

Award-winning saxophonist to appear at Traverse and in Linlithgow

Helena Kay is totting up the countries where her music has been played on radio recently.

The award-winning saxophonist, who plays concerts in Edinburgh and Linlithgow in April, has won praise as well as plays from presenters in Canada, the US, Australia and Ireland. And one Italian magazine went as far as to place Kay's latest album, Golden Sands among the best of current jazz.

"That's very flattering," said Kay. "But the coverage that has touched me most was the programme in Atlanta that used Xian Impressions from the album as the bridge between its tribute to the great Wayne Shorter, who died earlier this month, and the new music on its playlist. Being considered good enough to follow Wayne Shorter is quite a compliment."

Although still in her twenties, Kay has been impressing knowledgeable jazz observers for close on ten years now. Richard Michael, the indefatigable director of Fife Youth Jazz Orchestra was always keen to feature Kay as a teenage soloist. Then, in the final of the Young Scottish Jazz Musician of the Year in 2015, the judges. Including one of Scotland's greatest ever jazz musicians, the late saxophonist Bobby Wellins selected Kay as the winner.

Perth-born Kay went on to win the much-coveted Peter Whittingham Jazz Award in 2017 and having graduated from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London the previous

year, Kay used the cash prize from the Whittingham Award to finance the recording of her KIM Trio's first album, Moon Palace.

A period spent living, working and studying in New York followed. Kay took advantage of having access to top players, including Melissa Aldana, Dayna Stephens, Chris Cheek and Rodney Green to take lessons with them.

The music on Golden Sands drew its influences from the places Kay has called home – Scotland, London and New York – and was brought to fruition by the new-look KIM Trio with the addition of Kay's long-time colleague and now fellow member of the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra, pianist Peter Johnstone.

"Pete and I seem to have been either in the same band or pursuing the same goals forever," says Kay. "He won the Young Scottish Jazz Musician of the Year title three years ahead of me. Then we played in the Tommy Smith Youth Jazz Orchestra at the same time. Now he's in my band, which is really a quartet rather than a trio and we're also playing duo gigs and with the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra together."

The Edinburgh concert Kay plays at the Traverse Theatre on Monday 3rd April will feature the KIM Trio (Kay, Calum Gourlay, replacing Ferg Ireland, on bass and Dave Ingamells on drums) with Johnstone. The following week, on Friday 14th April, Kay and Johnstone play as a duo at St Peter's Church in Linlithgow.

"I can't wait for the tour that brings the group to the Traverse Theatre," says Kay. "We're playing all over Scotland, including Shetland, and then we get a few days off before Linlithgow, which I'm really looking forward to as everyone says it's a great gig to play. I'm not sure what we'll play on the duo gig but Pete knows loads of tunes and is never short of musical ideas."

