

Pop
The Blessing

Bar Academy, NI

★★★★☆

DAVID SINCLAIR

The four members of the Blessing have unusually diverse CVs. The bass player Jim Barr and drummer Clive Deamer played together in Portishead, while the trumpeter Pete Judge and saxophonist Jake McMurchie have performed with artists ranging from Super Furry Animals to the National Youth

Jazz Orchestra. But when the two jazz horns and the more rock-orientated rhythm section mesh to become the Blessing, they produce a sound that is both seamless and startling.

Embarking on a string of shows to promote their excellent debut album, *All is Yes*, released on Monday, the group's entrance was low-key but big on style. Dressed in matching charcoal suits and white shirts, they looked like a bohemian lounge-bar band. Barr made the first of many comically cryptic introductions in the deadest of

deadpan drones, and they took off at a jaunty canter with *Cake Hole*.

The number was driven along by Barr, who played a pale blue Fender bass with a heavy plectrum in a style influenced by the late Mark Sandman of Morphine. Beside him Deamer picked out some gloriously funky syncopations with economic intensity on his kit. The horns, meanwhile, skittered about in looping harmonic patterns that were both taut and reckless, producing an overall effect that echoed the organised schizophrenia of an Acoustic

Ladyland gig. "Here's a song about that slightly sickly moment when your head falls off and rolls along the floor," Barr said by way of an explanation of the inspiration behind *Another Brother's Mother*, a slower, cyclical sequence that built by incremental degrees into a huge swirling crescendo. *Loubia* began with Deamer beating out a drum pattern with his hands, while the horns conjured noir-ish images of a Tunisian dockyard at midnight.

Then it was back to the urgent bustle of *Thermos* – "Keeps things hot; keeps things cold,"

Barr helpfully explained – and the spiky bass riff of *Bleach Cake*, a number that managed to orchestrate an unlikely meeting between the Stranglers and Ornette Coleman.

Technically audacious, mysterious and droll, the Blessing also provided an evening of instrumental entertainment that was unfailingly tuneful and readily accessible. An experience to be savoured.

Pressure Point, Brighton, Sun; Cavern Club Exeter, Mon; Thekla, Bristol, Tues; Café Jazz, Cardiff, Thur