



Alfa Mist is a rising East London keyboard player, composer - and occasional rapper - of African descent whose admirers include noted R&B singer/songwriter, Frank Ocean, and jazz DJ, Gilles Peterson. His striking debut album, 2017's 'Antiphon,' got Mist noticed and now he's touring his freshly-unveiled second long player, 'Structuralism,' which features singer, Jordan Rakei, and has just released on the Sekito label. Fronting a simpatico five-piece band - keys, horn, guitar, bass and drums - Mist, who alternates between electric and acoustic pianos, often draws on the stuttering rhythms of hip-hop and grime for inspiration. His music is hazy, amorphous and loose-limbed but completely mesmerising with its meld of shifting textures and omnipresent sense of groove.

The excellent Johnny Woodham supplies cool Miles Davis-esque trumpet and flugelhorn lines, which waft over Mist's laidback but engrossing urban soundscapes. He's aided by fine fretboard work from guitarist, Jamie Leeming, who excels as both an accompanist and soloist. Bass player Kaya Thomas Dyke - who also contributes ethereal but soulful vocals to the song, 'Falling' - and drummer Jamie Houghton pool their talents to create sinuous rhythm tracks defined by a delicious ebb and flow. The highlights on the afternoon were plentiful, ranging from the luxurious groove of the set's opener, '44,' to the epic sweep of 'Retainer' with its breezy rhythms and the mesmeric hip-hop jazz of 'Closer,' the latter finding Mist dropping rhymes about urban angst over a throbbing groove, while counterpointed by slivers of jazzy horn. Another standout was 'Jjajja's Screen,' a heartfelt song about Mist's Ugandan grandmother.

Though something of a late-starter in music - apparently, he didn't begin playing the piano until he was 17 - on the evidence of this engaging Cheltenham show, the 20-something Newham-born auteur has come a long way in a short period of time. His unique approach to urban music singles out Alfa Mist as another bright new star of a British jazz renaissance that is bubbling over with exceptional musical talent right now.

(Charles Waring)