

Saxophonist will play standards, ballads and blues

Saxophonist John Burgess becomes the latest musician to play in the concert series in St Peter's Church in Linlithgow when he appears in the intimate High Street venue on Friday 19th April.

A versatile player who is equally at home in all styles of jazz, Edinburgh-born, Falkirk-based John has a CV that also includes tours with reggae and African bands and gigs with the late blues singer Tam White and trance folkies the Peatbog Faeries. He has even deputised with American country-Tex-Mex giants the Mavericks when their saxophonist fell ill.

"I know it looks a bit jack-of-all-trades," says John, who plays clarinet and bass clarinet as well as tenor saxophone. "But to me it all comes from the same place. I'm just standing up there doing what I do and I suppose that's a distillation of everything I've listened to."

The saxophone wasn't John's first choice of instrument. Growing up in Edinburgh, hearing his mother's collection of jazz records he was drawn to the trumpet. In his early teens he saved up money he earned selling t-shirts at Edinburgh Jazz Festival to buy a cornet he'd seen in a music shop window.

When he turned up to buy the instrument, he was deflated to learn that it had been sold. The shop owner persuaded John to try an alto sax instead, but this wasn't what he wanted.

"If I couldn't play trumpet or cornet, I wanted to be a tenor saxophonist, like Ben Webster," says John. "And eventually I

got a tenor and started playing gigs within a month.”

He’s the first to admit that he was nowhere near the quality that he’d heard Ben Webster produce with Duke Ellington’s orchestra but lessons with heroes, including the great American tenorist Joe Henderson while John was living in California, put him on the right path.

His extensive discography, ranging from his Dixieland-styled Nova Scotia Jazz Band to the smooth jazz of Blue Soul Groove and intimate duos with pianist Liam Noble, confirms John’s ease with different playing styles.

In Linlithgow he’ll be accompanied by keyboardist Campbell Normand, who recently toured with American singer Lolita Jackson. They’ll be playing standards, ballads and blues in a way that’s designed to appeal to non-jazz fans and jazz aficionados alike.

“I love playing good melodies that people recognise,” he says. “Grabbing people’s attention with something beautiful is what I try to do. I want to reach people who aren’t out and out jazz fans while at the same time bringing enough weight to the music to satisfy serious jazz people.”

