

Cape Town-born pianist gets new group in the groove in Leith

Cape Town-born pianist Philip Clouts brings his new-look quartet to Jazz at St James in Leith on Saturday, May 18 as part of a UK-wide tour.

Clouts has brought in bassist Tim Fairhall, who has worked extensively with Ladino singer Yasmin Levy, and drummer Kiran Bhatt, who has played with London Afrobeat band Nomad Soul Collective and alt-folk group Red River Dialect, alongside the quartet's established saxophonist, Samuel Eagles.

"Tim has worked with the quartet before and takes a lot of the credit for the success we had on our winter tour in 2014," says Clouts. "His double bass playing really suits the grooves in the music. Ideally we like to play with an acoustic piano but that's not always possible when touring in the UK and Tim, with his lovely warm tone and strong presence, somehow managed to give the band an acoustic feel even on the gigs where I had to play a digital keyboard."

Clouts' music has always drawn heavily on his South African roots. He was born in Cape Town but moved to London as a child and grew up hearing the records his parents brought over with them. More recently, though, he has added influences from other countries including Italy and India. He has also listened to a lot of Gnawa music, the ancient African Islamic spiritual and religious songs from Morocco and Algeria, and has worked this into his own compositions while still retaining the essence of his jazz piano heroes including Bill Evans and Keith Jarrett.

"The two crucial elements in music for me are strong melodies

and rhythms that draw people in so that they stay with you as you improvise," he says. "They're what attract me when I'm listening. They don't necessarily have to be happening simultaneously – one or the other can grab the attention initially – but if you have both going on in the music, that makes it all the stronger and that's what we strive to achieve."

Clouts scored a triumph when his latest album, *Umoya*, was picked up for release through the emergent jazz wing of respected classical label Odradek in 2015. His quartet will be playing tracks from *Umoya* and previous album, *The Hour of Pearl*, on tour as well as showcasing new pieces including *Rubik's Rubric*, which draws on the West African Yoruba rhythms that fed into Cuban music, as he works towards his group's next recording.

"Nothing beats touring for getting new material into shape," says Clouts. "One or two other newer pieces are written in unusual time signatures and the idea there is not to draw attention so much to their metres but to make them sound interesting rhythmically while at the same time having them flowing naturally. I'm really looking forward to going out and playing them with this band."