

Locke blows into Edinburgh to orchestrate the SNJO

A friendship forged following a gig in the Rutland Hotel bar in 1987 is behind the return to Edinburgh of New York-based vibes virtuoso, Joe Locke.

Locke and fellow American, singer Kenny Washington, guest with the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra at the Queen's Hall on Friday 25 February as part of a three-date Scottish tour. It's the third time that the SNJO have tried to stage their Pop! Rock! Soul! project, following cancellations due to Covid in 2020 and again last year.

In between these two attempts, Locke and Washington joined the SNJO by Zoom to create a video of the late, great Sam Cooke's civil rights era classic A Change Is Gonna Come, which Locke arranged. The SNJO's director, Tommy Smith edited it, pulling together contributions from musicians in New York (Locke), San Francisco (Washington), London, Glasgow and Edinburgh. The video went on to raise money towards a statue of Nelson Mandela to be erected in Glasgow.

"That's one of the songs in Pop! Rock! Soul!," says Locke, who has arranged all the material for the tour that brings him to Edinburgh. "Tommy afforded me the luxury of choosing songs I love, songs which resonate with me personally. I'm pretty confident that many of the songs will resonate with the SNJO audience as well. It was also important to find material that would lend itself to this large ensemble format and of course, songs that excited Kenny Washington. Discussing and selecting

the repertoire with Kenny was a lot of fun.”

Locke and Smith met in Bill Kyle’s Atlantic Bridge band, for which the late drummer and host of the Jazz Bar in Chambers Street would invite musicians he’d heard on New York business trips to come over and play. Their tour in 1987, which began at the Rutland, was the first time Locke had played outside the U.S. and he has maintained a special fondness for Scotland and its people ever since.

“Bill was such a catalyst,” says Locke, who toured with Atlantic Bridge several times after that first trip. “Whenever Bill invited me over, I knew I’d be meeting some great musicians, one of them being Tommy Smith, of course.”

Smith and Locke kept in touch. They have appeared on each other’s albums, including Locke’s *Dear Life*, in 2004, and the Tommy Smith Youth Jazz Orchestra’s *Exploration*, in 2008. Locke also made a stunning contribution to the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra’s star-studded *American Adventure* album, recorded in New York in 2013. Four years later, Locke and Washington guested with the SNJO on a Scottish tour and Locke is very keen to finally hear the arrangements he’s written being played on the Pop! Rock! Soul! tour.

He and Washington chose songs by Stevie Wonder, The Beatles, Stevie Nicks and Steely Dan, among others, and Locke has spent many hours arranging them.

“It’s always a thrill to hear your work coming off the page, especially when those results are in the hands of such a great orchestra as the SNJO,” he says. “Coming to Scotland always feels like coming home, so I’m really looking forward to this tour and being back in Edinburgh.”

