

JAMES MELDRUM

Biography 2026

British clarinettist James Meldrum is widely celebrated as a leading interpreter of contemporary and 20th-century repertoire. A graduate of the Royal College of Music, London, Meldrum holds a First-Class BMus (Hons) and an Advanced PGDip with Distinction and was awarded multiple scholarships including a Foundation Scholarship from the Royal College of Music, the MBF's Ian Fleming Award (twice), the Countess of Munster Musical Trust Award, Wilkins-Mackerras Scholarship and was a Boise Foundation scholarship winner.

Since 2009, Meldrum has served as Principal Clarinet of the New European Ensemble (NEuE), one of Europe's foremost groups dedicated to new and contemporary music. With NEuE, he has played a central role in shaping a forward-thinking repertoire, working closely with some of the most significant musical figures of recent decades, including Heinz Holliger, John Adams, Kaija Saariaho, Oliver Knussen, Helmut Lachenmann, Magnus Lindberg, Mark-Anthony Turnage, Mauricio Kagel, Anna Thorvaldsdottir and Dai Fujikura. This close relationship between composer and performer remains at the heart of Meldrum's work, from interpreting complex new scores and extended techniques to bringing newly commissioned music to life.

Collaboration has increasingly taken Meldrum beyond the boundaries of the conventional concert platform. Recent projects have brought him together with acclaimed novelist Ali Smith, Javanese singer and composer Peni Candra Rini and audiovisual artist Nick Verstand. His work with Verstand explored the relationship between music, light, movement and sound through music by Steve Reich, Terry Riley and Salvador Brede, while his collaboration with Smith has combined readings from her celebrated Seasonal Quartet novels with contemporary chamber music and new commissions. Other major projects have included the Konrad Boehmer Memorial Series and a multimedia programme for Montreal's MNM Festival combining clarinet, percussion, shadow theatre and video art.

Alongside his work in new music, Meldrum maintains a wide-ranging career as a soloist, chamber and orchestral musician. He has performed with orchestras including the Philharmonia Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, English Chamber Orchestra, London Chamber Orchestra, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Iceland Symphony Orchestra and deFilharmonie in Belgium. As a soloist, Meldrum has performed concertos by John Adams, Aaron Copland, Gerald Finzi and Mozart, including Gnarly Buttons in direct collaboration with John Adams himself.

Chamber music remains an equally important part of Meldrum's musical life, including his longstanding work with Ensemble 360 and collaborations with musicians and artists from across Europe and beyond. His performing career has taken him to many of the world's leading classical and contemporary music festivals, including the BBC Proms, Aldeburgh Festival, Edinburgh International Festival, George Enescu International Festival, Cheltenham International Festival, Gaudeamus Music Week, November

Music, Festival Vlaanderen, Svensk Musikvår, Shanghai New Music Week, Beijing Contemporary Music Festival and Spitalfields Music Festival, with further international appearances including the Romaeuropa Festival in Rome.

Meldrum's career has taken him to leading concert halls across Europe and beyond, from London's Royal Albert Hall and Barbican Centre to Amsterdam's Concertgebouw and Muziekgebouw, one of Europe's foremost venues for contemporary music. His performances have also been featured on BBC Radio 3, Dutch national television and international radio, including live appearances on In Tune, broadcasts for KMFA Radio in Austin, Texas, and a live solo broadcast from the European Parliament.

Meldrum's discography reflects the breadth of a career that moves naturally between established repertoire and the music of today. Releases include Debussy: Piano and Chamber Music Works (Halidon Classical), featuring his performances of Première Rhapsodie and Petite Pièce; Messiaen's Quatuor pour la fin du temps with members of the New European Ensemble; Steve Reich's Double Sextet; and Songs Along the Way (Etcetera Records), with mezzo-soprano Helena van Heel and NEuE in music by Jeff Hamburg and Mahler.

Meldrum continues to pursue a dynamic international career defined by curiosity, collaboration and a commitment to the expressive possibilities of the clarinet. Equally at home with the established repertoire and the newest music being written today, his work brings together performance, experimentation and a longstanding belief in music as a living and constantly evolving art form.