

## Donald Harrison

★★★★ Pizza Express Jazz Club, London

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Bebop is hard music to learn to play, but after serving its tough apprenticeship, bebop experts can find it easy, sleepwalking through complex pieces with the technique engaged but the spirit detached. Donald Harrison, the alto saxophonist from New Orleans who first startled UK audiences with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, takes the opposite approach. During his London shows in the Candid jazz festival, he and his quintet reworked one of the most familiar repertoires in jazz - the Kind of Blue era of Miles Davis - with a scalding relish.

Harrison's sound scatters soulful slurs, squawky high-register sounds and a Rollins-like fondness for manipulating repeated melodic fragments with a boppish fluency rooted in Charlie Parker. That chemistry put the performance in a different timbral and dynamic world to the nonchalant hipness of the Miles Davis quintet Harrison was celebrating. And the brassy impulsiveness and heated sound of his 19-year-old cousin Christian Scott on trumpet was only occasionally reminiscent of Davis's glowering reserve.

Harrison was backed up by a fine rhythm section that consisted of Jason Rebello (piano) and Orlando Le Fleming (bass), plus a young drummer, OC Davis, who at times sounded uncannily like Davis's Jimmy Cobb. They kept a supportive pressure on the front players, with Rebello inspired as both a sounding board for the others and an adventurous soloist.

Harrison's Kinda New was a fiercer and more urgent exploration of the All Blues vamp. It featured a long alto solo from the leader, with brittle high sounds, flowing runs and preoccupied, whirring trills. Freddie Freeloader brought a flaring trumpet break from Scott, while Harrison, yelling encouragement in his drummer's ear, soared into Charlie Parker mode in his own solo.

Rebello picked up and reshaped Harrison's phrases in Flamenco Sketches before emphasising the music's Spanish harmonic roots. A breakneck fast-bop phrase-swapping exchange between the two horns finally brought the house down. Great individual performances, but a true ensemble gig at heart