

RHAPSODISING on GERSWHIN

SNJO director Tommy Smith explains the story behind the orchestra's Rhapsody in Blue featuring Brian Kellock.

BK, as he's known, occasionally quotes from Rhapsody in Blue within his improvisational adventures during our duo concerts. In fact, he quotes many well known melodies and since he is so fluent in the language of jazz, he knows every tune ever written. However, I noticed that Rhapsody in Blue seemed to be a particular favourite.

Many years ago Dave Batchelor from the BBC suggested to me that the SNJO should perform Rhapsody in Blue with Brian, but I thought at the time there would be too much work involved. Things change. A few years later while Brian was round at my house he sat down at the piano and, off the cuff, played Rhapsody in Blue almost in its entirety. For a jazz musician to be able to execute this piece is phenomenal, but it turned out that Brian had performed the work in 1981 as his solo piece in a school concert during his final year at the Reid Concert Hall, in Edinburgh.

On November 21, 2005, Brian and I were flying back from a duo concert in Bristol. While we waited at the airport we read through the entire score of Rhapsody in Blue, imagining what jazz elements could be introduced to expand the work. I furiously wrote down ideas as we sang them and basically sketched the entire form of a jazz version. It then became a labour of love to take George Gershwin's 15 minute work and transform it into a 54 minute jazz orchestral vehicle, retaining as many of the classical piano passages as possible.

After more than six months of development, on Friday June 30 I completed my version of Rhapsody in Blue, running at one thousand and ninety-two bars long. I hope Brian will have lots of fun with it - and I'm really looking forward to hearing him tackle the music in front of a live audience as he is a player who really responds to an audience, using their presence as the inspiration for his fabulous creativity.

Tonight's concert is being filmed by BBC4.

Best wishes,

Tommy Smith

P.S. CDs of the Artists will be for sale for £5 each

Other performances of Rhapsody in Blue:

Friday 15th September • Gordonstoun

November 12th • Purcell Room, London Jazz Festival

the

Scottish National Jazz Orchestra

*in association with the **Brecon Jazz Festival***

present

RHAPSODY IN BLUE

featuring

Brian Kellock

arranged and adapted by

Tommy Smith



Scottish National Jazz Orchestra

directed by **Tommy Smith**

extracts from the 'Kansas City Suite' - Benny Carter

&

other works played by the Count Basie Orchestra

- there is no interval in this concert but there maybe a very short pause -

Rhapsody in Blue - George Gerswhin
(arranged and adapted by Tommy Smith)

Alyn Cosker - *drums*

Michael Campbell - *trombone*

Bill Fleming - *baritone saxophone*

Chris Greive - *trombone*

Calum Gourlay - *acoustic bass*

Brian Kellock - *piano* [www.briankellock.com]

Martin Kershaw - *alto saxophone & clarinet*

Tom MacNiven - *trumpet*

Lorna McDonald - *bass trombone*

Linsey McDonald - *trumpet*

Paul Newton - *trumpet*

Michael Owers - *trombone*

Ryan Quigley - *trumpet*

Graeme Scott - *guitar* [www.graemescott.com]

Tommy Smith - *tenor saxophone* [www.tommymith.co.uk]

Paul Towndrow - *alto saxophone* [www.paultowndrow.com]

Konrad Wiszniewski - *tenor saxophone* [www.konradw.co.uk]

www.snjo.co.uk