

Impossible Gentlemen – review

Pizza Express, London

The word is that every night of the current UK tour by the Anglo/US quartet [the Impossible Gentlemen](#) has been different so far, and given the technical firepower of the individuals and their swashbuckling confidence, it seems likely. The band spiritedly collides the casual song-spinning of a Pat Metheny band with scorching postbop intricacies, notably from pianist Gwilym Simcock, and bursts of raw electric blues from guitarist Mike Walker. With Americans Steve Swallow (bass guitar) and Adam Nussbaum (drums) adding dynamism and vast experience, they sound even more like a world-class [jazz](#) band than on their debut a year ago. Much of the live material came from their eponymously titled debut album, augmented by works by the prolific Simcock and the cannily lyrical Swallow. Early on, the pianist directed an incandescent improvisation of skidding twists, barline-vaulting long runs and classically precise figures at his own bebop-referencing *You Won't Be Around To See It*, as well as exploring the flat-out phrase-swapping with Walker that ran through both of Tuesday's sets. The guitarist's Wallenda's Last Stand has a Methenyish air, and his own lissome lines, and Steve Swallow's, resembled the same instrument at times. The tumbling *Laugh Lines* was a shade more muffled and navigationally uncertain than on the album, but Walker's *When You Hold Her* was a masterpiece of the slow burn, from delicate guitar chording to roaring, effects-packed drama. The second set spliced three pieces into one gripping story that opened on an understatedly dancing groove and ended with the players crouching, watchful and sometimes jubilant, testing and baiting each other. The formidable Nussbaum's homage to traditional blues, *Sure Would Baby*, hurled Walker into Hendrix territory, and Swallow's famously cool *Ladies in Mercedes* can rarely have been played with more impetuous ferocity.