

Multi-instrumentalist Fifield release third album in trilogy

Edinburgh University's Traditional Artist in Residence, Fraser Fifield continues a productive spell, releasing his third album in the space of a year on Friday 23 August.

Second Sight is the third instalment in a trilogy that focuses on Fifield's ultra-fluent and expressive playing on the low D whistle.

Each album has featured Fifield in a different trio. The first, Secret Path, saw him working with jazz musicians Paul Harrison on Wurlitzer piano and Tom Bancroft on drums. The second, One Great Circle was recorded with harp and violin partnership, Catriona McKay and Chris Stout.

For Second Sight, Fifield chose guitarist Graeme Stephen and Edinburgh-based Lebanese bassist Elie Afif to again showcase the low whistle as a relatively simple instrument capable of communicating sophisticated melodies and improvised expression.

While Fifield and Stephen have enjoyed a long musical partnership – they played their first, impromptu gig together as last-minute stand-ins for a radio broadcast from Aberdeen in 1996 – this was Fifield's first meeting with Beirut-born Afif.

"Elie is equally proficient on acoustic and electric basses but I had a trio of whistle, guitar and bass guitar in mind for the album," says Fifield. "I thought that would work best for the music I'd written and it was clear as soon as Elie began to play, from his ability to articulate intricate lines with feeling while gelling with Graeme and myself, that he's a

terrific player.”

With one exception, Lolanders, the music on *Second Sight* was written specially for the recording session. Lolanders dates from the successful Dutch-Scottish sextet of the same name that Fifield and Stephen formed for the *Going Dutch* touring project in 2019 with three top musicians from the Netherlands and Indo-Scottish tabla master Sodhi Deerhe.

“Most of the tunes on *Second Sight* are quite simple,” says Fifield. “I wanted to leave lots of space for all three of us to interact and knowing Graeme’s capabilities particularly, I was sure he would respond to a freer approach. He’s such a creative player and he and Elie really entered into the spirit of the session. On *No Distance*, for example, I’d written the melody you hear at the end and we improvised our way towards it, quite successfully, I think.”

In keeping with Fifield’s liking for capturing the music in the moment, *Second Sight* was recorded in one day. Stylistically it’s another departure, Fifield’s aim with all three trio albums being to take the low whistle out of its familiar territory.

“It’s somewhere between the desert blues of Tinariwen, especially with Graeme bringing a grungy edge to his playing, and a step or two beyond the Scottish tradition,” says Fifield. “The whole point of this trilogy was to be exploratory and see where the music goes through being open to other styles and influences.”

Having such a productive spell means that Fifield – unusually – has been able to submit two titles, *Secret Path* and *One Big Circle*, for the Scottish Album of the Year Award 2024, the winner of which will be announced on October 24.

“I’m not expecting to win at all, far from it, but it’s very satisfying to see two entries on the eligible albums list,” says Fifield. “There are so many albums released in Scotland

these days that it's easy to get lost in the crowd. If one of the albums made the shortlist, or even the longlist, that would be fantastic but I'll be happy if people just check out my music on the SAY website."



Photo Douglas Robertson