

Catherine Lamb, Composer

Biography

In her works, Catherine Lamb explores a sonic world that is rooted in her intensive engagement with just intonation. The harmonic space that unfolds within it gives rise to a wealth of new tonal relationships and music of ever-changing timbre. As she works within this space, human relationships, direct exchange and collective approaches are increasingly moving to the focus of her creative practice.

The musical journey of the composer, born in Olympia, Washington, in 1982, was guided from the very beginning by a strong inner compass that led her on a path beyond predictable academic routes. Even as an eleven-year-old, her penchant for open-ended compositional experimentation meant she did not fit into the mould of the classical piano lessons she was taking. Her enthusiasm for recordings of Hindustani music by Ram Naryan and N. Rajam led her to leave the conservatoire at the age of 21 to find her first important mentor in the sitar player Jyoti Thakar in India. Her interest in alternative tuning systems then took her to the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles, where she studied composition with Michael Pisaro and, as a student of James Tenney, immersed herself deeply in the concept of just intonation. Following the death of James Tenney, the filmmaker and Dhrupad musician Mani Kaul became another mentor. After completing her studies at Bard College in New York in 2012, a Henry Cowell research fellowship enabled her to collaborate with Élaïne Radigue in Paris.

She had already created opportunities for collective musical exploration during her time in Los Angeles, not least as co-founder of the microtonal women's choir Singing by Numbers. Since moving to Berlin in 2013, she has continued her activities as part of a vibrant creative community, including through her experimental label Sacred Realism and the Harmonic Space Orchestra, which she co-founded.

The 2026/27 season saw and will see the premiere of several works for ensemble and chamber music formations. *Triangulations*, written for the Harmonic Space Orchestra, received its world premiere in October 2026 at the Exploratorium in Berlin. *The Illuminated Grid*, a work commissioned by the Muziekgebouw Amsterdam and Wien Modern for the Klangforum Wien, will have its world premiere in Amsterdam in November 2026. For the Archipel Festival 2027, she is composing *umbra altera* for the Ensemble Contrechamps and the Ensemble Dedalus, who will be performing together for the first time. Catherine Lamb is composing for the JACK Quartet for the second time in 2027: the new work, commissioned by Wigmore Hall and the Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik, is due to have its world premiere in 2028.

Among the major works of recent years is *Portions Transparent/Opaque*, commissioned by the BBC and premiered in 2023 at the BBC Proms with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra conducted by Ilan Volkov; the orchestra had already premiered the first part of this three-part composition at the Tectonics Festival in Glasgow in 2014. In 2024, she composed *the being/the world* for the Ensemble Musikfabrik and the soprano Juliet Fraser, inspired by the philosophical ideas of the French philosopher Édouard Glissant. In the nine works of her *Prisma Interius* series, completed in 2018, she explores filtering processes between internal and external perception.

Catherine Lamb's works have been commissioned and premiered by ensembles and orchestras including the JACK Quartet, Yarn/Wire, Ensemble Dedalus, Ensemble Musikfabrik, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Ensemble Resonanz, Ghost Ensemble, EXAUDI, the London Contemporary Orchestra, Ensemble neoN, the Plus-Minus Ensemble and the Explore Ensemble.

Catherine Lamb has received numerous awards and grants for her work: in 2016 she was a fellow at the Akademie Schloss Solitude and a Staubach Fellow at the International Summer Courses for New Music in Darmstadt; in 2018 she received funding from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts; and in 2020 she was awarded the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation's Composition Prize.

Saison 2026/27

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