

Nicola Hands is a busy freelance oboist based in London, whose playing has been described as 'penetrating, elegant and wonderfully flexible' with a 'warm, full tone'. Born in Nottingham, she graduated in 2013 with Distinction from the Royal Academy of Music Masters programme, where she studied oboe with Melanie Ragge and cor anglais with Jill Crowther. At the RAM Nicola was awarded the Evelyn Barbirolli prize for oboe and the Grimaldi Cor Anglais Scholarship.

Nicola is currently on trial as principal oboe with English National Ballet, and has previously trialled with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra and Philharmonia Orchestra. From 2015 to 2017 she was the 2nd oboe and principal cor anglais player for the Orquestra do Norte, Portugal. As a freelancer Nicola has performed with English National Opera, Chineke!, Aurora Orchestra, Orchestra of the Swan, City of London Sinfonia, Wexford Festival Opera, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Royal Ballet Sinfonia, Orchestra Nova, and the Brigantes Orchestra amongst others. Nicola also plays for musical theatre; from September 2013 to February 2014 she was the oboe and cor anglais player for 'The Light Princess' by Tori Amos at the National Theatre, and she played for 'Miss Saigon' in the Prince Edward Theatre.

Nicola is also very active as a soloist and chamber musician. As a concert soloist, she has performed concerti by Martinů, Vaughan Williams, Mozart, Marcello, Strauss and Gipsy. In 2015 she was awarded a Jelinek soloist's award by Croydon Symphony Orchestra, and as a result performed the Albinoni D minor concerto in Guildford in 2016. As part of her duo with pianist Jonathan Pease, Nicola has performed in venues such as St. Martin-in-the-Fields, St. James Piccadilly, St. Mary's Perivale, Winchester Cathedral, Peterborough Cathedral, St. George's Hanover Square, St. James's Church Paddington and Waltham Abbey. In 2020 the duo released their first album, 'Light and Shade' and released their second album 'Phoenix' in January 2021. Nicola is also Artistic Director of the chamber collective the Tailleferre Ensemble, whose aim is to support women in music and perform lesser-known chamber works. Their debut album 'There Are Things to be Said' was released in February 2023.

During her Masters Nicola played in many high-profile performances, including principal oboe for Sir Colin Davis, Thierry Fischer and Yan Pascal Tortelier and cor anglais for Jac van Steen and Semyon Bychkov with the Academy Symphony Orchestra. She also performed the solo oboe part in Bainbridge's Concertante in Moto Perpetuo with the Academy Manson Ensemble conducted by Franck Ollu, in a special birthday celebration concert for the composer.

Before attending the Royal Academy, Nicola completed an MA in languages at Cambridge University. She was very active as both an oboist and a choral scholar in Cambridge. With the help of instrumental and choral scholarships from Jesus College, she was able to pursue her musical ambition, finding many opportunities to perform as both an ensemble player and soloist in the Cambridge music scene.