

Jazz at St James brings more top talent to Leith

The Jazz at St James series in Leith returns this month, with concerts by guitarist Don Paterson, saxophonist Laura Macdonald and pianist Fergus McCreadie due to take place in the church in John's Place by Leith Links.

Following a successful launch season in the spring, promoter Robin Connelly decided to continue with a programme that highlights some of the best musicians in Scotland.

"We began with a fantastic solo saxophone concert by Tommy Smith that sold out and demonstrated the superb acoustics of the room," says Connelly. "The feeling I got from that night was that there was a real interest among people locally in coming out to really listen, rather than going to a club where there can be a lot of background chatter, and the intimate atmosphere certainly helps. We had young musicians sitting at very close quarters to Alyn Cosker, when he played with the New Focus Quartet, and they said it was like getting a drum lesson."

Connelly has persuaded Don Paterson, who these days is better known as a poet, to read some of his poetry as well as leading the Don Paterson Situation on September 15. Paterson has been wary of combining the two strands of his work but is coming round to the idea that people might become interested in his music through his writing.

Having concentrated on poetry at the expense of his music career since his group with saxophonist Tim Garland, Lammas, dissolved, Paterson is now fired up by his new band which features keyboards player Steve Hamilton, who currently tours with drumming

legend Billy Cobham, bassist Euan Burton and the aforementioned Alyn Cosker on drums.

“The Scottish scene is so strong right now, with a lot of great young musicians coming through the jazz course at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and the idea is really to focus on home-grown musicians,” says Connelly. “Laura Macdonald, who plays on October 20, is well established up here and further afield, of course, and is a wonderful player and composer and I’m really excited to have Fergus McCreadie’s trio playing on November 17 because he’s such an amazing talent, as magazines like Jazzwise are beginning to recognise.”



Laura Macdonald plays on 20 October 2018

Connelly doesn't rule out appearances by touring bands from beyond Scotland as he looks ahead to 2019 and is keeping his ear to the ground. The main proviso that musicians need to meet, however, is that they are able to play acoustically, or with minimum sound enhancement.

“The sound in the room is such that microphones just aren’t necessary for saxophones, for example, and the response we’ve had so far is that the musicians themselves are delighted to be able to work with the natural sound of their instruments and the audience like it that way too,” he says. “So that’s become a feature of the concerts and we make it a selling point along with the up close and personal nature of the presentations.”

[Tickets here.](#)