

THOMAS NICHOLSON

Curriculum Vitae

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(Updated: December 2025)

SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Thomas Nicholson (b. 1995) is a Berlin-based Canadian composer whose work centres on just intonation. Combining rigorous theoretical and formal research with intuitive, practice-based experimentation, he seeks out points of contact in his music between acoustics, perception, and musical expression.

He studied composition with Christopher Butterfield at the University of Victoria and later with Marc Sabat at the Universität der Künste Berlin. His 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, they 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 a standard for notating music in extended just intonation.

Since 2014, his compositions have focused increasingly on the inherently microtonal qualities of just intonation. His work often draws from his interests in mathematics, physics, psychoacoustics, music history, and philosophy, as well as the visual clarity of graphic design. He is particularly drawn to intimate musical contexts, frequently writing for small ensembles of two to four performers, in which finely tuned relationships between tones become especially vivid.

In addition to composing, he develops tools and pedagogical materials to support musicians working with similar practices, addressing the conceptual and practical considerations of performing microtonal music on acoustic music. As a violist, he is 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– Piano teacher, Musikschule Erkner and Musikhaus e.V.
- 2022– Freelance music engraver, Berlin
- 2019– Member of Harmonic Space Orchestra (HSO), Berlin
- 2018–21 Teaching assistant, Universität der Künste Berlin
- 2016–17 Assistant music director and organist, Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria
- 2014–17 Teaching assistant, University of Victoria
- 2014– Freelance music teacher, piano and composition
- 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 Weinzwieg Grand Prize, SOCAN, Toronto
- 2017 Awards for Young Composers, two 1st prizes, SOCAN, Toronto
- 2014–16 Study stipend, New Brunswick Arts Council, Fredericton

PUBLICATIONS

- 2021 “A Compact Enharmonically Viable Subset of Harmonic Space: The Stern-Brocot Tree and Some Thoughts About Lattices and Spirals”, co-authored with Marc Sabat, *Živá hudba* 11, Prague
- 2020 “The Helmholtz-Ellis JI Pitch Notation”, co-authored with Marc Sabat, *Plainsound*, Berlin
- 2020 “Farey sequences map playable nodes on a string”, co-authored with Marc Sabat, *Tempo* 74, issue 291, London
- 2018 “Microtonal Playback in Dorico”, *Scoring Notes*
- 2018 “Fundamental Principles of Just Intonation and Microtonal Composition”, co-authored with Marc Sabat, *Plainsound*, Berlin

SOFTWARE

- 2018 Plainsound Harmonic Space Calculator (web app), *Plainsound*, Berlin

RESIDENCIES, LECTURES & WORKSHOPS

- 2025 *Elsie Hamilton in 26 Letters*, with Rebecca Lane, MIKRO/TONAL, Kiel
- 2025 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
- 2023 *Harmonic Space*, workshop, Tulkinnanvaraista, Helsinki
- 2023 Rencontres de la création musicale, seminars and workshops, GMEA, Sylvanès
- 2022 *Expériences*, residency, GMEA, Albi
- 2022 *The Art of the String Multiphonic*, conference, FHNW, Basel
- 2020 MicroFest Prague 2020, co-presented keynote lecture with Marc Sabat, Czech Institute for Microtonal Music, Prague
- 2020 Beyond: Microtonal Music Festival 2020, conference, University of Pittsburgh

FESTIVALS & SERIES

- 2025 Festival Mixtur, Barcelona
VANG VII, Madrid
- 2024 Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, 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

36. *Pipe Dream* (2025), 20 minutes
Solo pipe organ in any tuning with at least two manuals and pedals
35. *Ultramarine* (2025), 16 minutes
Solo harp in a modified 84-EDO tuning
Performances: 03.12.2025, Cara Dawson, KM28, Berlin
34. *Enharmonium* (2025), 6 minutes
Bass flute, bass trombone, electric guitar, violin, two violas and contrabass
Performances: 18.10.2025, Harmonic Space Orchestra, Festival Mixtur, Barcelona

33. *Crooked Dances* (2025), 15 minutes
Solo piano in 12-EDO
32. *Monotone-Expansion* (2024), open duration, collaboration with Rebecca Lane and Sam Dunscombe
Open instrumentation with pre-recorded playback
Performances: 10.10.2025, Harmonic Space Orchestra, KM28, Berlin
31. *Free and Easy Wandering* (2024), 23 minutes
SuperCollider
30. *Night falls light fall* (2024), open duration, collaboration with Marc Sabat
Solo cello with live electronic processing in SuperCollider
Performances: 03.12.2023, Lucy Railton, Sophia Club, London
29. *Doppelzelt* (2023), 30 minutes, collaboration with Rebecca Lane
Bass flute, viola and electronic tones
Performances: 03.11.2023, Rebecca Lane and Thomas Nicholson, Tulkinnanvaraista, Helsinki
15.01.2024, Rebecca Lane and Thomas Nicholson, Keith Bar, Berlin
28. *Minimal Surface* (2023), 15 minutes
Voice, bass/alto flutes, trombone, violin, viola, cello and contrabass
Performances: 28.10.2023, Harmonic Space Orchestra, KM28, Berlin
29.10.2023, Harmonic Space Orchestra, Festival AFEKT, Tallinn
31.10.2023, Harmonic Space Orchestra, Äänen Lumo, Helsinki
01.11.2023, Harmonic Space Orchestra, Himera Festival, Turku
05.12.2023, Harmonic Space Orchestra, Festival AFEKT, Berlin
24.11.2024, Harmonic Space Orchestra, HCMF, Huddersfield
27. *Slow Burn* (2023), 17 minutes
SuperCollider
26. *Time Falling* (2021–23), 24 minutes
Bass flute and contrabass
Performances: 14.10.2023, Rebecca Lane and Jon Heilbron, Lindenkirche, Berlin
25. *Old Town* (2023), 18 minutes
Film with electronic music made in SuperCollider
Performances: 31.03.2023, KM28, Berlin
24. *Rassla* (2023), 17 minutes
SuperCollider, optionally with acoustic instruments and/or voices
23. *Sieve of Eratosthenes* (2023), Open duration
Two pianos in 67-limit just intonation
22. *Nocturne* (2022), 18 minutes
Flute, bass flute, alto saxophone, bass trombone, accordion in 12-EDO, electric guitar in 84-EDO, harp in 84-EDO, violin and cello
Performances: 06.08.2022, residency musicians, GMEA, L'Athanol, Albi
21. *Harmonium Glistening* (2021), 18 minutes
At least six instruments and/or voices, possibly with electronic accompaniment
20. *Triple Resplendence* (2021), 7 minutes
Alto flute, viola and trombone
19. *Chanter* (2021), 15 minutes
Solo cello
18. *Per* (2018/20), 12 minutes
Orchestra: 3 Flutes, 3 oboes, 3 clarinets, 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, bass drum, timpani, harp and strings
17. *Fields Flowering* (2020), 8 minutes
Violin, viola and cello
16. *Wenn* (2020), 8 minutes, text by Luisa Rüster
High voice or alto flute, violin, clarinet in A and bass clarinet
Performances: 11.10.2020, Harmonic Space Orchestra, KM28, Berlin
15. *Rondo for Marcus Pal* (2020), 27 minutes
SuperCollider

14. *98 Chords for Catherine Lamb* (2020), 10 minutes
Horn, viola and suspended cymbal
Performances: 04.12.2020, Ensemble Ilinx, UdK Berlin
13. *Bercher* (2019), 11 minutes
Solo cello
Performances: 14.07.2019, Émilie Girard-Charest, HfM Hanns Eisler
12. *Atlas 2012* (2015/19), 14 minutes
First version, 2015: alto saxophone and electric guitar with e-bow
Second version in just intonation, 2019: viola and acoustic guitar with ebow
Performances: 30.08.2019, Fredrik Rasten and Thomas Nicholson, KM28, Berlin
29.01.2016, Adam Jasieniuk and Thomas Nicholson, Simon Fraser Uni., Vancouver
25.10.2015, Adam Jasieniuk and Thomas Nicholson, University of Victoria
11. *Anstatt* (2019), 10 minutes
Clarinet, violin, cello and accordion in 12-EDO
Performances: 04.05.2019, Neuköllner Originaltöne, Berlin
10. *Just/Chords Melodies* (2019), 13 minutes
Solo piano in Sabat II well temperament
Performances: 07.01.2019, Thomas Nicholson, KM28, Berlin
15.03.2019, Thomas Nicholson, KM28, Berlin
9. *Still* (2018), 6 minutes
Violin and viola
Performances: 07.01.2019, Marc Sabat and Thomas Nicholson, KM28, Berlin
8. *Endless Wander* (2018), 9 minutes
Bass flute, violin, viola and cello
Performances: 31.05.2023, EnsembleSpectrum, Nová Cvernovka, Bratislava
10.11.2023, EnsembleSpectrum, b-minor, Trnava
7. *Schwer Abschied nehmen wenn ich Taschentuch sehe* (2018), 45 minutes
Collaboration with L. Rüster, J. Du, M. Färber and L.-J. Schindlbeck
Three dancers, light, object installation, violin and SuperCollider
Performances: 23.09.2018, Urbanraum, Berlin
6. *Gram* (2018), 15 minutes
Baroque alto flute, viola and keyboard, with optional video installation
Performances: 16.10.2018, Natalie Pfeiffer, Alice Bordarier and Thomas Nicholson, UdK Berlin
25.11.2018, Natalie Pfeiffer, Alice Bordarier and Thomas Nicholson, UdK Berlin
5. *Branch* (2018), 8 minutes
Any three sustaining instruments and/or voices
Performances: 14.07.2018, Marc Sabat, M.O. Abbott and Thomas Nicholson, HfM Hanns Eisler
4. *Servicemaster* (2017), 55 minutes, collaboration with Kim Ferris-Manning
Site-specific installation, sculpture and film
Performances: 05. to 07.09.2017, Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria
07.01.2019, KM28, Berlin
3. *Motte* (2017), 40 minutes
Flute (+ piccolo), alto saxophone (+ contrabass clarinet), bassoon (+ contrabassoon), horn, tubular bells, piano in 13-limit just intonation, violin and viola
Performances: 27.03.2017, Student ensemble, University of Victoria
2. *That/Which* (2016), 5 minutes
Orchestra: 2 Flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, tuba, tubular bells and strings
Performances: 16.11.2016, Fredericton Symphony Orchestra, Christ Church Cathedral, Fredericton
1. *About* (2016), 17 minutes
Orchestra: 3 Flutes, 2 oboes, 3 clarinets, 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, percussion, harp, organ and strings
Performances: 24.05.2016, University of Victoria Symphony Orchestra, University of Victoria