

The  
**Scottish National  
Jazz Orchestra**

directed by Tommy Smith

# RELEASE

Music by Gwilym Simcock

April 2023



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL



# RELEASE

Award-winning pianist and composer Gwilym Simcock joins the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra for the premiere of RELEASE.

An uplifting musical experience, with emotion at the forefront, written to transport you to another place and give the listener a precious and glorious distraction from everything else.

The SNJO, directed by Tommy Smith and featuring Welsh wizard of music Gwilym Simcock on piano, offer RELEASE as a means of escape, finding new pathways through joyfully expressed improvisation and spectacularly composed orchestral jazz.

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If you enjoyed tonight's concert, please do consider becoming a "Friend of the SNJO" and help support the future of our orchestras and that of jazz in Scotland. We welcome new friends at any time.

If you would like to know more about our memberships, please contact Catherine Gillespie:  
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We would like to extend special thanks to our main sponsors, **Creative Scotland** and the **Royal Conservatoire of Scotland** for their continued support of the orchestras.



We would also like to encourage everyone to please sign up for our email updates at [snjo.co.uk/news](https://snjo.co.uk/news)

# PROGRAMME NOTES

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Gwilym Simcock was always destined to be a professional musician.

This Bangor-born Welshman, who is the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra's latest guest tonight, might have become an orchestral French horn player. Or, equally, he might now be touring the world as a concert pianist playing the classical repertoire exclusively.

His results in his Grade 8 exams in both instruments – being the highest in the UK that year – certainly suggested he could achieve great things. And he has gone on to do so, after following the advice of Steve Berry, one of his tutors at the prestigious Chetham's School of Music in Manchester.

Before joining the teaching staff at the UK's leading specialist music school, Steve Berry played bass in the anarchic London big band Loose Tubes. And when he heard Gwilym playing piano in an improvisation class, he gave him a mixtape of jazz featuring pianist Keith Jarrett, Brazilian pianist-guitarist Egberto Gismonti and guitarist Pat Metheny's group.

This cassette – the forerunner of music fans choosing a Spotify playlist – changed Gwilym's life. Here was jazz that had all the musical elements that he loved – great harmony, great melody and great form.

Gwilym would go on to tour the world for four years with Pat Metheny, who rates the pianist as *"one of the most exceptional musicians that I have ever known."* The late piano and keyboards virtuoso Chick Corea went as far as to describe Gwilym as a *"creative genius."*

The innate improvising talent that Gwilym showed at Chetham's was nurtured and developed on the Royal Academy of Music in London's jazz course, where Gwilym studied with the internationally revered pianist John Taylor, among other tutors.

Within a year or two of graduating from the Academy, Gwilym became the first musician

from a jazz background to be selected for the BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artists Scheme. He was now working in both classical music and jazz and in 2008 he was commissioned to compose a piano concerto, which he and his trio performed with the BBC Concert Orchestra in the Royal Albert Hall during the Proms.

In between performing with ensembles including the Britten Sinfonia, the Aronowitz Ensemble and the Scottish Ensemble, Gwilym was racking up jazz experience with vocalist Bobby McFerrin, saxophonist Lee Konitz, trumpeter Kenny Wheeler, bassist Dave Holland and drummer Bill Bruford's Earthworks.

Along the way he was nominated for the Mercury Music Prize, with his first solo piano album, *"Good Days at Schloss Elmau"*, toured with violin virtuoso Nigel Kennedy and caught the ear of Scottish National Jazz Orchestra director, Tommy Smith.

Tommy heard a solo piano concert and was *"transfixed."* So when the opportunity arose, he commissioned Gwilym to compose a programme of music, entitled Release, which will be performed at tonight's concert.

Gwilym is thrilled to be working with the SNJO. *"It's fantastic to have the opportunity to write for such a brilliant, world-famous ensemble,"* he says. *"As a composer, you want your music to be realized to the highest level, so I'm extremely excited by this commission and being able to play it with the SNJO."*

Release, says Gwilym, aims to engage people emotionally.

*"That's how people like Keith Jarrett, Egberto Gismonti and Pat Metheny appealed to me in the beginning,"* he says. *"It's how I want the music I hear to affect me and I want to have the same effect on audiences, make them feel an emotional connection to the music."*

© Rob Adams

# PROGRAMME

All music composed by Gwilym Simcock and commissioned by the SNJO with support from Creative Scotland.

THE LOOSENER

RUSE

ONE GLORIOUS MOMENT

HERE BE JOY

DANGEROUS PRECEDENT

HOPE ON HOPE

PLAIN SONG

SNAP

## THE ORCHESTRA

### **Woodwinds**

Martin Kershaw  
Helena Kay  
Tommy Smith  
Konrad Wiszniewski  
Bill Fleming

### **Trumpets**

James Davison  
Sean Gibbs  
Tom MacNiven  
Lorne Cowieson

### **Trombones**

Gordon Campbell  
Anoushka Nanguy  
Michael Owers  
Owen Pickering

### **Rhythm**

Gwilym Simcock  
Graeme Stephen  
Calum Gourlay  
Alyn Cosker  
Steve Foreman

# GWILYM SIMCOCK

Pianist and composer Gwilym Simcock moves effortlessly between jazz and classical creating a sound that is very much his own working with orchestras, choirs, big bands, small ensembles and musicians across the spectrum of music.

His 2011 solo album *"Good Days at Schloss Elmau"* (ACT) was described as "dazzlingly fresh", "world class", "stupendous", "phenomenal", "a cause for huge celebration".

Gwilym often appears on BBC Radio and TV in the UK. In 2018-9 he was Artist in Residence with the NDR Big Band in Hamburg. Since 2018 he has worked regularly with the LSO Percussion Ensemble with whom he recorded an album "Quartet, Quintet". In 2021 he worked with the Swedish orchestra O/Modernt for whom he arranged and recorded "Milestones" based on the music of Miles Davis featuring trombonist Nils Landgren. In 2022 he was commissioned to write a new work "When Time Has Told" for the Stuttgarter Kammerorchester.



2014 saw the release of two highly acclaimed albums on ACT "Instrumentation" with the City of London Sinfonia and "Reverie at Schloss Elmau" a duo with bassist Yuri Golubev. In 2019 he released a solo album on ACT "Near and Now" dedicated to some early influences. Gwilym co-leads Anglo-American Supergroup 'The Impossible Gentlemen' with guitarist Mike Walker and has recorded three highly acclaimed albums with the band on Basho Records. He regularly tours the world with US guitar legend Pat Metheny with Linda May Han Oh and Antonio Sanchez. In 2019 Metheny released his album "From This Place" featuring these musicians on Nonesuch. Gwilym is Professor of Jazz Piano at his alma mater The Royal Academy of Music.

*"No young musician outside the pop world has moved as fast into the upper reaches of his profession as Simcock".* Stuart Nicholson, Observer

# THE ORCHESTRA

The Scottish National Jazz Orchestra (SNJO) is considered by many to be one of Europe's foremost contemporary big bands.

Founder/Director Tommy Smith established the SNJO in 1995 as a not-for-profit organisation with a crystal-clear artistic vision and core values of versatility, discipline and expression. The SNJO is dedicated to promoting jazz as a pre-eminent art form through performances, original compositions, recordings, and educational outreach programmes. This commitment extends to the task of developing promising young jazz musicians through the ranks of The Tommy Smith Youth Jazz Orchestra.

The SNJO repertoire has included re-imaginings of works by the great, the good and the gigantic, including Weather Report, Herman, Rich, Carter, Strayhorn, Goodman, Kenton, Basie, Gillespie, Mingus, Jaco, Corea, Monk, Metheny, Shorter, Miles and Coltrane. They have also recorded vivid interpretations of Mozart, Prokofiev, Piazzolla, Gershwin and Ellington to rave reviews, alongside a remarkable re-reading of Miles Ahead, an ECM-tinted set on Celebration and Tommy Smith's suites, World of the Gods, Torah, and Beauty & the Beast. The SNJO has built a growing library of original compositions underpinned by a deep understanding and appreciation of improvisation.





**THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL  
JAZZ ORCHESTRA**  
DIRECTED BY TOMMY SMITH

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## **In Memory Of...**

We are filled with great sorrow and heavy hearts upon learning  
of the sudden passing of lifelong Friend Robin McClure.

Our sincere and heartfelt condolences are with  
Robin's dear friends and family at this time.

We dedicate the 2022 - 23 Concert Season to his memory.



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Mark McKergow – London Jazz News

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