

Orchestra goes online for landmark anniversary concert

The Scottish National Jazz Orchestra reaches a significant milestone when it live-streams its twenty-fifth anniversary concert from its website on Saturday 5 December 2020 at 2:30pm.

Founded by Edinburgh-born saxophonist and musical director Tommy Smith OBE, the orchestra has weathered some difficult times as well as collaborating with a who's who of jazz, from British luminaries Dame Cleo Laine and Sir John Dankworth to American stars Peter Erskine, Gary Burton, John Scofield and Joe Lovano.

"We have an extensive concert history now, including tributes to Duke Ellington, Miles Davis and Dave Brubeck and specially commissioned works that draw on the jazz, classical and Scottish traditions," says Smith. "But it was tough in the early days when we needed funding and we didn't even have a rehearsal space. We used to use my living-room and it's a good job I moved out into the country because city-dwelling neighbours wouldn't have put up with the volume of noise we made back then."

Albums by the orchestra were also slow to materialise, due to lack of financial resources, but in recent years there have been enthusiastic reviews on both sides of the Atlantic for a string of releases including American Adventure, which was recorded in New York with guests including guitarist Mike

Stern, trumpeter Randy Brecker and saxophonists Dave Liebman, Bill Evans and Donny McCaslin.

The twenty-fifth anniversary concert will feature music from across the SNJO's history. Pieces from Duke Ellington, Mary Lou Williams, Count Basie and Buddy Rich will be included. The programme will also contain a Scottish element in Robert Burns' My Love Is Like a Red, Red Rose and part of the Culloden Moor Suite, which the orchestra recorded with its composer, the late Glasgow-born tenor saxophonist, Bobby Wellins. It will also underline Smith's willingness to encourage young talents, both within his own youth jazz orchestra and the SNJO itself.

"We've always created opportunities for good young players, while at the same time working with well-established names, and this concert will put the spotlight on three particularly promising musicians," says Smith. "Trombonists Anoushka Nanguy and Liam Shortall were winners at the recent Scottish Jazz Awards – Anoushka winning the Rising Star title and Liam winning Best Album and Best Band with his group corto.alto – and their colleague in the trombone section, Kieran McLeod has a great future as an arranger."

In addition to organising cameras as well as sound equipment for the live-stream, Smith has had to bear in mind the Covid-19 regulations when organising both offstage and onstage set-ups for Saturday.

"Of course, we'd rather be playing to an audience in a concert hall," he says. "We can't do that right now but we want to give people watching at home as near as possible to the live jazz experience of making music in the moment. We'll be observing social distance regulations so we'll be setting up be further apart than usual but we'll doing everything we can to relay the immediacy and intimacy of a jazz concert."

The Scottish National Jazz Orchestra's 25th anniversary

concert will be available here <https://livestream.snjo.co.uk/>
on Saturday, December 5 at 2:30pm.