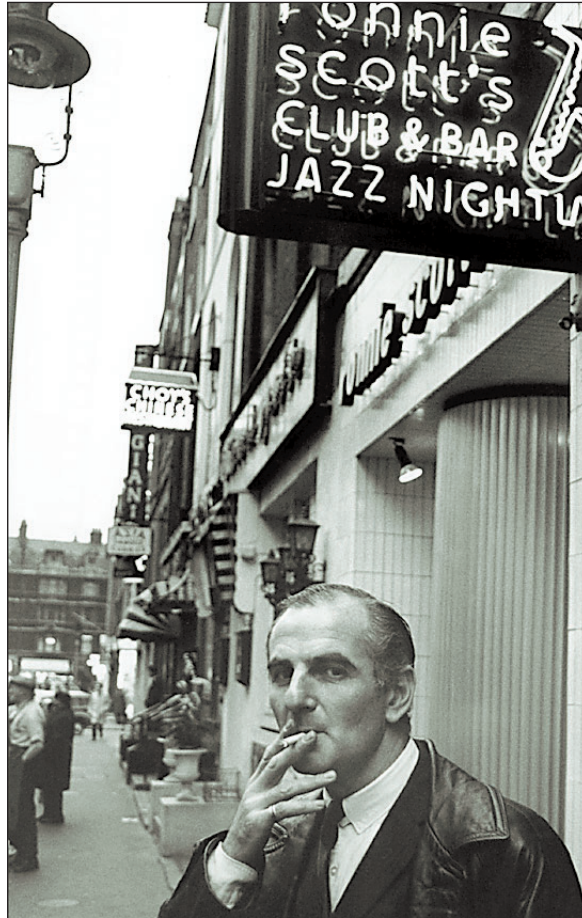


back with a bang



Akin Falope



Val Wilmer/Redferns



Alan Davidson

photographs of the performers displayed on every inch of wall. Zoot Sims, Dexter Gordon, Benny Goodman, Miles Davis and everyone who has ever been anyone are all here.

Leo's underlying point is serious when he jokes: "When you think of the big names who have played here — and Ronnie and Pete had everyone — my biggest challenge is the fact that most of them are dead. I have to keep the club going while maintaining that quality and in order to do that, I feel that we have to be a little more flexible with the booking policy."

This is the kind of news guaranteed to provoke the man in the corner with a

goatee and polo neck into apoplexy, but Leo, it should quickly be emphasised, has no plans to host any Spice Girl reunions.

"The music will always be 90-95 per cent jazz because this is a jazz club and not a general music venue. On the other hand, Ronnie and Pete were always booking people who were not strictly jazz. Long before it was fashionable, they brought all those great Cubans here in the Seventies. Lisa Stansfield played here for a week."

Leo plans to continue their policy of booking not only the biggest names in jazz but also acts that are true to the spirit of the place. He even harbours dreams of bringing Rod Stewart and the Faces to the

tiny stage. He is also looking to the youngsters to keep the standards strong. He points out that Wynton Marsalis first played at the club as a member of Art Blakey's group when he was 19, and just to keep things in the family, kid brother Delfeayo will be arriving next month to play trombone with Ramsey Lewis.

"We have got to keep building up new talent or otherwise there will be no one to book in the future," says Leo.

He maintains that Sally Greene bought a place which needed some attention but was not broken and in need of repair: "I saw that this was a place that needed a little physical assistance," Greene confirms. "The nicest thing someone could say is that the club looks just the same only a bit cleaner. Pete King did not want a conglomerate to take control of the club, which is how I got involved. I love music and I loved coming here with my father, and all that was required was a slight enhancement of the facilities. All I can say is that I hope everyone else loves it as much as I do."

Suffice it to say that the loos have been cleaned up, but they are still at the bottom of those stairs. Leo applauds the lack of a total makeover: "Sally has not turned it into some poncey theatre club. Nor does she interfere in any way," he insists. "She has put her money where her mouth is and she's in this for the long haul. Everyone is looking for her to fall on her face, but she is a jazz fan who came here as a kid to see the likes of Nina Simone and wants to maintain the atmosphere."

This is the place that carries the torch for jazz music in London, and it has been passed into good hands.

● Information: 020 7439 0747, www.ronniescotts.co.uk.

All that jazz: Monty Alexander, main picture, in full flow on opening night. Top, the founder outside his club; Keith Richards and Mick Jagger, above, at the venue for Charlie Watts's debut with his big band in 1985

gets the full Monty

percussive chordal riffs of an icy precision that kept bassist Hassan Shakur and drummer George Floridas on full alert. Recalling a memorable 1982 gig here, with vibist Milt Jackson, drummer Mickey Roker and the great Ray Brown on double-bass, he dedicated Two Bass Hit to Brown's memory.

Going still further back, he called on co-founder Pete King to take a bow, thanking him for his first trio opportunity at Scott's, with bassist Spike Heatley and drummer Kenny Clare in 1974, "when I was about seven". Not every jazz pianist would choose to end his set with a Bob Marley medley of Redemption Song and No Woman No Cry, but self-confessed "yard boy" Alexander

did. And this was not the only novelty. By 11pm, the time the headline act used to start, Alexander was gone.

Not only that, but we had already been entertained by James Pearson's Oscar Peterson-ish piano trio, joined in the middle set by tenorist Dave O'Higgins and Aussie chanteuse Nina Ferro. O'Higgins, formerly a Mike Brecker speed-freak, has matured into a more considered soloist whose self-edited and funkier phrasing is a great improvement. And Ms Ferro's mellifluous voice reflected her warm, confident personality and shapely appearance. As Bob Hope said of Dinah Shore: "Naturally her voice is good. Just look where it's been."

WHAT ELSE IS NEW...

WORLD

Gilberto Gil

Barbican Hall

★★★★☆

Sue Steward

THE closing show for the Barbican's magnificent Tropicalia festival brought Brazil's Minister of Culture, Gilberto Gil, away from his desk; dressed in white linen, his dreadlocks in a ponytail, he relished the old life.

Favourites were delivered according to style, Gil's lastingly youthful, soulful voice describing conventional melodies or soaring on long, dynamic falsetto thermals (most brilliantly on Cambalache). His Bahian background and its African candomblé religion inspired the rhythmic density of *Andar con fé* (Go with faith), and the sambas came in many colours, accompanied by percussion, particularly tambourim.

Reggae is a permanent presence in Gil's performances, and his

extended version of *Could You Be Love?* featured word fragments tossed like balls. The slow bossa rendering of *Imagine*, accompanied by a slinky cavaquinho guitar, saw Gil intone Lennon's lyrics like religious texts, substituting for his own legendary lectures on injustice.

After nearly two hours, the minister skittered off, blowing kisses, then returned quoting St Augustine on time, and announced: "Today, I'm 64; it's my birthday!" So the band played McCartney's song, Gil shimmered, and we sang *Happy Birthday*. Two frisky numbers created a party: the forró's twirling, polka-like rhythms driven by a humble triangle, and we sang choruses to the catchy *Chupa roda*, unaware of their deliciously erotic lyrics. As Gil danced away, his musicians indulged in a metal version of *I Want to Hold Your Hand*. Yet again, President Lula's greatest ambassador sprinkled magic over London.

EXHIBITION

Bill Viola — Love/Death: The Tristan Project

Haunch of Venison, W1

★★★★☆

Nick Hackworth

THE most spectacular moment comes suddenly, after a long, calm wait. A white dot appears on a black screen. Almost imperceptibly, it grows, resolving itself into an image of a man and woman entwined. They fall through darkness until, with unexpected violence, they crash through an invisible barrier to float, suspended in serene slow motion, in blue water lit from above, and their forms become ghostly silhouettes.

This passage from *The Fall into Paradise* comes from a suite of eight works by Bill Viola, one of the world's most renowned video artists. The pieces were created originally as a set for Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* at the Paris Opera last year. They have now been reconfigured to stand in their own right, and are presented in spectacular fashion over two venues, the Haunch of Venison in Mayfair and St Olave's College, near London Bridge.

Commissioned works disengaged from their original purpose risk becoming obscure, but the story of the doom-struck lovers, and the consequent imagery used by Viola — a couple subjected to abstracted, elemental environments, walls of fire, depths of water and the vastness of the sea — prove universal enough to sustain the break.

The hint of a narrative driving the sequence of films that take us from the couple's initial rapture to their tragic deaths, adds poignancy. They are both beautiful and moving and at their best in *The Fall into Paradise* and *Tristan's Ascension* (*The Sound of a Mountain Under a Waterfall*), in which *Tristan's* body, lying on a slab, is engulfed in a waterfall that flows upwards from the stone, raising him up and out of the picture frame.

There is much technical trickery involved, and production values are high; the works are produced with the same lavish attention and budget as the most expensive adverts. But it's Viola's ability to stand in their own right, and are presented in passages of combined image and sound that cuts right to the heart of the matter.

● Until 2 September (020 7495 5050).



Purification: Viola's production values are high