

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2019 – Ron Davis SymphRONica

Canadian pianist Ron Davis launches his latest album, UpfRONt, in Europe with an extended Fringe run with his octet, SymphRONica.

Davis, who studied with a piano teacher who learned directly from jazz master Oscar Peterson and who could trace his musical lineage through George Gershwin and back to Beethoven, formed SymphRONica to celebrate the idea of music without borders. The group comprises a jazz quartet and a string quartet and has led to Davis being described as a “Canadian jazz visionary” by the influential All About Jazz website.

“I wanted to play music that isn’t afraid to incorporate groove, rock, world or classical influences while staying true to its jazz roots,” he says. “We’ve proved we can do that – I hope – with the previous two SymphRONica albums, so with UpfRONt the idea was to preserve the SymphRONica sound but shine a new light on it and inject new energy into it. UpfRONt is my twelfth recording overall and as with all my records, I didn’t want to repeat anything I’d done before.”

To facilitate a different approach Davis decided to, for the first time, hand over the production to an outside pair of ears and brought in

the prominent

Canadian bassist and three-times JUNO award-winner Mike Downes as bass player-producer.

“Mike is a great bass player and he’s also an amazing composer, arranger and all-round musician,” says Davis. “The sound you hear on UpFRONT is the sound shaped by a master jazz player and musical mind. We had a dozen terrific tunes and arrangements ready to go, then Mike came in and took them to stratospheric levels. I had to twist his arm a bit to record “Popeye”. At first he thought it wasn’t serious enough. But as you’ll hear on the record, he came around to the idea and we turned it into a most serious jazz barnburner.”

For his Fringe concerts at the Jazz Bar and theSpace @ Niddry Street, Toronto-based Davis will be flying in with his long-established guitarist and musical director, Kevin Barrett. On arrival they’ll then get together with local string players and a rhythm section featuring one of Scotland’s most prominent young drummers, Stephen Henderson, who plays with the Scottish Album of the Year longlisted pianist Fergus McCreadie’s trio and world-jazz group Mezcla.

“This will be our fourth visit to the Fringe and we’ve established a good rapport with a pool of string players there,” says Davis. “The people we work with totally get the idea that they might be playing a Hungarian dance number followed by a reworked jazz standard followed by the theme

from Popeye, and they're up for that. We're also really looking forward to working with Stephen, who is a fabulous drummer with a great sense of dynamics and will bring his own energy to the music."

Ron Davis' SymphRONica appears at the Jazz Bar, Edinburgh from Tuesday 6th to Saturday 10th August and at theSpace @ Niddry Street, Edinburgh from Monday 12th to Saturday 24th August.

