

Tommy Smith receives his OBE from The Queen

Tommy Smith the internationally renowned Jazz saxophonist was invested with his OBE by Her Majesty the Queen at Holyrood earlier in the week. He received the honour as Head of Jazz at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and Artistic Director of the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra for services to Education and Jazz Music.

Tommy said : "I was one of 17 civilians that were honoured with an OBE during an Investiture at the Palace of Holyroodhouse presented by Her Majesty the Queen on July 2nd.

"Behind me is the tall and kindly George Weir getting ready to receive his OBE for services to Rugby and Motor Neurone Disease Research. He said, "I'll follow and copy you, so don't get it wrong!"

During my short conversation with the Queen, we talked about the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, its jazz programme, then the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra. Finally, I asked her if she remembered receiving the one and only copy of an LP, Duke Ellington had specially composed and recorded for her in 1959 titled 'The Queen's Suite'.

The Queen answered: "Yes!"



Tommy Smith receiving the OBE from Her Majesty the Queen at the Palace of Holyroodhouse on 2 July 2019 Photos by Derek Clark

Tommy has delighted audiences all over the world beginning here in Edinburgh. He explained : "At the age of 52, you can't help contemplate, if you've done enough for your country. I certainly have had a very stagnated career since focusing on the SNJO from 1995 to present, Spartacus Records in 2000, my youth orchestra from 2002, the Scottish Jazz Federation, the RCS jazz programme in 2009, and its adjacent Summer jazz school.

"Soon, I hope to spend more time on my own career writing, practising and touring. All I ever imagined, as a young player, was to excel in a small quartet, trio or duo. I never wished to start a National orchestra nor develop a University Jazz programme, but Scotland was in dire need of them – and as I saw every country on the planet flourish with those elements we lacked whilst touring internationally with Gary Burton. Somebody, me, had to stick their career on the line and get their hands mucky to begin the long wait and develop the basics, that was sorely neglected.

"It's been over a quarter of a Century now since my first 24-week jazz programme at Napier University in 1993, and Scotland STILL needs a proper jazz infrastructure equal to our European neighbours regarding promoters, festivals, record companies, agents, improvised music in high schools, radio, and TV, etc., Even though we a small country, we can do it!"