

## Christian Mason, Composer

### Biography

*"Mason's music is astonishingly inventive and powerful, generating a searing, hypnotic intensity."* The Strad

Christian Mason's music is characterised by interweaving and subtle metamorphoses of sounds that often create dreamlike atmospheres. The winner of the Grawemeyer Music Composition Award 2025 creates finely crafted textures that demand attentive listening, while the expressive content of his works is conveyed with strong directness. Born in London in 1984, he was already attracting attention with first orchestral works in his early 20s, and when he won the composers' prize of the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation in 2015, the press described his music as "delicate, initially nearly tender, self-aware, shimmering, yet never boastful. (...) Rarely has the music of a young composer managed to radiate such magic" (Fono Forum).

Since then, Christian Mason has been developing his musical universe with great productivity and focus, as his projects in the current and previous seasons show: with his Octandre Ensemble, which he founded in 2011 together with conductor Jon Hargreaves, he was a guest at the Glasgow Cathedral Festival in 2024 with *time space sound light*, a programme of interwoven compositions in various instrumentations, which was also released as a CD on the Winter & Winter label. Shortly afterwards, the ensemble performed at the Little Missenden Festival with the British premiere of the work *Figures in a landscape (awaiting eternity)*, the world premiere of which took place during his residency at the music village of Ernen. An orchestral work already recorded in 2015 by the Orchestre National de France under the baton of Maxime Tortelier was premiered in February 2025: *Sympathetic Resonance* was performed by the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra in Frankfurt and then at the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg. Cellist Elinor Frey performed *Tristesse pour les temps perdus*, composed in concerto grosso form, with the Il Gardellino Ensemble in Brussels, followed in May 2025 by another major world premiere with the Ensemble Modern and the SWR Vokalensemble: *The Oddity Effect*, based on a text by Paul Griffiths and inspired by the swarming behaviour of fish, was performed at the Alte Oper Frankfurt, the Theaterhaus Stuttgart and the ACHT BRÜCKEN festival in Cologne. A concerto for double bass and orchestra will be premiered during the current season: the Orchestre National d'Auvergne, conducted by Richard Tognetti, will perform the work in November 2025 with soloist Ricardo Delgado in Clermont-Ferrand, before it is heard at the Fondazione Haydn in Bolzano in the 2026/27 season. Patricia Kopachinskaja and Joonas Ahonen will record *And dream me out to blissful vistas...* for violin, piano and electronics for a CD production at the SWR Experimentalstudio Freiburg in September.

Major projects in recent seasons include a flute concerto for Noemi Gyori and the Orchestre Philharmonique Royal de Liège, the Hölderlin cycles *I would sing of thee, but only tears* and *Hölderlin's Madness* for the mezzo-soprano Lotte Betts-Dean, Thorwald Jørgensen (theremin) and the Explore Ensemble, *Invisible Threads*, a 70-minute performance installation for the Arditti Quartet, the Neue Vocalsolisten, Gareth Davis and Krassimir Strev, performed at the Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik in 2023 and at the Eclat Festival Stuttgart in 2024, and *The Singing Tree*, an environmental cantata with texts by Paul Griffiths for the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, the Neue Vocalsolisten and Finchley Children's Music Group, premiered in Birmingham under the direction of Michael Wendeborg. The sound installation *In Unknown Elements... In Endless Transmutation...* was presented at the Pierre Boulez Saal Berlin and the Tonhalle Zurich to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation. In France, a two-year collaboration with the Orchestre National d'Auvergne ended in 2023 with the world premiere of *Voix Terrestre* for string orchestra, complemented by a one-hour radio portrait by France Musique. 2022 saw the completion of *Time and Eternity*, a three-part orchestral cycle premiered respectively by the Vienna Philharmonic under Christian Thielemann, the Konzerthausorchester Berlin under Christoph Eschenbach and the hr-Sinfonieorchester under Michał Nesterowicz.

Past commissions include pieces for the Philharmonia Orchestra, the Munich Chamber Orchestra, the Orchestre National de France and the Lucerne Festival Contemporary Orchestra, among others; he has written ensemble works for Ensemble Recherche, the CONNECT project (London Sinfonietta, Ensemble Modern, Ensemble Remix, Ensemble Asko-Schönberg), the Lucerne Festival (Ensemble intercontemporain) and the BBC PROMS (London Sinfonietta); and he has composed chamber music works for the Arditti Quartet, the Ligeti Quartet, the Britten Sinfonia and the Festival Nouveaux Horizons at the Grand Théâtre de Provence in Aix and solo/duo works for Carolin Widmann, Jean-Guihen Queyras, Momo Kodama, Midori, Mieko Kanno, Jack Adler-McKean (tuba) and the Orléans Concours International.

Christian Mason was honoured with the Grawemeyer Music Composition Award 2025 for his ensemble composition *Invisible Threads*. A 2015 winner of an Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung Composer Prize, he is a mentor for the LSO Panufnik Young Composers Project, the Philharmonia Composers' Academy and the Hong Kong Composers' Scheme (2023/24). He has been a resident artist at Eton College, Villa Concordia, Civitella Ranieri and at SWR Experimental Studio in Freiburg. In 2012 he was awarded the Mendelssohn Scholarship and received a British Composer Award. Christian completed a Ph.D at King's College London with George Benjamin and worked as Composition Assistant to Sir Harrison Birtwistle. He previously studied at the University of York. He is a founding Artistic Director of the Octandre Ensemble and plays the Theremin. His works are published by Breitkopf & Härtel and are recorded on the London Sinfonietta Label, LSO Live, Col Legno, Winter & Winter and nonclassical.

2025/26 season

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