

Orchestras combine in Usher Hall Rhapsody

The Scottish National Jazz Orchestra joins forces with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Japanese piano virtuoso Makoto Ozone to play Rhapsody in Blue at the Usher Hall on Friday 3 May.

Ozone will be the featured soloist in a new, extended orchestration by SNJO artistic director, saxophonist Tommy Smith that will mark the centenary of George Gershwin's classic jazz age composition.

"This is a milestone in the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra's near thirty-year career," says Smith, who also re-orchestrated the SNJO's successful 2009 recording of Rhapsody in Blue. "To be invited to perform in collaboration with the internationally respected RSNJO is an honour and a thrill. We're very excited at the prospect of working with such an esteemed ensemble."

A former child prodigy, Kobe-born Makoto Ozone had already played a piano recital at Carnegie Hall, New York when, in 1983, he was invited to join American vibes virtuoso Gary Burton's world touring quintet, in which he and Smith formed a lasting relationship. Ozone has performed three classical suites with the SNJO, Carnival of the Animals, Peter and The Wolf and Rhapsody in Blue. He also orchestrated Mozart's Jeunehomme piano concerto for enthusiastically received concerts and a successful SNJO recording.

“We’re delighted to be welcoming back Makoto, a real master and an old friend of the SNJO, to play on these concerts,” says Smith. “We’ve worked with him on quite a few projects now, including a tour of Japan when we performed Peter and the Wolf with Japanese screen actor Isao Hashizume in 2000-seat concert halls. We’re sure Makoto’s fantastic musicianship and pianistic skills will excite everyone who comes to hear him.”

The SNJO, with the outstanding Scottish pianist, Peter Johnstone, will also perform Duke Ellington’s Black & Tan Fantasy, Billy Strayhorn’s jazz arrangement of Morning Mood from Edvard Grieg’s Peer Gynt Suite and German composer Florian Ross’s arrangement of the West Side Story Suite in the concert.

“In the second half, the RSN0 will be playing the suite from Alfred Hitchcock’s cinema classic Vertigo and their own version of West Side Story, which will feature SNJO musicians, drummer Alyn Cosker, trumpeter Ryan Quigley and saxophonist Helena Kay,” says Smith. “The two versions of West Side Story will allow the audience to contrast the different approaches and will make the programme all the more interesting, I’m sure.”

