

James Oesi

Double Bass/Artistic Director/Arranger/Presenter



"One to watch" (The Strad)

"James Oesi ... has no shortage of charm, presence and charisma."
(De Standaard)

Power, rhythmic stability and a warm, enigmatic presence; the double bass has a striking identity, from Classical to Jazz.

"One to watch" (The Strad) - In James Oesi's gifted hands, that enticing sound transforms music you know, into pieces reimagined. A virtuosic soloist, arranger and Artistic Director, James' vision for his instrument, its repertoire and these times is powerful.

"Oesi's beautiful tone strikes you immediately. He makes the bass truly sing... playing his instrument with real virtuosity." (Reformatorisch Dagblad – album 'Adoration')

Born in London and raised in post-apartheid Johannesburg, James moved to Russia aged 16 to study at the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory. He completed his studies at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague, where he received the Fock Medal for the best final exam of that year. Now based in Amsterdam, he moves between Baroque, Classical and Contemporary music, and occasionally Jazz. It was his Bach playing, shared on Instagram, which led the late Abdullah Ibrahim to propose a collaboration. When James pointed out that he had no Jazz training, Ibrahim told him that the way he played Bach, he didn't need any.

"Musical storytelling on a live stage hardly gets more powerful than this." (nrwjazz.net)

James is one of the few double bassists to have built a career around the instrument as a soloist. His programmes, ranging from Bach and Beethoven to Rachmaninov and Berio, have taken him to stages around the world including Concertgebouw Amsterdam, the Gewandhaus Leipzig and Concertgebouw Brugge as part of the Bach Academie. Festival appearances include Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (UK), November Music (NL), Festival of Flanders Ghent (BE), KLAENG Festival in Cologne (DE) and South Africa's National Arts Festival, where he performed as a soloist with Asko|Schönberg. In 2026, he was Artist in Residence at HÖR Musiktage. James has also toured South Africa with pianist Andrea Vasi and collaborated with Kamerata Zuid and South African jazz legend Abdullah Ibrahim, with whom he performed at the North Sea Jazz Festival.

James is constantly seeking new repertoire for the instrument; he had a close connection to Sofia Gubaidulina and has commissioned works from Calliope Tsoupaki (for solo double bass) and Derrick Hodge (a concerto), as well as many young composers. His concerto repertoire ranges from Nino Rota, Tubin and Bottesini to Vanhal (on the Viennese Double Bass).

James' own trio, the James Oesi Trio, was formed in 2022 and is the only one of its kind in the world. It tours joyous, eclectic programmes for double bass, bass guitar and theorbo, ranging from the music of the 17th century to South African Jazz of the 80s and 90s, as heard on their self-titled debut EP, released on vinyl in 2025.

James' debut album 'Adoration' (2024), with pianist Djuwa Mroivili, was launched at Concertgebouw, Amsterdam. It places late-Romantic favourites by Dvořák, Brahms and Gershwin alongside composers of colour of the same era, amongst them Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, William Grant Still and Florence Price, whose organ piece gives the album its title. Every piece is in James' own arrangement for double bass. His next album is his own transcription of all six of Bach's cello suites, a cycle rarely recorded on double bass. In preparation, he worked with neuroscientist and former Olympic speed skater Beorn Nijenhuis on a 2020 case study into how professional musicians can practise most effectively. The album was recorded in 2021 and 2022 with Grammy-winning producer Guido Tichelman, and is set to be released in 2027.

James is an engaging presenter. He has hosted his own NPO Klassiek programme, 'Een goede morgen met', and has been a guest on television and radio programmes such as Podium Klassiek, Vrije Geluiden, NPO Radio 1 and Klara. De Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad, Trouw and Luister magazine have published extensive interviews with him, and Classic FM UK featured his video of Luciano Berio's 'Psy'.

Alongside his performing career, James is the Founder and Artistic Director of BassFest Rotterdam, the only festival of its kind in the world, and since 2024 he has been Artistic Director of Bachfestival Dordrecht.

A dedicated pedagogue, James is professor of classical double bass at Utrecht Conservatory. Everything from his recordings and teaching to his enthusiastic festival audiences shows James' collaborative spirit, engagement and the sheer delight his connections create. He is one of the most passionate champions of an instrument which deserves to be heard more.

James Oesi is managed worldwide by Percius (and with Robert Soomer for NL & BE): www.percius.co.uk

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