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Havana Cultura Live Barbican, London

★★★★★

It's a familiar challenge: how do you turn a multi-artist concept album into a coherent live event? Too many individuals and it becomes too bitty; too few and it can lose the grand idea that made it work in the first place.

In the case of Gilles Peterson presents Havana Cultura, the concept was to feature the new sound of Cuba. At the heart of the project is musical director and virtuoso pianist Roberto Fonseca. The double album, which comprises a new studio disc coupled with a 16-track compilation, embraces more than a dozen flavours of style and rhythm, and many different artists.

In performance, DJ and taste-maker Peterson stands to one side of his 10-piece band, occasionally twiddling knobs or triggering beats from a portable console.

On record, Peterson and his team seem to have the final cut; in concert it is Fonseca who dominates, revealing the creative tension between the pianist's world-jazz ambitions and Peterson's more populist, inclusive approach. Fonseca's predilection for ultrafast, dazzling pianism means that mid-tempo pop songs unexpectedly mutate into finger-busting virtuosity. And his regular quintet is much tighter than the full lineup, which includes genial rappers Oggwure.

Peterson sets the pace for certain numbers, mixing in samples, atmospheres and field recordings, or triggering a thumping four-on-the-floor kick drum. But the lineup lacks the electronic resources and flexibility of musicians such as Gotan Project or Matthew Herbert, or the hardcore appeal of the new Havana Cultura Remixed album, which features engaging reinventions by Louie Vega, Seiji and 4Hero, among others.

Nevertheless, the concert was terrific in parts, and featured young Cuban singer Danay Suárez Fernández on several numbers, including Think Twice and languorous Lagrimas de Soledad: you could hear her growing in confidence, singing better and better, as the show progressed.

John L. Walters