

Alfa Mist

Doors: 7.30pm

Alfa Mist: 8pm

Interval: 8.45pm

Alfa Mist: 9.05pm

End: 9.50pm

Approximate running time: 110 minutes, including interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

Oumar Saleh sat down with Alfa Mist and talked about the influences behind his album, *Bring Backs*.

When listening to Alfa Mist, you can't help but envisage his myriad compositions being the soundtrack to a black-and-white Steve McQueen film set in London. The Newham-born producer, pianist, bandleader and MC – long hailed as one of the torchbearers of the UK's next-gen jazz movement – crafts the kind of contemplative music that is moody and hypnotic, perfect for long train commutes and night-time winter walks. Those sentiments are evident on his latest album *Bring Backs*, an emotive odyssey that champions the city's cosmopolitan resilience, while also doubling as an eclectic love letter to the place he calls home.

Perhaps his most personal project yet, *Bring Backs* is a masterful fusion of jazz, neo-soul, and hip hop that is both modern and nostalgic at once. Enchanting intro 'Teki' is elegantly guided by stuttering percussion and psychedelic guitar strums. Tube announcements punctuate the ruminative 'Mind the Gap', with Alfa's languid raps lulling you into that all-too-familiar feeling akin to wearily staring out of a train window. 'Attune' is laid-back lounge jazz that evokes some of Chick Corea's more tender works. And while the J Dilla-indebted 'Organic Rust' may leave you yearning for lazy summer days on a hammock, its pensive lyricism showcases a sense of relatable melancholy we've grown accustomed to during the pandemic's loneliest months.

'For me, 'Organic Rust' is a bad day where you have moments where you want the world to burn. It might come across as a state of mind, which it isn't supposed to, but it's meant to be perceived as someone just having a bad day.'

Tying *Bring Backs* together is a poem by Hilary Thomas, who candidly recites her mother's immigrant experience while tapping into the struggle of existing between cultural worlds. 'Change is inevitable, the isms and schisms questionable, the future is out there, a matter of time,' declaims Thomas, who honours the various challenges the Black diaspora faced in seeking a better life in the UK by 'keeping [their] cup full of tea, while hers half, plenty empty'. For Alfa, it's a perspective that hits home, having been raised as the child of a Ugandan immigrant in one of London's poorest boroughs; to growing up and trying to make it as a jazz musician without any formal training. It's more than just a rule in a childhood card game, a homegrown variant of classic blackjack, from which the album's title takes its name from.

'Whoever gets rid of their cards first and wins must then wait for one more round, because they could be brought back into the game if someone has the right card,' explains Alfa. 'That's the concept of *Bring Backs*, in that I feel like I always have to wait, that I haven't really won yet. My family and friends are calling me, telling me that they're really proud of me making all this music, but I'm like, "No, no, I haven't won yet". I'm in a place where I'm still unsure of things, even after doing way better than I've ever done. The album's kinda double layered, talking about the journey from an immigrant's point of view, but also the perpetual state of not being sure of what's waiting for me around the corner.'

barbican

After dabbling in grime production on FruityLoops during his early teens, Alfa credits producers such as Madlib, Hi-Tek, and Dilla, as well as electronica pioneers Massive Attack and Portishead, for introducing him to sampling and influencing his entire sound. He namedrops Herbie Hancock, Ahmad Jamal, Mal Waldron, and Freddie Hubbard as just some of the musicians that had a profound effect throughout his career despite not being an 'underground jazz guy'.

Despite keeping his feet firmly on the ground, Alfa's excitement at playing a sold-out show tonight is understandably palpable. 'I've gone there and seen some great musicians like Robert Glasper and Brad Mehldau,' he says, 'so to perform the whole of *Bring Backs* at such a famous venue is gonna be amazing.' Unlike several in the industry, the pandemic hasn't had a major impact on his artistry given that he's been able to regularly keep in touch with his band while keeping himself busy by 'always working on more music'.

However, that hasn't stopped him from feeling pretty eager on his return to performing live on stage. 'I've missed it a lot, more than I thought because I'm a pretty introverted guy,' Alfa muses. 'Yeah, I'm excited, that's all I'm saying.'

Performers

Alfa Mist keys, vocals

Kaya Thomas-Dyke bass, vocals

Jas Kayser drums

Jamie Leeming guitar

Johnny Woodham trumpet, flugel

Samuel Rapley tenor sax, bass clarinet

Peggy Nolan cello

Lucy Nolan viola

Simmy Singh violin I

Laura Senior violin II

+ Special guests TBC

Produced by the Barbican



The City of London
Corporation is the founder
and principal funder
of the Barbican Centre