning  
 · First presented 5–7 September 2017 – Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria ([see](#))
- 17 **MOTTE** (2016–17) for flute (piccolo), alto saxophone (contrabass clarinet), bassoon (contrabassoon), horn, tubular bells, violin, viola and 13-limit justly tuned piano [40']  
 · First performance on 27 March 2017 – University of Victoria ([listen](#))
- 16 **(BE)NEATH** (2016) for 13-limit justly tuned piano [10']  
 · First performance on 25 November 2016 – University of Victoria ([listen](#))
- 15 **THAT, WHICH** (2016) for orchestra (2.2.2.2/4.2.2.1/bells/strings) [4']  
 · Commissioned by the Fredericton Symphony Orchestra  
 · First performance on 6 November 2016 – Fredericton Symphony Orchestra
- 14 **ABOUT** (2016) for orchestra (3.2.3.3/4.3.3.1/3.hp.org/strings) [17']  
 · First performance on 4 April 2016 – University of Victoria Symphony Orchestra ([listen](#))
- 13 **ALONG, AROUND** (2015/2016) for thirteen strings with percussion toys [10']  
 · First performance on 19 June 2016 – Atlantic Sinfonia
- 12 **AT LEAST** (2016) for violin and piano (12-EDO) [10']
- 11 **number five** (2015) for orchestra (3.2.2.2/4.2.3.1/timp2/strings) [11']  
 · First performance on 13 April 2015 – University of Victoria Symphony Orchestra
- 10 **L'art de toucher...** (2015) for piano (12-EDO) [6']  
 · First performance on 4 December 2015 – University of Victoria ([listen](#))

## 9 ATLAS, 2012

(b) (2019) New version in 11-limit just intonation for acoustic guitar and viola [14']  
· First performance on 30 August 2019 – KM28, Berlin ([listen](#))

(a) (2015) Original version for electric guitar and alto saxophone [14']  
· First performance on 25 October 2015 – University of Victoria ([listen](#))

8 **for Margaret Lingas** (2015) for 10 voices and harmonium (12-EDO) [6']  
· First performance on 6 February 2015 – University of Victoria ([listen](#))

7 **Tombeau de souvenirs** (2014) for orchestra (2.2.2.2/2.2/timp/strings) [6']  
· Commissioned by the Fredericton Symphony Orchestra  
· First performance on 21 June 2014 – Fredericton Symphony Orchestra

6 **Apparitions** (2014) for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano (12-EDO) [10']  
· Commissioned by the *Bathurst Chamber Music Festival*  
· First performance on 7 May 2014 – *Bathurst Chamber Music Festival*

5 **D'esquisses** (2014) for string quartet [2']  
· First performance on 8 March 2014 – University of Victoria

4 **number three** (2014) for mandolin, viola and piano (12-EDO) [9']  
· First performance on 14 February 2014 – *Oak Bay New Music Festival*, Victoria ([listen](#))

3 **Intérieurs** (2013) for violin and piano (12-EDO) [5']  
· First performance on 14 December 2013 – University of Victoria

2 **Trois pièces d'après Kandinsky** (2012) for orchestra (2.2.2.2/4.3.3.1/timp.pno/strings) [10']  
· First performance on 10 May 2013 – New Brunswick Youth Orchestra

1 **Clandestine** (2012) for piano (12-EDO) [7']  
· First performance on 18 April 2012 – *Fredericton Music Festival*