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# Dizzy Gillespie All Stars at Ronnie Scott's, London W1

Clive Davis



Given that the late Dizzy's old friends, the saxophonist James Moody and the trombonist Slide Hampton, have a combined age of more than 150, this gig could easily have turned out to be horribly embarrassing. Bebop is an unforgiving form that demands a rare degree of athleticism. Gillespie himself was not immune to the passing of time; some of the concerts he played in his final years lacked that vital spark.

Hampton has certainly lost some of his old precision, which is hardly surprising, and Moody has dropped down a gear. Yet there was still a joie de vivre about this display that would have put many a younger band to shame. And in Gregory Gisbert, a fortysomething trumpeter who has turned out with many a big band, they have a player who can reproduce Gillespie's high-register runs with uncanny accuracy.

With Gisbert performing with such flair, and with the pianist Cyrus Chestnut, bassist John Lee and drummer Vincent Ector forming an immaculate rhythm section, the group generated the dynamism of a miniature big band. Gillespie's gently undulating *Con Alma* was full of discreet embellishments, and faded out with a subtle quote from *Tin Tin Deo*. Later, Hampton supplied the suitably impish vocals on *Salt Peanuts*, a tune he playfully attributed to the former President Jimmy Carter.

No one upstages Moody when it comes to pranks. A long-time favourite at the club who looks nowhere near 84 years of age, he seized the microphone to deliver his parody of *Pennies from Heaven*. In his hands the song becomes the ribald tale of a baby of uncertain parentage called Benny. The joke may sound stale in print but, as with Ronnie Scott's old yarns, retold night after night after night, the secret lies in the timing.

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