

# A Blessing in this guise

**O**ccasionally you hear a jazz album that you know would shift truckloads of units if only it weren't labelled 'jazz'. **Bugs in Amber** (Cake) is just such a disc. Recorded by Bristol-based quartet Get The Blessing – they were still known as The Blessing when they released their BBC Jazz Award-winning debut, *All Is Yes*, last year – this album broods (*The Unnameable*), it hypnotises (*The Word For Moonlight Is Moonlight*) and, once in a while, it explodes into bright psychedelic colours (the parping, time signature-shifting *Einstein Action Figure*). Inspired rhythm section Jim Barr and Clive Deamer are best known for their work with Portishead, of whom there are echoes here, especially on the mean and moody *Tarp*. There are few solos as such, just an indefatigable stream of tight melodic riffs, interspersed with the odd floaty, 'free' break from trumpeter Pete Judge and saxophonist Jake McMurchie. It's the perfect accompaniment to that cool dinner party you're planning.

Portishead aren't the only Bristolian trip-hop types flexing their muscles on the jazz scene this month. Massive Attack's Robert Del Naja has both writing and production credits on the terrific new album from Terry Callier, **Hidden Conversations** (Mr Bongo). Del Naja underscores mystical folk-jazz troubadour Callier's bluesy, crystalline vocals with epic noirish electronic beats on *Wings*, John Lee Hooker and *Live With Me* (a song that first appeared on Massive Attack's best-of album, *Collected*, in 2006). The non-Del Naja material is lighter but no less engrossing thanks to Callier's unmistakable delivery: full of a soulful fragility and cosmic wisdom. It's another impressive collection from this legendary Chicagoan, who recorded his debut single more than



**Inspired:** Get The Blessing show their true psychedelic colours on new album *Bugs In Amber*

45 years ago and went into semi-retirement before being 'rediscovered' by the Acid Jazz label in the 1990s; you can also hear Callier live at London's Union Chapel on May 29.

There's noodling aplenty on **Five Peace Band Live** (Decca/Concord), the new double live album from Chick Corea and John McLaughlin's quintet supergroup of the same name. Well over two hours of music still only provides these titans of taut jazz-rock improvisation with enough time to get through eight numbers. But what numbers they are – a handful of McLaughlin and

Corea classics, plus a glorious assault on the Davis/Zawinul standard *In a Silent Way/It's About That Time* – and what a variety of moods the band conjure up from the material. It's a feast of musical virtuosity.

If you like your jazz with a dash more menace you should try on Led Bib's ironically titled **Sensible Shoes** (Cuneiform) for size. The band was apparently named for one of those guards you wear when you get a dental X-ray but, given the quintet's rocky dynamics and the thunderous intensity with which drummer Mark Holub pounds his

kit, it's hard to believe that no Led Zeppelin allusion was intended.

Whatever the case, their third album, a masterpiece of musical foreboding, is a head-on collision between infectious theme-writing and full-on, self-deconstructing wig-outs. There's nothing quite like the twin sax attack of Pete Grogan and Chris Williams; just listen to their sinuous, tricky, sweet-and-sour duelling on *Call Centre Labyrinth*, spattered with Toby McLaren's splashy, expressionistic keyboard work. The Bib are a great live act, too; catch them on national tour throughout June. *Robert Shaw*

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