

Music review: Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, The Caves (****)



Sunday might be a day of rest for some, but not for the eight brothers from Chicago who stormed the stage in Edinburgh's Caves with a rough, tough, high-energy performance. The Hypnotic Brass Ensemble – four trumpets, two trombones, baritone and LT supplying some thundering basslines on sousaphone – have played together since they were kids (their father, Philip Cohran, played with Sun Ra in the 1950s) and it shows in their tight ensemble and remarkable range of material.

They can move from anarchic rapping and clowning around to slick choreography in an instant. Their tunes – all their own – blended hard-hitting jazz with hip-hop in a towering wall of sound that crackled with power. The music wasn't always immediate and often took time to grow, but HBE clearly aren't afraid of complex arrangements and spiky melodies. In any case, that didn't stop them energising the packed crowd, who seemed in awe of their cool, urban sophistication right from the start.

Numbers were short and rapid-fire, with pithy solos a long way from self-indulgence, and the players kept the pace moving nicely. Mentioning birthdays and dividing the audience into two competing choirs might have seemed a bit pantomimey – and somewhat at odds with hardness of the guys' image – but it also showed how determined they were that we all had a good time.

And it felt like we all did. By the time the mesmerised audience had been ushered out of the venue, in what seemed a bit of a premature conclusion, the band had more than lived up

to its name.