

Saxophonist flying in for Leith concert

LEITH CONCERT NEXT WEEK

Saxophonist Matt Carmichael will fly in from Oslo for his quartet's Jazz at St James gig in Leith on Saturday, 1 February 2020.

Carmichael, who is studying at the Norwegian capital's conservatory as an Erasmus student, has been making waves on the Scottish and UK jazz scenes since arriving at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow.

The leader of the conservatoire's jazz course, saxophonist Tommy Smith immediately invited the teenager to join his youth jazz orchestra, a feeder group for the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra, and has since described Carmichael as "better than I was at that age."

Carmichael took up the saxophone at school when his class was offered lessons on flute, clarinet or saxophone. He was eleven at the time and is not sure that he'd even heard a saxophone being played back then. He just liked the sound of the word, ticked the box marked "saxophone" and after a short aptitude test, he was selected.

"I didn't know much about jazz at all but my teacher, Allon Beauvoisin, who played with the horn quartet Brass Jaw, gave me a compilation disc with saxophone players like Chris Potter and Michael Brecker, mostly Americans, on it," he says.

It was a fellow Scot, however, Konrad Wiszniewski, whose

playing appealed to him the most.

“There was a version by Brass Jaw of the Beatles’ Drive My Car on that disc and Konrad played this solo on it that made me think, wow, that’s what I’d like to do,” says Carmichael, whose influences have since developed a distinctly European identity.

“I really like the folk music influence that you hear in Norwegian players like Jan Garbarek and Trygve Seim,” he says. “I’ve brought Scottish folk into my own music, which is almost inevitable when you’re around the Conservatoire in Glasgow. There’s a lot of interaction between students on the Scottish Music and jazz courses and you hear it in players like Fergus McCreadie, who’s the pianist in my quartet.”

Also in Carmichael’s quartet are bassist Mark Hendry and drummer Stephen Henderson, who as well as also being students, or former students, at the Conservatoire have the distinction of having been chosen, like Carmichael and McCreadie, as Ones to Watch by leading UK magazine Jazzwise.

For Carmichael, who has already appeared at Ronnie Scott’s in London, at the BBC proms and at Newport Jazz Festival, coming back to Scotland for a weekend (he also has a duo concert with Fergus McCreadie at Celtic Connections in Glasgow) is becoming another accepted part of the musician’s life.

“I’m really looking forward to playing at Jazz at St James,” he says. “I’ve heard a lot of good things about the concerts they have there from friends who have played at them. We’ll be playing music from my first album, which I’ve just launched a crowdfunder project to raise money to record.

“It’s melodic and accessible and gives everyone in the band a chance to display their creativity.”