

Jazzwise

The Steve Swallow Quintet + The Impossible Gentlemen – Queen Elizabeth Hall, 13.11.2011

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Steve Swallow's role in The Impossible Gentlemen was filled by Steve Rodby as the group supported its usual bassist's new quintet. The opening set, dominated by Mike Walker's fine compositions and even finer guitar work, delivered an exciting blend of subtle harmonies and what pianist Gwilyn Simcock described as "hammer-horror" pentatonic rock.

The closing intensity of the Gentlemen's set would have been impossible to match. Rather than try Swallow's quintet, consciously slowing things down, opened with a trio of minimal tunes foregrounding Chris Cheek's saxophone. Anything lacking in intensity was compensated in variety. A string of tunes followed, wittily dedicated by Swallow to murder-mystery fiction, where Carla Bley's atmospheric organ drew the group close to film music. Swallow and Steve Cardenas then embarked on a gentle flamenco-inspired duet. Here Swallow reached such delicate high registers that his bass and Cardenas's guitar converged to haunt the same tonal grounds and offer the evening's highlight.

These two highly-divergent highly-rewarding sets, united through Swallow, were a outstanding tribute the bassist's versatility.

– Matt Ellis