

Leith-bound musician in prestigious Ukraine tribute

A musician who is due to appear in Leith in May has made a high-level musical tribute to the people of Ukraine.

Pianist Euan Stevenson, of the New Focus duo, who play at Jazz at St James on Leith Links on 21 May, was contacted at short notice by the English Chamber Orchestra and commissioned to arrange the Ukrainian national anthem for them.

The orchestra wanted to play the anthem, which translates as “The glory and Freedom of Ukraine has not yet perished”, at their concert at Cadogan Hall in London last Sunday. Not only that but it was to feature the legendary virtuoso violinist Pinchas Zukerman and renowned cellist Amanda Forsyth.

Falkirk-born Euan, who studied composition at Birmingham Conservatoire and has had pieces premiered on both sides of the Atlantic, was more than happy to oblige.

“To write for someone as accomplished and respected internationally as Pinchas Zukerman is an incredible honour,” said Euan, who recently moved from Glasgow to Surrey. “It was also an honour to be able to pay tribute to the people of Ukraine in such a way. I went along to the concert and Pinchas and the orchestra played the piece beautifully. It was a very moving way to open the evening in the current circumstances.”

Music runs in Euan’s family. His grandmother, on whose Steinway piano Euan composes, was the first woman to graduate from the Royal Academy of Music and Drama (now the Royal

Conservatoire of Scotland) in Glasgow. One of her cousins was the film soundtrack conductor Muir Mathieson, who conducted the music from Brief Encounter among more than a thousand other films, and another was the composer Cedric Thorpe Davie, who studied with Ralph Vaughan Williams and Zoltán Kodály and designed St Andrews University's music course.

The programme Euan will be playing in Leith with his musical partner, the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra's star saxophonist, Konrad Wiszniewski, combines his love of classical music and the duo's expertise in jazz.

"I've believed for a long time that there are many links between the two musical styles," says Euan. "Classical composers and jazz composers often tend to favour the same keys and the influence of composers such as Debussy and Satie on jazz musicians including Miles Davis and Bill Evans is quite marked."

He points out these connections in an informative but entertaining way in the duo's Classical Connection programme, which was awarded five stars by The Herald when they presented it at Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival in 2019.

They've yet to decide if they'll play the Ukrainian national anthem at Jazz at St James, however.

"We wouldn't want to appear to be jumping on a bandwagon or taking advantage of a situation that's obviously horrendous for everyone caught up in it," says Euan. "But if we can find a way of playing the music that's sympathetic to the Ukrainian's plight, it would be good to show support, even if we are a long way away."



Euan with saxophonist Konrad Wiszniewski