

SNJO unites East and West at the Queen's Hall

The Scottish National Jazz Orchestra unites Orient with Occident and a 2000-year-old musical tradition with contemporary improvisation in World of the Gods at the Queen's Hall on Sunday 28 May.

Composed by SNJO artistic director Tommy Smith, and incorporating traditional Japanese melodies, World of the Gods was first performed in 2010 and brings the orchestra together with the percussive choreography of the Mugenyko Taiko Drummers.

"I saw a fascinating Taiko drumming documentary full of choreography, sounds of thunder and delicacy, skill, strength, and endurance," says Smith. "But I assumed I'd have to travel to Japan to find genuine Taiko drummers."

The reality was quite different. Smith, who lives near Lanark, discovered that the UK's first and only professional Taiko group, Mugenkyo were closer to hand than he could have imagined.

"Although they tour all over the UK and Europe, I was astonished to discover that their Dojo (rehearsal space) is only 5 miles from my house," says Smith. "They were very excited about working with the SNJO, and in 2010 and 2011, we had two successful tours in Scotland and England with World of

the Gods. The audiences loved the spectacle of all these drums and the energy and musicality of Mugenkyo's performances."

Over the past thirty years, Mugenkyo has become synonymous with performances that are strikingly visual and range from industrially powerful rhythms to delicately expressive sequences and have thrilled audiences from Glastonbury to Cork Jazz Festival to the Last Night of the Proms.

"World of the Gods is a project we've wanted to return to for some time," says Smith. "So we're looking forward to performing it again. We can justifiably say we'll bring the rumble of thunder but also the sweet fragrance of cherry blossoms in this music."



