

Gwilym Simcock/Mike Walker

Ronnie Scott's, London

Jazz supergroups are volatile concoctions, bespoke teams of virtuosi often just getting in each other's way. But the Anglo-US quartet built from scratch this week around the untried partnership of pianist Gwilym Simcock and Salford guitarist Mike Walker, with Americans Steve Swallow on bass and Adam Nussbaum on drums, fulfilled all its promise – and then some.

With everything from prize-winning albums to Prom concerts under his belt, Simcock's international stature is secure – but Mike Walker, though almost two decades older, has been a peripheral figure. Yet Walker's contribution to this ensemble was nothing short of sensational, through plenty of quiet but compellingly lyrical music, as well as some postbop gallops and a spectacular roaring blues.

With its mix of understated grooving, chiming rock/blues guitar sounds and passages of glistening delicacy, this band recalled the early ensembles led by vibraphonist Gary Burton. Simcock set the improv bar early on with a surging, McCoy Tyner-like solo on his own convoluted-bop theme, and Walker's fast Laugh Lines revealed his rare balance of meticulousness, spontaneity, storytelling and tonal bite as a soloist. Walker uses effects sparingly, but an accordion-like sound warmed a graceful ballad towards the end of the first set. Nussbaum's blues Hey Pretty Baby then launched some howling electric-blues out of a stealthy and soft-strummed overture, and Swallow's classic Ladies in Mercedes was a vehicle for the bass guitarist's inimitably slinky solo style – with Simcock's arrangement typically cherishing its famous riff, while disguising its melody almost entirely. The full house listened rapt to every polished sound.

John Fordham