

Saxophone star Tommy Smith opens new Jazz at St James programme

The series of jazz concerts held at St James Scottish Episcopal Church in Leith resumes on Saturday 12 February when saxophonist Tommy Smith plays a solo and unamplified repertoire of tunes drawn from the jazz, folk, classical and praise song traditions.

Smith calls these recitals celebrations of melody as he spontaneously selects tunes from an extensive memory bank and moves from one to another through passages of improvisation as the mood takes him in the moment.



“Tommy opened the first season of Jazz at St James almost exactly four years to the day,” says organiser Robin Connelly. “It was such a special concert, hearing someone who is an absolute master and world-renowned playing in an intimate space, that we felt it would be fitting if he was to mark the return of these concerts after almost two years absence due to the Covid pandemic.”

When Connelly introduced the guitarist and poet Don Paterson’s group onto the St James stage in March 2020, he had no inkling that it would be the last time an audience would gather in the

venue for so long. The programme that was planned to follow Paterson had to be postponed – and postponed again several times – as live events were forced into a lengthy break.

“We’ve kept in touch with the musicians we had lined up and they’ve all been brilliant about the postponements,” says Connelly. “I think everyone understands the situation and the musicians trusted us to honour the bookings we’d made at some point. Finding slots that suit all the bands has involved much juggling of dates but we felt we had a good programme when it was originally booked and it feels even better now that we’re able to finally go ahead with it.”

Following Tommy Smith, organist Paul Harrison brings his Team Talk trio, with the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra’s drummer, Alyn Cosker and the acclaimed young saxophonist from Shetland, Norman Willmore, to St James on 5th March. Violinist Bernadette Kellerman’s Colourworks (featuring musicians including multi-award-winning pianist Fergus McCreadie and drummer Graham Costello, of Strata) appear on 26th March.

Bassist Mario Caribe’s Fret, with a two guitar frontline of Graeme Stephen and Kevin Mackenzie, plays on 23rd April and the New Focus Duo – pianist Euan Stevenson and Scottish National Jazz Orchestra saxophone star Konrad Wiszniewski – reprise their Classical Connection marriage of Mozart, Miles Davis, Debussy and Bill Evans on 12st May,

“New Focus: The Classical Connection is another attraction we’ve had to St James before and another one that everyone who was there will remember fondly,” says Connelly. “When we started organising the concerts we wanted to present high quality music in a room that really suits jazz with no, or minimum, amplification and where people enjoy listening to the music in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere. That’s still what we do and we’re really looking forward to welcoming people back. It’s been too long since the last gig.”

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/tommy-smith-solo-acoustic-presented-by-jazz-at-st-james-tickets-217609113717>