



Eddie Palmieri and the Afro-Caribbean Jazz Stars – review

Ronnie Scott's, London

☆☆☆☆★

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Repetition is key to most forms of dance, from deep house to The Rite of Spring – an explicit pulse that keeps limbs in motion. Eddie Palmieri's brand of "Nuyorican" Afro-Caribbean music can be as sophisticated and complex as jazz, but its Latin rhythms are embedded in every tune he plays.

There is little space for dancing at Ronnie Scott's, but everywhere you looked people were moving, shifting, tapping feet and fingertips to Palmieri's infectious grooves. Waiting staff, their trays in hand, glided by in strict tempo. As Palmieri locked into the ferocious clave of Tito Puente's Chang, a quick-footed waiter grabbed a passing friend by the hand and she performed a graceful arabesque.

Many of the themes, such as Puente's Piccadillo, sound like stylish Blue Note melodies draped over a taut Latin clave. Jose Claussell (timbales) and Vincent "Little Johnny" Rivero (congas) leave spaces that are different to those a kit drummer might create, allowing us to appreciate the jigsaw precision of Palmieri's arrangements: the band clatters away like a cherished old steam engine.

There is subtlety, too, in numbers such as Palmieri's Tema Para Rene, which elicited gorgeous solos from trumpeter Philip Dizack and saxophonist Louis Fouché. Palmieri can also be playful, as shown in the funky interplay between piano and bass (Luques Curtis) on a long intro, but his final solos are ferociously brilliant. Palmieri's genius is to stay rooted at the rhythmic heart of his band while playing with the improvisational flair of Horace Silver or McCoy Tyner. It is a musical sleight of hand that effortlessly links the salsa dura of his 1960s heyday to hard bop and beyond.

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