

The
**Scottish National
Jazz Orchestra**
directed by Tommy Smith

GEOFFREY KEEZER

T H E A R T O F

ARRANGING



SEP 2023



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL



THE ART OF ARRANGING

The arranger's art has been integral to the evolution of the SNJO from its inception in 1995.

Consequently, the orchestra has developed lasting creative relationships with some of the world's most gifted and sought-after musician-composers. One such is GRAMMY® Award-winning pianist Geoffrey Keezer, whose contributions to the SNJO repertoire have transformed and enhanced the music of iconic figures including Keith Jarrett, John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Henri Mancini, John Scofield, Leonard Bernstein, and Wayne Shorter.

A former child prodigy, Keezer has played with such jazz legends as Art Blakey and Ray Brown and duetted with pianomasters Kenny Barron and Chick Corea, who described Keezer's playing as "beautiful" and his compositions as "very inspiring." Touring with popular stars including Chris Botti, David Sanborn and Sting, Keezer has drawn praise from the former Police singer-bassist, who heard "a composer and conceptualist who can maintain the overall line and the DNA of the song in everything he plays."

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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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PROGRAMME NOTES

Geoffrey Keezer enjoyed an early career path that just isn't available to young jazz musicians today. As a seventeen-year-old student at Berklee School of Music in Boston, the pianist was introduced to Art Blakey. The legendary drummer and leader of one of jazz's great on-the-road colleges, the Jazz Messengers, heard Keezer play and offered him a job.

Keezer declined, preferring to finish his year at Berklee, but at age eighteen, he joined Blakey, becoming the last in an illustrious line of Jazz Messengers pianists including Horace Silver, Bobby Timmons, Keith Jarrett, McCoy Tyner, Chick Corea, Cedar Walton, John Hicks and George Cables.

Following Blakey's death, a year or so after Keezer had joined the Messengers, the pianist worked with trumpeter Art Farmer and then Ray Brown, the bassist for Ella Fitzgerald and Oscar Peterson. Keezer had already recorded his first album as a leader during his year as a Messenger, touring the world and learning about music, the piano and life from the drummer.

Keezer becoming a musician had been inevitable. Born to musical parents - his father a percussionist, teacher and bandleader; his mother a French horn player and music teacher - he was a child prodigy on piano and began playing gigs with his dad at the age of fourteen. He taught himself composition and while leading his own groups and touring and recording with an array of musicians including singer-pianist Diana Krall, and saxophonists Benny Golson, Wayne Shorter, Joshua Redman and David Sanborn, he has also become recognised for his mastery of the art of arranging.

"Geoffrey is one of the world's most gifted, most sought-after musicians and composers," says SNJO artistic director Tommy Smith. "As well as working with a number of true jazz legends, he

has also been recognised in the pop arena through touring with Sting, who described him as a superb technician and improviser, a musician's musician."

Over the past twenty years SNJO audiences have been treated to many examples of Keezer's arranging talents in concert and on record. His treatment of John Coltrane's *Dear Lord* featured on the SNJO's *American Adventure* album and he arranged Keith Jarrett's *My Song* for the orchestra's collection of music associated with the ECM Records label, *Celebration*.

"Geoffrey's appreciation and understanding of music are huge," says Tommy Smith. "He has delivered superbly sensitive arrangements for us of pieces by composers and songwriters from Henry Mancini and Leonard Bernstein to Robert Burns and although I thought his strength lay in ballads, his reimagining of bass guitar revolutionary Jaco Pastorius' animated *Teen Town* was strikingly effervescent."

Under the banner of *The Art of Arranging*, Keezer will guide the Orchestra through his unique, new treatments of jazz classics by saxophonists Charlie Parker, John Coltrane and Wayne Shorter as well as specially reimagined arrangements of some of his own music. Since his last assignment for the SNJO, Keezer's composing, allied to his great talent as a pianist, has been recognised by the American music industry's top awards, the Grammys, as *Refuge*, from his twenty-third album, *Playdate*, won Best Instrumental Composition at this year's awards.

As Tommy Smith says, "This is well-deserved recognition and we're looking forward immensely to welcoming Geoffrey back to Scotland."

© Rob Adams

SOUTHEAST ALASKA SUITE

Note by **Geoffrey Keezer**

In 2005, when I was invited to compose an extended work for the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra, I knew right away that the thematic material would have to come from something in my own recent life experience. In August of 2004, two dear friends, newly married, invited me on a week-long boat excursion in Southeast Alaska, from the towns of Petersburg to Sitka. Thanks to the navigational expertise of our captain and our smallish-sized boat, we were able to visit some wonderfully remote places mostly untouched by humans. Trying to be mindful of our impact on the pristine environment, we fished for salmon and halibut, hiked, swam in lakes and hot springs, encountered whales, avoided bears, and generally took in some of the most spectacular scenery on Earth. It was a trip I'll never forget. To be in the presence of such immense natural beauty is very humbling, and I can't begin to attempt to capture it all with my own limited musical language - indeed, I can only portray my personal impressions and feelings. And even these six musical snapshots are a very small part of it.

Aboard the Karlynn

The name of our boat. On the first day out, the weather was rainy but became calm later, and the water was still as glass, unusual for any time of year in this area. This opening movement establishes thematic material that recurs in different forms throughout the Suite. The time signature alternates between 7/4 and 4/4. Repeating, sustained piano octaves represent the still water, in relationship to the shifting harmonies

of the horns, the ever-changing scenery. The tenor saxophone is the featured soloist.

Memory, Frozen Blue

One of the most spectacular sights in Alaska is the glaciers. Inconceivably ancient, they flow slowly and steadily towards the ocean, breaking off into icebergs. Sadly, the glaciers are melting faster and faster with the rising global temperatures. Someday soon they may be gone completely, and with them, their memories of countless millennia. The "Blue" in the title has a double meaning: the actual color of the ice, and the sadness I felt thinking of their imminent fate. While not specifically in blues form, the improvised middle section contains stylistic elements of blues and funk. The soprano saxophone is featured throughout.

Bowline

The name of a simple knot used to tie the boat to a dock. The pun is intentional, as the melody line is shared by the arco (bowed) bass and the bass clarinet. The bass line/melody is then restated in half-time under the trumpet solo. The influence of Duke Ellington and Thad Jones on my writing is readily acknowledged in this piece.

Na Kohola (The Whales)

On our second day out, again with perfectly clear and still water, we encountered a large pod of humpback whales, at least 30 or more. While we did our best

to maintain a respectful distance, they literally surrounded our boat, breaching, spy-hopping, diving and inspecting us. Twice we tried to leave, and the whales cut us off, swimming straight at us (to our delight!), before eventually moving on. They are the gentlest and wisest of creatures. I chose the Hawaiian word for the whales, Na Kohola, because many of the whales we met were the Hawaiian humpbacks that migrate thousands of miles every summer to Alaska to feed, returning to Hawai'i in the winter to give birth.

The opening melody, played by the electric piano, is composed in the style of Hawaiian "slack key" guitar, specifically in the manner of Keola Beamer, a great guitarist with whom I have been collaborating recently. This is followed by an ensemble passage in tempo with multiple entrances zigzagging all over, appearing and disappearing. Next comes a group improvisation featuring the piano, flugelhorn, tenor saxophone, and trombone. Another ensemble passage winds down eventually into the opening guitar-like theme. The entire band gets to be the "pod", coming up for air every now and then!

Port Alexander Moon

We spent one night at this tiny, remote port near the southern tip of Baranof Island. The sky was clear with a bright, full moon overhead. We went for a short walk on the rocky beach, the only sound the soft lapping of the waves on the rocks. The overall feeling was contemplative and sublime. This movement features the piano trio.

Captain Jon

Named for our fearless captain, who also happens to be an excellent drummer. This is the only movement

of the Suite that was actually composed on the boat, at least the first eight bars of the melody. I had brought a small portable keyboard on board, with the noble intent of practicing—but for the most part, there was too much to see, fish to catch, anchors to pull up...At one point on our journey, the boat had engine trouble and Captain Jon crawled down in the engine room, switched some fuel lines around, rewired some things, and got us back underway in no time, all the while reassuring us that it was "no big deal". I found out much later, after we returned home, just how dangerous our situation actually was. We were only a mile from shore, and had we not been able to start our engine, the tide would have pulled us onto the rocks in an hour's time.

Safe Haven

Our part of the journey ended in the port town of Sitka, after some rough weather and 15 foot rolling waves on the open ocean. I found out I don't get seasick (others on the crew weren't so lucky...) When we arrived in our berth, we saw the most beautiful rainbow ever, a perfect unbroken arch spanning half the sky. This short concluding movement is a reworking of the opening theme, with an unabashedly happy ending.

GEOFFREY KEEZER

Geoffrey Keezer is a GRAMMY®-winning pianist, composer, arranger and producer based in New York City. A native of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, he began playing piano and composing at an early age. After briefly attending the Berklee College of Music in Boston, Keezer moved to New York in 1989, becoming the last pianist with the legendary Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers. Keezer has toured and recorded with Ray Brown, Roy Hargrove, Joshua Redman, Diana Krall, Art Farmer, Benny Golson, Barbara Hendricks, Wayne Shorter, Dianne Reeves, David Sanborn, Chris Botti, Sting, Joe Locke and Christian McBride; produced and arranged three GRAMMY®-nominated recordings with vocalist Denise Donatelli, and released a series of albums drawing influences from Hawaiian, Okinawan and Afro-Peruvian folk traditions.

His 2009 album *Áurea* (ArtistShare) was nominated for a Best Latin Jazz Album GRAMMY® award. Geoffrey's 2013 solo piano release, *Heart of the Piano* (Motema Records), seeks to redefine solo jazz piano as a personal and interactive showcase of melody, energy and groove, while

his 2018 album *On My Way to You* (MarKeez Records) is a stunning set of music featuring his working trio with the addition of guest vocalist Gillian Margot. Keezer's latest album *Playdate* (MarKeez Records) earned a 2023 GRAMMY® in the Best Instrumental Composition category for his song "Refuge".

Geoffrey's compositions have been commissioned by the Mainly Mozart Festival, Art of Elán ensemble, Saint Joseph Ballet, Zeltsman Marimba Festival, Carnegie Hall Jazz Orchestra and Scottish National Jazz Orchestra. His music can be heard in the films *What Happens in Vegas*, *The Wedding Year*, and *Inhale*, and in numerous TV shows including *The Young and the Restless*, *Parks and Recreation*, *Casual*, *House of Lies*, *Call Me Kat*, *American Crime Story*, *Clarice*, and *The Originals*.

Time Magazine wrote, "Geoffrey has more than enough virtuosity and sheer musical wit and intelligence to weave all of his apparently disparate strands of influence into an original and compelling whole", and pop icon Sting said "In the universe of piano players that I have been exposed to over the years, Geoffrey has proved himself to be not only a superb technician and improviser, but also above and beyond this, a composer and conceptualist who can maintain the overall line and the DNA of the song in everything he plays. A musician's musician."

Geoffrey Keezer is a faculty member of The Juilliard School and is a Yamaha artist.



PROGRAMME

MUSIC ARRANGED AND COMPOSED BY GEOFFREY KEEZER

PARKER'S MOOD BY CHARLIE PARKER
from The Legend of Charlie Parker
(Performed by the SNJO in 2016)

VIRGO RISING BY WAYNE SHORTER
from The Music of Wayne Shorter featuring Gary Burton
(Performed by the SNJO in 2009)

HIBISCUS BY GEOFFREY KEEZER
(Premiered in 2023)

DEAR LORD BY JOHN COLTRANE
from Celebration of the 40th of John Coltrane
(Performed by the SNJO in 2007)

TEEN TOWN BY JACO PASTORIUS
from The Music of Weather Report With Peter Erskine
(Performed by the SNJO in 2012)

MY LOVE IS LIKE A RED RED ROSE BY ROBERT BURNS
from Alba: Songs of Scotland – Eddi Reader
(Performed by the SNJO in 2015)

SOUTHEAST ALASKA SUITE BY GEOFFREY KEEZER
(Performed by the SNJO in 2005)

Aboard the Karlynn
Memory, Frozen Blue
Bowline
Na Kohola
Port Alexander Moon
Captain Jon
Safe Haven

THE ORCHESTRA

Reeds

Emma Roche
Martin Kershaw
Helena Kay
Tommy Smith
Konrad Wiszniewski
Bill Fleming

Trumpets

James Davison_
Sean Gibbs
Tom MacNiven
Lorne Cowieson

Trombones

Kieran McLeod
Liam Shortall
Michael Owers
Owen Pickering

Rhythm

Geoffrey Keezer
Calum Gourlay
Alyn Cosker

TOMMY SMITH

Born in Edinburgh in 1967, Smith began his prolific career at 14 when his quartet won Best Band, and he received the Best Musician Trophy at the 1981 Edinburgh Jazz Festival. A year later, he was invited to appear on the TV show 'Jazz at the Gateway' with Niels Henning Ørsted Petersen and Jon Christensen; toured with the European Youth Jazz Orchestra, and recorded his quintet for BBC Radio. At 16, he released his 1st album, Giant Strides and studied at Berklee with financial assistance from Sean Connery.

He joined Gary Burton's quintet after a recommendation from Chick Corea, toured worldwide, and recorded on ECM's album Whiz Kids. Smith has documented over thirty solo albums for Blue Note, Linn, ECM and his own Spartacus Record label; toured 50+ countries, composed over 300 works, and collaborated with musicians, poets, and visual artists, including Arild Andersen, Scofield, MacCaig, Alan Davie, Kenny Munro, Jaco, Wheeler, DeJohnette, Liz Lochhead, Christine de Luca, Trilok, and poet Edwin Morgan who he developed a unique artistic

relationship in 1996, collaborating on 55 works of poetry and music.

In 1995 he established the SNJO and ensured its progress until funding began in 1998. He founded the TSYJO in 2002 to provide an educational opportunity for the country's best young jazz musicians and fought to establish the first full-time jazz course in Scotland. In 2009 Smith was appointed head of Jazz at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and became Professor in 2010.

Smith holds numerous jazz accolades from BBC, British, UK Parliamentary and Scottish - Jazz Awards. His contributions to Jazz were recognised nationally when in 1998, he became the youngest-ever recipient of an honorary Doctorate from Heriot-Watt University in recognition of his extraordinary artistic achievement. He subsequently received honorary doctorates from Glasgow Caledonian and Edinburgh Universities. In 2019 he was given an OBE for services to Jazz by Her

SCOTTISH NATIONAL JAZZ 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.

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In Memory Of...

We are filled with great sorrow and heavy hearts upon learning of the passing of Susy Duncan.

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

We dedicate this concert to her memory.

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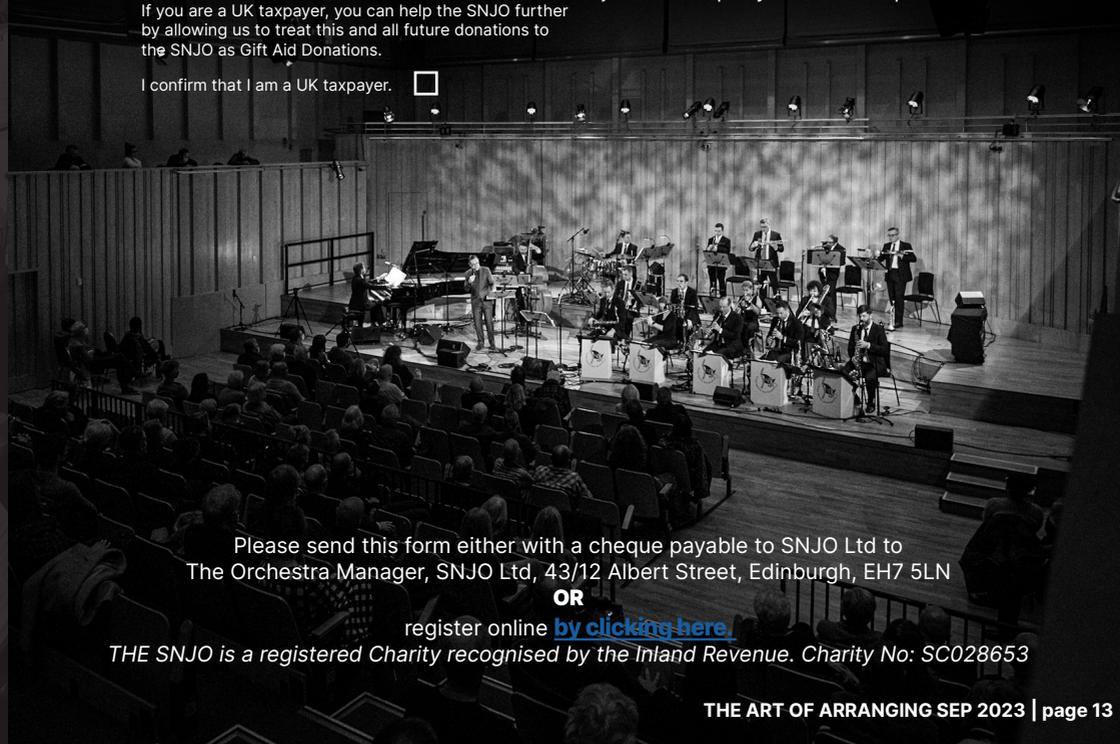
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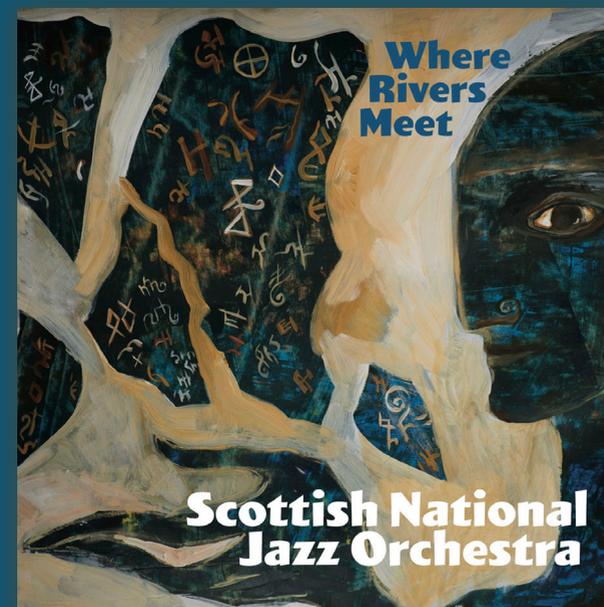
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