

Manana//Cuba x Jazz re:freshed

Start time: 7.30pm

Running times: 2 hr 10 minutes

All times are approximate and subject to change.

Arwa Haider looks into the history behind this collaboration ahead of their joint show at Milton Court.

'Manana' (no accent) isn't the Spanish word meaning 'tomorrow', but it is a word that connects the past and the future. It's a term apparently originating from the Cuban War of Independence at the end of the 19th century; it derives from the name of a revolutionary general's wife, and it was later used by Cuba's *rumberos* to denote music played with a heartfelt passion. That attitude definitely fuels Manana // Cuba: an international collective who launched an acclaimed electronic/roots festival in Santiago de Cuba in 2016, and who've more recently been producing collaborative live and club events and label releases in London. For tonight's concert, they team up with Havana based The Cuban Joint and London innovators Jazz re:freshed, creating a meeting of minds and a meltdown of rhythms, across jazz, electronic and Afro-Cuban genres.

'The roots of Manana//Cuba was a 6 month trip to Santiago De Cuba where I studied the music there whilst also building a community studio alongside local producers in the city who were keen to experiment and explore new electronic ideas. This studio opened doors to working with a wide network of musicians, folkloric companies and eventually the ministry of culture, who we worked alongside to create the festival.'

'We learned a lot, and we brought that back to the projects we do in London,' says Follett. Tonight's show will also highlight Manana // Cuba's natural progression towards working with jazz musicians in the UK capital, as Follett explains:

'There's always a strong focus on improvisation in all the projects we have. The nature of Afro-Cuban rhythms, especially rumba, is that they're quite open and free. Cuban musicians are used to playing in lots of different contexts, so it's been quite easy to make these connections with jazz musicians.'

These modern connections stem from a rich legacy of musical exchange. Historically, the evolution of jazz music was deeply enriched by Cubans who travelled to the States in search of work. US jazz giant Dizzy Gillespie also famously travelled to Cuba for inspiration, and performed and co-wrote seminal tracks such as the vibrant 'Manteca' (1947) with the Havana-born percussion don Chano Pozo.

The concert tonight will involve collaborations spanning different perspectives; in the first half, it brings together Brit-based Cuban music involving award-winning percussionist Hammadi Valdes (from Manana // Cuba's flagship outfit Ariwo, and previously a member of Cuban outfit Irakere) and the dub techno-inflected Space Afrika, whose acclaimed 2018 album *Somewhere Decent To Live* showcased expansive grooves that also echo the urban setting of their Manchester roots. This venture in particular, will see the duo dive deeper into the social and cultural aspects so far versed in their output, engaging with ideas of ethnomusic, whilst connecting to a wider overall movement.

In the second, it showcases an exhilarating new gen mix of Cuban and Brit jazz, roots and electronic talents including conga don Adel Gomez, bass virtuoso Feliciano Arango, much raved-about pianist Sarah Tandy, fantastically impulsive drummer Yussef Dayes, spirit-soaring saxophonist/percussionist

barbican

Kevin Haynes, and Seiji (from creatively ground-breaking London broken beats collective Bugz In The Attic, more recently based in Berlin). All of these brilliant players have proved multi-ranging in their abilities, and tonight's performance continues to draw from the collaborative energy (as well as vivid visuals) of a Havana show produced by Jazz re:freshed co-founder/artistic director Justin McKenzie and Manana // Cuba.

Since 2003, Jazz re:freshed have merged club culture and far-ranging live programming, creating an approach that feels heady, sweaty and smart; these tastemakers have highlighted numerous acts who are now spearheading the current surge of excitement around the British jazz scene.

'The zeitgeist is different, in terms of digital age technology and the changing of generations, though in terms of musicality and talent, the British jazz explosion could have happened at any point,' argues McKenzie. 'Jazz re:freshed has always been driven by our tastes, and what works musically.'

McKenzie recalls growing up listening to a range of Caribbean music including calypso - being particularly fascinated by its rhythmic connections, and later taking up Afro-Cuban percussion as well as becoming an avid collector of pan-Latin jazz records. During the Havana trip, his collective also took time out from intensive rehearsals to catch live performances by seasoned Cuban legends Rumberos de Cuba.

'There's something about the cultural interpretations of Cuban music that has always influenced musicians, going back to the likes of Dizzy Gillespie,' he says. 'There's also a kind of timelessness; I'll discover a tune that sounds very 'now', and discover that it goes way back.'

There are few places on Earth that have influenced the planet musically, more than Cuba. Couple that with a Jazz scene in the UK that is leading the world in its ascendancy and its highly respected reputation for innovation in electronic music. It was these elements that were sought to be fused and explored in this project, which brought musicians from the UK to Cuba, to create original compositions with their Cuban counterparts. Created over a five day period in Havana, the end result of this musical experiment showcases the symbiosis of disparate sonic elements and results in a piece that works seamlessly across musical and geographical borders.

Manana// Cuba x Jazz re:freshed promises a blend that is instinctive yet unpredictable, melding musical histories: a 21st century cultural exchange that's delivered with genuine passion. As McKenzie says: 'This is an opportunity to hear where the talent that we have will take these possibilities. There's the unknown quantity of what's going to happen, but also the knowledge that, with the quality of the musicians involved, whatever happens is going to be exciting.'

Tonight's sounds couldn't be fresher: sourced from a trip and sessions that ended just a few days ago, and sparking creative avenues that continue to stretch forward.



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