

Capital connection finds Elling and SNJO on song

A connection that was made in Edinburgh back in the 1980s flourishes in spectacular style on the new video from the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra.

Released to coincide with Remembrance Sunday this weekend, *Somewhere* – the showstopping ballad from the romantic musical drama *West Side Story* – features the leading American jazz singer, Chicago-born Kurt Elling giving a masterly performance.

Elling spent a year at Edinburgh University when he was studying divinity in the late 1980s and one of his most vivid memories of that time is seeing saxophonist, and now Scottish National Jazz Orchestra director, Tommy Smith in concert at the Queen's Hall.

Little did Elling imagine then that, one day, he would be returning to Edinburgh to appear on that same stage with Smith. But he has, more than once now, and the video of *Somewhere* was captured in the Clerk Street venue as part of the critically acclaimed song-cycle *Syntopicon*, on which Elling and Smith collaborated closely, choosing ten songs that reflect human emotions, virtues and experiences.

“Like all poetry, everyone has their own interpretation of a song lyric,” says Tommy Smith. “For me, *Somewhere* conveys a message of reconnecting with a loved one. We chose this weekend as the release date so that when the nation unites to

remember and honour the fallen and those we have lost, no-one is forgotten. Everyone is included. That seems like a good sentiment to send out at any time but especially so in these difficult days we're all living through at the moment."

With music by one of America's greatest composers, Leonard Bernstein, and lyrics by master wordsmith Stephen Sondheim, Somewhere is a classic vehicle for a singer of Elling's quality.

Following on from his and the orchestra's enthusiastically received *Courage: Jeep on 35°*, also taken from the Syntopicon series of concerts, Somewhere is a superb example of a singer and instrumental ensemble working together in harmony and common purpose in a live setting.

From the simply executed introduction by pianist Steve Hamilton, who carefully follows the score's musical instructions to keep the opening statement pure, the performance is brilliantly considered. Elling's clear, mahogany-toned singing brings out the poetry of Sondheim's yearning lyric and both Hamilton and alto saxophonist Ru Pattison improvise with expression and creativity in keeping with the song's sentiment and New York pianist Geoffrey Keezer's apposite, warm brassy arrangement.

"This is the fourth video we've released during the Covid-19 pandemic," says Smith. "The idea behind these releases is that they help us to stay in touch with our audience while we are unable to give live performances. But this one, like *Courage: Jeep on 35°* and its predecessors with the marvellous young Texan Jazzmeia Horn and New York vibes virtuoso Joe Locke, is also a reminder of the resources we have in our concert catalogue and the connections we've made internationally. It's a great performance by Kurt and an illustration of the understanding we have developed together over a series of collaborations."

Somewhere is free to view and will be available on the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra's [YouTube](#) channel _ from 9:00am UK time, Sunday 8th November.