

Transatlantic connection inspires fiery orchestral manoeuvres

Edinburgh fans of the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra can relive one of the orchestra's great moments in concert when it releases a new video this week.

Back in 2014, the Chicago-born singer Kurt Elling joined the SNJO onstage for the second time at the Queen's Hall as part of a three-date Scottish tour. The video was actually recorded in Glasgow the following evening but the song concerned proved a big favourite with the Edinburgh audience.

Jeep on 35° is a composition by triple Grammy Award-winning guitarist John Scofield, here given a vocalese with attitude by Nina Clark, the English musical activist and 21st century minstrel.

Taken from the song cycle Syntopicon, which brings human traits and values including knowledge and wisdom, good and evil, language and joy to musical life, Jeep on 35° was chosen to represent courage, and Elling doesn't hold back. He inhabits lyrics and melody with huge personality and a masterly range of rich vocal tones and agile phrasing.

At the time of the concerts, Elling and the SNJO had already toured Scotland three years previously. They had also headlined at London Jazz Festival and Jazz Sous les Pommiers in Normandy and recorded together in New York. The resultant

familiarity allows Elling to be, at once, the star singer and one of the band, revelling in both an exchange of sophisticated, creative improvisations and a fiercely committed, bluesy conversation with SNJO director, saxophonist Tommy Smith.

“We collaborated with Kurt again the following year to celebrate Sinatra’s centenary and on a dynamic choral project entitled Spirit of Light in 2017, and he always delivers, as you would expect from an artist who is widely regarded as the world’s top jazz vocalist,” said Tommy Smith OBE. “Jeep on 35° is prime Kurt Elling and the orchestra was on great form that night too.”

Arranged by Chicago-born pianist and composer Jim McNeely, Courage: Jeep on 35° follows two previous videos released by the SNJO during the Covid-19 pandemic, a special arrangement by vibes maestro Joe Locke of Sam Cooke’s civil rights era classic A Change is Gonna Come, with musicians from New York, San Francisco, London and Scotland, and Free Your Mind, a showcase for Texas-born rising vocal star Jazzmeia Horn.