



Back in the late 1960s, a young music photographer called David Redfern began to spend rather a lot of time at Ronnie Scott's jazz club. Ronnie's was breaking new ground by attracting the biggest artists in the business to a small, intimate London venue, and Redfern was given carte blanche to come and go as he pleased, photographing, among others, Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk and Buddy Rich. It was the beginning of a special relationship that has spanned more than three decades.

Today, the images of jazz greats captured by Redfern and a select band of his contemporaries are considered classics. Not only do they adorn the walls of the club, but they have graced album and magazine covers, illustrated books, and been turned into posters.

Ronnie Scott died in 1996, but the legendary club he founded celebrates its 45th anniversary this month, and Redfern – who now runs a music picture library with one of the most comprehensive jazz collections in the world – has joined up with the photographers Val Wilmer, John Hopkins and David Sinclair to produce a showcase exhibition. The title, *45 Pictures Can't Be Wrong*, is a play on Scott's joke about the high quality of food at his club, which ended with the punchline: "After all, 50,000 flies can't be wrong!" On show are iconic images such as Redfern's 1969 shot of Thelonious Monk smoking at the piano, and Sinclair's powerful portrait of Roy Ayers silhouetted by a single overhead light, as well as previously unseen pictures.

Working at Ronnie's has always offered challenges, surprises and moments of sheer sublimity, Redfern says. "There's not much space to move around, so you just have to observe and go with the flow. Capturing the intensity of the experience on film is really about getting into the soul of the music and the performers, and waiting for the right moment to come along."

His glossy colour shot of Miles Davis, for instance, was taken under television lights during filming of the 1969 BBC series *The Jazz Scene* at Ronnie Scott's. "Miles missed rehearsal, showed up a nail-biting 10 minutes before the cameras were due to roll, and launched into the most incredible performance," he recalls. A dark, grainy picture of Nina Simone, singing just a few feet from the audience, couldn't be more different, and encapsulates the heady ambience of the club. It was 1984 and, Redfern says, every time Simone approached him during that residency, he knew it meant trouble. "She was a Jekyll and Hyde – either having a go at me for selling pictures to fans, or inviting me for dinner. Once, when she was on the warpath, I hid on the floor of the cloakroom with the manager!"

Photographing Scott himself, who hated being in front of the camera, was tricky, Redfern recalls. "Ronnie needed some publicity pictures, and I was trying to get a smiling shot. I was rescued by a joke machine that uttered a one-liner every time you pressed the button. Ronnie, who loved his jokes, couldn't keep a straight face."

Some of the earliest pictures in the exhibition are by Wilmer, a music journalist and author, and Hopkins, a chronicler of Sixties counter-culture in London. Wilmer's shot of Scott smoking outside the club's first home, in Soho's Gerard Street, is a wonderfully seedy image; her previously unseen picture of Johnny Griffin, surrounded by pigeons in Trafalgar Square, seems to capture the spirit of the 1960s jazz scene.

In contrast, Sinclair's work at Ronnie's spans the past 15 years. His shots of artists such as Lisa Stansfield and Nigel Kennedy are immediately recognisable for their focus on the performers, outlined against an almost black backdrop. Redfern is still a regular at the club – if he's not there on opening night, people want to know why.

45 Pictures Can't Be Wrong, Redferns Music Picture Gallery, 3 Bramley Road, W10 (020-7792 9914; www.redferns.com), 25 October to 4 December

When the lights were low

For more than 30 years, David Redfern and his cohorts have been photographing performers at Ronnie Scott's jazz club, in Soho. The venue has been the backdrop to some magical – and monstrous – musical moments, he tells **Jane Hughes**



In the groove: Roy Ayers (above) and Lisa Stansfield (top left) by David Sinclair; and Miles Davis (centre left) and Buddy Rich (bottom left) by David Redfern, all playing at Ronnie Scott's