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# REBECCA LOMNICKY & THE FIRE

Seán Laffey talks to Rebecca Lomnicky about her music and a new album from her Scottish band The Fire.



**Seán:** “At what stage did you become enchanted by Scottish fiddle music?”

**Rebecca:** “When I was eight years old, my parents took me to see Cape Breton fiddler, Natalie MacMaster. Her stage performance, music, and persona were so inspiring to me that I wanted to play like her. Shortly thereafter, my parents found me a teacher, Linda Danielson, who specialized in Scottish and Irish music.”

**Seán:** “You won the U.S. National Scottish Fiddle Competition in 2005?”

“In The Fire we hope to showcase the beauty of Scottish music and add our own voices to the tradition”

**Rebecca:** “That competition was a defining moment for me because in addition to winning, I also got to hear Scottish fiddler Bonnie Rideout give a solo fiddle recital. That was the first time I witnessed a fiddler make her instrument sound like a bagpipe. Her performance inspired me to dig deep into the bagpipe tradition and begin my quest to develop ornamentation and stylistic techniques that closely imitate the pipes. My musical partnership with bagpiper, David Brewer, has allowed me to continue this work and been instrumental in shaping my own musical style.”

**Seán:** “Four years later you won the Glenfiddich International Scottish Fiddle Championship.”

**Rebecca:** “Winning the Glenfiddich was both a personal and professional highlight. When I travelled to Blair Castle to compete, it was the first time I had ever been to Scotland. I had studied with different Scottish fiddlers, listened to hundreds of recordings, and practiced my sets for months leading up to that moment, but I still never expected to win. The legendary pianist Morag Macaskill accompanied me and was a wonderful source of encouragement and support. When I became the youngest person and second American to win the championship, it was both an incredible honour and an affirmation of all the hard work I had put into studying the tradition.”

**Seán:** “How has your teaching been impacted by the Pandemic?”

**Rebecca:** “I teach private fiddle lessons, public fiddle workshops, and ethnomusicology classes to students at the University of California, Berkeley. Due to the pandemic, everything has become virtual. I have been living in Glasgow for the last year conducting research on the Scottish traditional music scene for my PhD in Ethnomusicology. One of the benefits to online teaching is that despite the distance and time zone differences, I’ve been able to continue working with my students back in California. However, group discussions, which are a key to my larger classes, can be quite difficult to facilitate over Zoom. I think everyone is looking forward to the day when we can have all of these classes in person again!”

**Seán:** “Tell us something about your band The Fire.”

**Rebecca:** “The Fire is a Scottish music trio based in Santa Cruz, California. My band mates are David Brewer and Adam Hendey. David is a dynamic and virtuosic bagpiper, as well as a brilliant whistle and bodhrán player. He was a founding member of the California Celtic band, Molly’s Revenge, with which he performed for 20 years. David is one of the most energetic and charismatic bagpipers you will ever see, and in The Fire we work together to craft intricate arrangements of melodies, which showcase the interplay between the pipes and fiddle.

“Adam brings a rich layer of guitar, bouzouki, and harmonium to our sound. He is a graduate of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and holds a M.A. in Traditional Music Performance. He brings an innovative and contemporary accompaniment style to the band. Both David and Adam are also prolific tune writers and we enjoy incorporating many of their compositions into our band repertoire.

“Over the past year and a half, The Fire has been working on our new 11 track album, *Marigold*. The collection of tunes draws from a variety of Scottish fiddle manuscripts, bagpipe music collections, and our repertoire of original compositions. *Marigold* is a celebration of our band’s identity and our home. Tracks range from the traditional heartfelt slow air *Mrs. Jamieson’s Favourite* to an intricate set of original tunes

titled *California Highway 1*. We also have a track called *The Robert Burns Medley*, which is a set of lesser-known tunes that Burns used as melodies for his songs. By performing a range of music, from old to new, we hope to showcase the beauty of Scottish music and add our own voices to the tradition.”

**Marigold will be released worldwide on 1st January 2021. Order online at: [www.thefirescottishband.com](http://www.thefirescottishband.com)**

