

## Jazz

### New York All Stars

Ronnie Scott's, W1

★★★★☆

Time moves on, and now that the Runyonesque generation of swing revivalists — the Ruby Braffs, the Jake Hannas and the Kenny Daverns — is slipping away, the tenor saxophonist Harry Allen and his peers are starting to fill their shoes. Whether they will ever amass as colourful a store of anecdotes is open to question, but there's no doubting Allen's ability to evoke the elegance of Coleman Hawkins or Lester Young.

Like the guitarist Howard Alden, his colleague in the New York All Stars, the sober, besuited Allen — now in his mid-forties — seems to have been around for ever, turning out one polished mainstream album after another. It is not cutting-edge music by any means, and urbane professionalism sometimes trumps passion, but the opening set by their current band threw in some genuine surprises.

Technically speaking, the "All Stars" tag is a bit of a stretch, since the third member of the front line, the saxophonist Lou Caputo, is not particularly well known over here, while the young guest singer Kelley Suttentfield is a newcomer who released her debut album only two years ago. Oh, and the drummer Steve Brown and the double-bass player Simon Woolf — both fine musicians — are stalwarts of the London scene.

Still, any quibbles were laid to one side as Allen and Alden took centre-stage for a lyrical duet on *Chelsea Bridge*. Allen's timbre was at its most ethereal here, full of deep shadow and shimmering lights. Unobtrusive as ever, Alden created the simplest of frameworks as he strummed spacious chords.

Some of the other, more functional arrangements gave Allen less room to manoeuvre. Caputo, switching to flute, stepped forward on a brisk arrangement of *I Thought About You*. Later, a boppish treatment of *What Is This Thing Called Love?* found the quintet firing on all cylinders.

Since the show had been billed as a celebration of that hoary old beast, the Great American Songbook, Suttentfield might have been expected to confine herself to the usual suspects. But once she arrived on the bandstand she immediately made her mark with a sassy version of Stanley Turrentine's soul-jazz tune *Sugar*, complete with a Mingus-style intro from Woolf. While *I Fall in Love Too Easily*, cushioned by an unusually subtle bossa pulse, may have been more conventional fare, her phrasing had a distinctive, country-style edge.

**Clive Davis**