

Piano star opens new Queen's Hall concert series

The award-winning pianist Zoe Rahman headlines the first in a series of concerts curated by saxophonist Helena Kay at the Queen's Hall in Edinburgh next month.

Chichester-born Rahman, who won the Ivor Novello Impact Award in 2021 and the MOBO Award for Best Jazz Act in 2012, has become a much-respected figure on the UK and European jazz scenes. Her powerful performances marry her classical training with studies in jazz with the revered JoAnne Brackeen at Berklee College of Music in Boston and her strong engagement with her Bengali heritage.

Rahman will play solo piano before being joined in a series of duets with Kay in a concert on 19 September that will be opened by the Glasgow-based Ghanaian guitarist Nathan Somevi's trio.

For Kay, who has included a number of "inspirational" musicians including saxophonists Laura Macdonald and Tommy Smith and violinist Seonaid Aitken in the concert series, sharing the Queen's Hall stage with Zoe Rahman is exciting for two reasons.

The two women have worked together before, when Kay joined the octet that recorded Rahman's 2023 album, *Colour of Sound*. Having first met Rahman as a teenager, however, Kay says that

the sixteen-year-old Helena wouldn't believe this turn of events.

"My mum is also a big fan of Zoe's and she made sure we both went to meet Zoe after a concert she played with Courtney Pine," says Kay. "It was so inspiring for me to meet Zoe at that stage in my musical life."

The Queen's Hall is also a source of inspiration for Kay.

"I've played there quite a few times with the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra and I'm always aware that I'm following in illustrious footsteps," says the saxophonist. "The brilliant composer and pianist Carla Bley and saxophone legend Sonny Rollins are just two of the people I admire who have appeared in the venue. So to play there with some of my heroes is really special."

Kay first came to public notice in winning the Young Scottish Jazz Musician of the Year title in 2015. The Peter Whittingham Jazz Prize followed the year after that and having graduated from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, Kay went on to become a City Music Foundation Artist and won the Drake Yolanda Award in 2023.

The concert on 19th September is the first of five due to take place over the coming year under the Jazz Thursdays banner and Rahman and Kay have rehearsed in preparation for their debut as a duo.

"Zoe is such a brilliant duo partner," says Kay. "It's almost like playing in her octet. She puts so much energy and passion into her playing and her flow of ideas is amazing. It really makes you want to play."

[Tickets here.](#)

