

Zachary James Watkins
Bio 2026

Zachary James Watkins studied composition with Janice Giteck, Jarrad Powell, Robin Holcomb and Jovino Santos Neto at Cornish College. In 2006, Zachary received an MFA in Electronic Music and Recording Media from Mills College where he studied with Chris Brown, Fred Frith, Alvin Curran and Pauline Oliveros. Zachary has received commissions from The Empyrean Ensemble, Splinter Reeds, The Switch Ensemble, Density512, sfsound, The Living Earth Show, Kronos Quartet and the Seattle Chamber Players among others. His 2006 composition "Suite for String Quartet" was awarded the Paul Merritt Henry Prize for Composition and has subsequently been performed at the Labs 25th Anniversary Celebration, the Labor Sonor Series at Kule in Berlin, Germany and in Seattle, WA, as part of the 2nd Annual Town Hall New Music Marathon featuring violist Eyvind Kang. Zachary has performed in numerous festivals across the United States, Mexico and Europe. In 2008, Zachary premiered a new multi-media work entitled "Country Western" as part of the Meridian Gallery's Composers in Performance Series that received grants from The American Music Center and The Foundation for Contemporary Arts. An excerpt of this piece is published on a compilation album entitled "The Harmonic Series," alongside Pauline Oliveros, Ellen Fullman, Theresa Wong, Charles Curtis and Duane Pitre among others. Zachary completed "Documentado / Undocumentado," a multimedia interactive book in collaboration with Guillermo Gómez Peña, Gustavo Vasquez, Jennifer Gonzalez and Felicia Rice. His composition "Exciting Sites of Opposition III" received a NEA grant and premiered at The Lab in 2025 featuring vocalist Lisa E. Harris and Bassoonist Jamael Smith. His composition "Peace Be Till" commissioned by Kronos Quartet, premiered at Carnegie Hall in 2018 and was released in 2026 by Smithsonian Folkways on the Kronos record "Glorious Mahalia." His sound art work entitled "Third Floor::Designed Obsolescence," "spoke as a metaphor for the breakdown of the dream of technology and the myth of our society's permanence," review by Susan Noyes Platt in the Summer 05 issue of ARTLIES. Zachary releases music on the labels Smithsonian Folkways, Red Hot, Sige, Cassauna, Confront (UK), The Tapeworm and Touch (UK). Novembre Magazine (DE), ITCH (ZA), Walrus Press and the New York Miniature Ensemble have published his writings and scores. Zachary has been an artist-in-residence at the Espy Foundation, Djerassi, the Headlands Center for The Arts and the Amant Foundation Siena, Italy.