

Saxophonist blows into Leith after period of illness

Saxophonist Laura Macdonald appears at Jazz at St James in Leith on Saturday 20th October following a lengthy period of inactivity due to a mystery injury.

Back in March, Macdonald was taking a workshop at the Tolbooth in Stirling and didn't notice any damage being done at the time.

"It was only when I got home that I felt a pain at the top of my ribcage," said the Ayrshire-born musician.

"I thought it was a stomach upset at first but a day or two later I was in agony. I couldn't take deep breaths and when I went to the doctor I was ordered to take ten weeks' complete rest. The weird thing is, I don't know what I did to cause the damage so I don't know how to avoid doing it again in the future."

As well as having to take time off from the instrumental teaching she does for South Lanarkshire Council, and which she is passionate about continuing, Macdonald had to cancel all the gigs in her diary between March and June, including some prestigious festival appearances.

She returned to fitness in time for the Edinburgh and Islay jazz festivals, which both went well, and is looking forward to her Jazz at St James concert with her band, which comprises Kevin Mackenzie (guitar), Mario Caribe (bass) and Stu Brown (drums).

They'll be bringing the music Macdonald grew up with to the venue by Leith Links, what's come to be known as the Great American Songbook.

“It really was a songbook – or a set of songbooks – for me as I learned these great songs by Harold Arlen, George Gershwin and Cole Porter from books my dad had,” says the Ayrshire-born musician. “My dad was a jazz singer and these songs, sung by Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald and other great singers, were always playing in the house. They’re where I got my grounding in music and they still inspire me to this day.”

Macdonald, who played with the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra for ten years and recorded her first two albums in New York, has worked with some of the best musicians in world jazz. A previous band, her sextet, included saxophonist Donny McCaslin, who is now much better known for collaborating with David Bowie on his final album, *Blackstar*, and drummer Antonio Sanchez, who composed the soundtrack to the film *Birdman*.

“I’m not sure I could afford these guys now but the musicians in my current quartet are all great players and all bandleaders in their own right,” she says. “We have a gig in Glasgow the night after we play in Leith, so that’s almost like a tour for me after being out of action for so long! Everyone who has played at Jazz at St James is full of praise for it as a venue and after we play, the next concert, in November, features the brilliant young pianist Fergus McCreadie. So it’s great to be part of something like this. I can’t wait.”