

Jazz

Impossible Gentlemen

Pizza Express, London



The word is that every night of the current UK tour by the Anglo/US quartet the Impossible Gentlemen has been different so far, and given the technical firepower of the individuals and their

swashbuckling confidence, it seems likely.

The band spiritedly collides the casual

song-spinning of a

Pat Metheny

band with

scorching

postbop

intricacies,

notably from pianist

Gwilym Simcock, and

bursts of raw electric

blues from guitarist

Mike Walker. With

Americans Steve

Swallow (bass guitar)

and Adam Nussbaum

(drums) adding

dynamism and

vast experience,

they sound

even more like a

world-class jazz

band than on their debut a year ago.

Much of the live material came from their eponymously titled debut album, augmented by works by the prolific Simcock and the cannily lyrical Swallow.

Early on, the pianist directed an incandescent improvisation of skidding twists, barline-vaulting long runs and classically precise figures at his own bebop-referencing *You Won't Be Around To See It*, as well as exploring the flat-out phrase-swapping with Walker that ran through both of Tuesday's sets. The guitarist's *Wallenda's Last Stand* has a Methenyish air, and his own lissome lines, and Steve Swallow's, resembled the same instrument at times. The tumbling *Laugh Lines* was a shade more muffled and navigationally uncertain than on the album, but Walker's *When You Hold Her* was a masterpiece of the slow burn, from delicate guitar chording to roaring, effects-packed drama.

The second set spliced three pieces into one gripping story that opened on an understatedly dancing groove and ended with the players crouching, watchful and sometimes jubilant, testing and baiting each other. The formidable Nussbaum's homage to traditional blues, *Sure Would Baby*, hurled Walker into Hendrix territory, and Swallow's famously cool *Ladies in Mercedes* can rarely have been played with more impetuous ferocity.

John Fordham

At The Stables, Wavendon (01908 280800) tonight, and touring until 23 June.