



World Music

Havana Cultura

Barbican

★★★★☆

DAVID SINCLAIR

A lot has changed in the decade or so since Ry Cooder introduced the music and musicians of Cuba to a mainstream global audience with the celebrated *Buena Vista Social Club* album. But the distinctive melodic flavour and rhythmic flair of Cuban music remains a given, as the DJ Gilles Peterson found when he made his own voyage of discovery to the island last year to make a recording with an ensemble of somewhat younger players there. The resulting album, *Gilles Peterson Presents Havana Cultura*, was brought to life here with a performance that combined incredible musicianship with a passionate sense of fun.

Even as they filed on to the stage the musicians were clapping their hands and banging bits and pieces to create a syncopated rhythm so infectious that it

defied the audience not to join in. With Peterson overseeing affairs from behind a record deck, from which he contributed occasional electronic beats or other discreet effects, the percussion-heavy band took off under the leadership of the pianist Roberto Fonseca. An incredibly expressive and versatile player, Fonseca at first caressed the keys during *Roforofo Fight* with a gentle touch, then attacked them with a jabbing sequence of hard, staccato phrases, like Rachmaninov performing a rumba.

The singer and songwriter Danay took centre stage for *Ser o No Ser (To Be or Not To Be)*. Her voice, although strong and soulful, had a rather strident quality and seemed better suited to the fast, tongue-twisting rap, which she applied to a strikingly souped-up version of Donald Byrd's classic funk groove *Think Twice*. It was left to the rap duo Oggueré — looking like a Cuban version of Run DMC in their jackets and hats — to close the show with a couple of rabble-raising numbers that had all three tiers of the hall dancing. The revelries continued post-performance as Peterson gave an impromptu DJ set in the foyer — a nice, value-added touch to a great night.