Curriculum Vitae
Thomas Nicholson
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Short Biography

I am a composer, violist and pianist working with just intonation. I search for points of contact between acoustics, perception, and musical expression by combining rigorous theoretical and formal research with intuitive, practice-based experimentation.

I studied composition with Christopher Butterfield at the University of Victoria and Marc Sabat at the Universität der Künste Berlin. My long-standing collaboration with Sabat has led to a number of artistic and scholarly projects, including in-depth work on tuning theory and music notation. In 2020, we undertook a major revision and expansion of the Helmholtz-Ellis Just Intonation Pitch Notation (HEJI), originally developed by Sabat and Wolfgang von Schweinitz in the early 2000s. The updated system is now widely used across Europe and North America as the standard for notating music in extended just intonation.

Since 2014, my compositions have focused increasingly on what seem to me inherently microtonal qualities of just intonation. My work is often coloured by my interests in mathematics, psychoacoustics, music history, and philosophy. I am particularly drawn to intimate musical constellations, typically small ensembles of two to four performers, where finely tuned relationships between tones become especially vivid.

In addition to composing, I develop tools and pedagogical materials to support musicians working with similar practices. These aim to address the conceptual and practical considerations of performing microtonal music on acoustic instruments. As a performer, I am a member of Harmonic Space Orchestra.

Education

2017–21 Master of Music, Universität der Künste Berlin (with Marc Sabat)
2013–17 Bachelor of Music, University of Victoria (with Christopher Butterfield)
2009–13 Private studies, St. Thomas University, Fredericton (with Martín Kutnowski)

Professional Experience

2023– Freelance music teacher, Musikschule Erkner and Musikhaus e.V., Berlin
2022– Freelance music engraver, Berlin
2019– Member of Harmonic Space Orchestra (HSO), Berlin
2018–21 Teaching assistant, Universität der Künste Berlin
2016–7 Assistant music director and organist, Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria
2014–7 Teaching assistant, University of Victoria
2014– Freelance composer

Awards, Grants & Stipends

2023 Work stipend, Senatsverwaltung für Kultur und Europa, Berlin
2020 Travel grant Germany–USA, Canada Council for the Arts, Ottawa
2018 DAAD Prize, Universität der Künste Berlin
2017 The John Weinzweig Grand Prize, SOCAN, Toronto
2017 Awards for Young Composers, two 1st prizes, SOCAN, Toronto
2014–6 Study stipend, New Brunswick Arts Council, Fredericton

Publications

2026 "Other Paths: composing with near-equivalencies in just intonation," *Živá hudba* 17, Prague
2021 "A Compact Enharmonically Viable Subset of Harmonic Space: The Stern-Brocot Tree and Some Thoughts About Lattices and Spirals," co-auth. Marc Sabat, *Živá hudba* 11, Prague
2020 "The Helmholtz-Ellis JI Pitch Notation," co-auth. Marc Sabat, *Plainsound*, Berlin
2020 "Farey sequences map playable nodes on a string," co-auth. Marc Sabat, *Tempo* 74/291, London
2018 "Microtonal Playback in Dorico," *Scoring Notes*, online
2018 "Fundamental Principles of Just Intonation and Microtonal Composition," co-auth. Marc Sabat, *Plainsound*, Berlin

Software

2021 Harmonic Series Spiral Synth (web app), *Plainsound*, Berlin
2018 Plainsound Harmonic Space Calculator (web app), *Plainsound*, Berlin

Residencies, Lectures & Workshops

2026 Recording residency with Émilie Girard-Charest, GMEA, Albi
Composers workshop, Academy of Music and Drama, University of Gothenburg
2025 "Elsie Hamilton in 26 Letters," with Rebecca Lane, MIKRO/TONAL, Kiel
Just intonation workshops, Ensembles Contrechamps and Dedalus, Geneva
2024 La Semaine du Son: "L'infini du son," GMEA, Albi
2023 Mikroskop IV, lecture and workshops, EnsembleSpectrum, Bratislava
"Harmonic Space," workshop, Tulkinnanvaraista, Helsinki
Rencontres de la création musicale, seminars and workshops, GMEA, Sylvanès
2022 "Expériences," residency, GMEA, Albi
"The Art of the String Multiphonic," conference, FHNW, Basel
2020 MicroFest Prague 2020, keynote with Marc Sabat, Czech Institute for Microtonal Music, Prague
Beyond: Microtonal Music Festival 2020, conference, University of Pittsburgh

Festivals & Series

2026–7 "Expansions" Series, Harmonic Space Orchestra, Berlin
2026 Göteborg Sound Arts (GAS) Festival, Gothenburg
Unerhörte Musik, Berlin
2025 Festival Mixtur, Barcelona
VANG VII, Madrid
2024 Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (hcmf//), Huddersfield
2023 Festival AFEKT, Tallinn and Berlin
Edition Festival, Stockholm
2022 SALT New Music Festival, Victoria
2021 Festival Riverrun, Albi
Louth Contemporary Music Society, Dundalk
FREIRAUM, Konzerthaus, Berlin
2020 Harmonic Space Festival 2020: James Tenney, KINDL and KM28, Berlin

Catalogue of Compositions & Performances (reverse chronology)

38. *Shining Autumn* (2026)
Solo cello • 35 minutes
37. *Canadian November* (2026)
Solo piano in Pythagorean tuning • 8 minutes
36. Enigma Canon (2026)
SuperCollider • variable duration
35. *Pythagoras Spiral* (2026)
Solo piano in 12-EDO • 15 minutes
34. *Pipe Dream* (2025)
Solo pipe organ in any tuning with at least two manuals and pedals • 20 minutes
33. *Ultramarine* (2025)
Solo harp in a modified 84-EDO tuning • 16 minutes
3 Dec 2025, Cara Dawson, KM28, Berlin
32. *Enharmonium* (2025)
Bass flute, bass trombone, electric guitar, violin, two violas and contrabass • 6 minutes
18 Oct 2025, Harmonic Space Orchestra, Festival Mixtur, Barcelona
31. *Crooked Dances* (2025)
Solo piano in 12-EDO • 15 minutes
30. *Monotone-Expansion* (2024)
Collaboration with Rebecca Lane and Sam Dunscombe
Open instrumentation with pre-recorded playback • open duration
10 Oct 2024, Harmonic Space Orchestra, KM28, Berlin
29. *Free and Easy Wandering* (2024)
SuperCollider • 23 minutes

28. *Night falls light fall* (2024)
    Collaboration with Marc Sabat
    Solo cello with live electronic processing in SuperCollider • open duration
        3 Dec 2023, Lucy Railton, Sophia Club, London
27. *Doppelzelt* (2023)
    Collaboration with Rebecca Lane
    Bass flute, viola and electronic tones • 30 minutes
        15 Jan 2024, Rebecca Lane and Thomas Nicholson, Keith Bar, Berlin
        3 Nov 2023, Rebecca Lane and Thomas Nicholson, Tulkinnanvaraista, Helsinki
26. *Minimal Surface* (2023)
    Voice, bass/alto flutes, trombone, violin, viola, cello and contrabass • 15 minutes
        24 Nov 2024, Harmonic Space Orchestra, HCMF, Huddersfield
        5 Dec 2023, Harmonic Space Orchestra, Festival AFEKT, Berlin
        1 Nov 2023, Harmonic Space Orchestra, Himera Festival, Turku
        31 Oct 2023, Harmonic Space Orchestra, Äänen Lumo, Helsinki
        29 Oct 2023, Harmonic Space Orchestra, Festival AFEKT, Tallinn
        28 Oct 2023, Harmonic Space Orchestra, KM28, Berlin
25. *Sursum Corda* (2023)
    SuperCollider • 17 minutes
24. *Time Falling* (2021–3)
    Bass flute and contrabass • 24 minutes
        14 Oct 2023, Rebecca Lane and Jon Heilbron, Lindenkirche, Berlin
23. *Old Town* (2023)
    Film with electronic music made in SuperCollider • 18 minutes
        31 Mar 2023, KM28, Berlin
22. *Rassla* (2023)
    SuperCollider, optionally with acoustic instruments and/or voices • 17 minutes
21. *Sieve of Eratosthenes* (2023)
    Two pianos in 67-limit just intonation • open duration
20. *Nocturne* (2022)
    Flute, bass flute, alto saxophone, bass trombone, accordion in 12-EDO, electric guitar in 84-EDO, harp in 84-EDO, violin and cello • 18 minutes
        6 Aug 2022, residency musicians, GMEA, L'Athanor, Albi
19. *Harmonium Glistening* (2021)
    At least 6 instruments/voices, possibly with electronics • 18 minutes
18. *Triple Resplendence* (2021)
    Alto flute, viola and trombone • 7 minutes
        10 Apr 2026, Ensemble Éclat, Centre Sanaaq, Montréal
17. *Per* (2018/20)
    3 Flutes, 3 oboes, 3 clarinets, 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, bass drum, timpani, harp and strings • 12 minutes
16. *Fields Flowering* (2020)
    Violin, viola and cello • 8 minutes
15. *Wenn* (2020)
    High voice or alto flute, violin, clarinet in A and bass clarinet • 8 minutes
        11 Oct 2020, Harmonic Space Orchestra, KM28, Berlin
14. *Rondo for Marcus Pal* (2020)
    SuperCollider • 27 minutes
13. *98 Chords for Catherine Lamb* (2020)
    Horn, viola and suspended cymbal • 10 minutes
        4 Dec 2020, Ensemble ilinx, Universität der Künste Berlin
12. *Atlas 2012* (2015/19)
    Second version in just intonation (2019): viola and acoustic guitar with ebow • 14 minutes
    First version (2015): alto saxophone and electric guitar with e-bow • 14 minutes
        30 Aug 2019, Fredrik Rasten and Thomas Nicholson, KM28, Berlin
        29 Jan 2016, Adam Jasieniuk and Thomas Nicholson, Simon Frasier Uni., Vancouver
        25 Oct 2015, Adam Jasieniuk and Thomas Nicholson, University of Victoria

11. *Anstatt* (2019)
    Clarinet, violin, cello and accordion in 12-EDO • 10 minutes
        4 May 2019, Neuköllner Originaltöne, Berlin
10. *Just/Chords Melodies* (2019)
    Solo piano in Sabat II well temperament • 13 minutes
        15 Mar 2019, Thomas Nicholson, KM28, Berlin
        7 Jan 2019, Thomas Nicholson, KM28, Berlin
9. *Still* (2018)
    Violin and viola • 6 minutes
        7 Jan 2019, Marc Sabat and Thomas Nicholson, KM28, Berlin
8. *Endless Wander* (2018)
    Bass flute, violin, viola and cello • 9 minutes
        10 Nov 2023, EnsembleSpectrum, b-minor, Trnava
        31 May 2023, EnsembleSpectrum, Nová Cvernovka, Bratislava
7. *Schwer Abschied nehmen wenn ich Taschentuch sehe* (2018)
    Collaboration with L. Rüster, J. Du, M. Färber and L.-J. Schindlbeck
    Three dancers, light, object installation, violin and SuperCollider • 45 minutes
        23 Sep 2018, Urbanraum, Berlin
6. *Gram* (2018)
    Baroque alto recorder, viola and keyboard, with optional video installation • 15 minutes
        16 Oct 2018, Natalie Pfeiffer, Alice Bordarier and Thomas Nicholson, UdK Berlin
        25 Nov 2018, Natalie Pfeiffer, Alice Bordarier and Thomas Nicholson, UdK Berlin
5. *Branch* (2018)
    Any 3 instruments and/or voices • 8 minutes
        14 Jul 2018, Marc Sabat, M.O. Abbott and Thomas Nicholson, HfM Hanns Eisler, Berlin
4. *Servicemaster* (2017)
    Collaboration with Kim Ferris-Manning
    Site-specific installation and film • 55 minutes
        7 Jan 2019, KM28, Berlin
        5–7 Sep 2017, Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria
3. *Motte* (2017)
    Flute (piccolo), alto saxophone (contrabass clarinet), bassoon (contrabassoon), horn, tubular bells, piano in 13-limit just intonation, violin and viola • 40 minutes
        27 Mar 2017, student ensemble, University of Victoria
2. *That/Which* (2016)
    2 Flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, tuba, tubular bells and strings • 5 minutes
        16 Nov 2016, Fredericton Symphony Orchestra, Christ Church Cathedral, Fredericton
1. *About* (2016)
    3 Flutes, 2 oboes, 3 clarinets, 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, percussion, harp, organ and strings • 17 minutes
        24 May 2016, University of Victoria Symphony Orchestra, University of Victoria