

Violinist's music for saxophone and strings to be performed at the Queen's Hall

Violinist Seonaid Aitken returns to the Queen's Hall on Thursday 10 April to perform her widely admired Chasing Sakura suite.

Written for a string ensemble – two violins, viola, cello, and double bass – with saxophonist Harben Kay as featured soloist, Chasing Sakura was composed while Seonaid was recovering from a serious horse-riding accident and its general air of optimism has been reflected in the response the music has generated.

Venues and festivals including Ronnie Scott's in London and Celtic Connections in Glasgow have hosted enthusiastically received performances of the suite, which was commissioned by Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival in 2021 and released on CD the following spring.

A versatile musician who also leads the hot club-swing styled Rose Room jazz quartet, Seonaid composed Chasing Sakura with the ensemble's instrumentation and personnel in mind. She was also inspired by the cherry blossom season in Glasgow and in Japan, where she lived and worked for eighteen months.

"In the spring of 2021, I was recovering from a fall while horse riding where I broke my pelvis, ankle, small vertebrae and ribs," she says. "I would go for walks around Glasgow chasing cherry blossoms and it reminded me of my time in Japan and how I was inspired by the way they celebrate the beauty

and symbolism of the sakura season with Hanami – the traditional custom of enjoying the beauty of the flowers.”

The music draws inspiration from the lifespan of the cherry blossom to symbolise overall themes of hope, optimism and impermanence. It also takes influences from the wide range of music that Seonaid works in. Classically trained at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Glenrothes-born Seonaid played with the Orchestra of Scottish Opera for twenty-one years and as a busy session musician and orchestrator, she has worked with Burt Bacharach, Deacon Blue, Eddi Reader, jazz singer Carol Kidd and the Dutch violinist Tim Kliphuis, with whom she has appeared at the Queen’s Hall before.

“I’m really looking forward to playing at the Queen’s Hall again,” she says. “I’m particularly pleased to be bringing Chasing Sakura to a venue where I’ve always enjoyed playing. It’s coming up for the cherry blossom season, so it feels like an appropriate time to be playing this music.”

