

Let the spirit move you

25
10
25

A cathedral is an apt venue for Duke Ellington's Sacred Concerts, writes **Paul Dromey**

FEATURING the world-famous Laurent Mignard Dukish Orchestra from Paris, with full choir and soloists, the magnificent music of Duke Ellington's Sacred Concerts will be recreated at St Fin Barre's Cathedral, Cork, on the afternoon of Sunday October 30, as part of this year's Cork Jazz Festival programme for Cork Capital of Culture 2005.

Apart from his reputation as a bon vivant, Ellington was a deeply religious man.

"Now I can say openly what I have been saying to myself on my knees," Duke once said, describing the first Sacred Concert as the most important work of his life, when he accepted the invitation to present his music for the first time at an event celebrating the consecration of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco in 1965.

His three Sacred Concerts (written in 1965, 1968 and 1973), allowed Ellington to crossover into liturgical music, blending swing, blues, gospel, oratorio, "grande musique" and African music.

In 2002, at a festival in Paris, Ellington's great project was recreated by Laurent Mignard in Saint Sulpice, a church in which Duke performed in 1969.

The celebrated French bandleader, composer, arranger and trumpet player transcribed the Sacred Concerts from their original recordings, for a full swing band, instrumental soloists, solo piano, narrator, choir and solo vocalists.

When the Cork Jazz Festival committee decided to stage something special for Cork 2005, committee member and former Cork School of Music lecturer Bernard Casey suggested Mignard's interpretation of the Sacred Concerts.

Coincidentally, Bill Hosford, of the Friends of St Finn Barre's Cathedral, then approached the committee with a proposal to have a concert in the cathedral as part of the Capital of Culture programme.

On a recent visit to Cork for rehearsals, Mignard spoke of his love for Ellington's distinctive music. "It is very different from that of Count Basie. I love Basie but many musicians in big bands play Count Basie-style. I didn't want to have this sound, this way of phrasing, this way of playing military swing. So, the project consisted of not alone transcribing the music, but also of having to prepare a real tool for playing the music of Duke Ellington.

"The rhythm section is the most important, and I have built the orchestra around this piano/bass/drums trio."

Complementing Mignard, his 15-piece orchestra, solo vocalists and instrumentalists, will be the 36-member Voices of Cork, under musical director Pádraig Wallace.

Pat Cox, former European Parliament president, is the narrator for this Irish premiere of Ellington's Sacred Concerts, an amalgam of the three compositions, as brought together by Laurent Mignard. Bookings: St Finn Barre's Cathedral, the Everyman Palace Theatre or phone (021) 4501673.

As the concert was taking place Bill Johnson, the director of Cork Guinness Jazz festival, speaking at Cork Opera House, disclosed that Duke Ellington's famous 'sacred concerts' are to be performed at the cathedral on Sunday, October 30.

PRESS
LAUNCH

The three works combining elements of jazz, classical and choral music, spirituals, gospel, blues and dance, will be performed by the Laurent Mignard Dukish orchestra, one of Europe's top big band orchestras.

"We are looking forward to what should be a truly magnificent occasion," Bill said.



Aoife Carlin, Cork 2005; Mary Browne, secretary Jazz committee; Imelda Dervin, Cork 2005 and Vincent Kelly, Business Editor Evening Echo at the launch of the Duke Ellington recital.

Picture: Gerard Bonus