
JAZZ

The Blessing

Pizza Express Jazz Club, WI

★★★★☆

JACK MASSARIK

KEEP it to yourself but some jazz musicians do buy pop albums, particularly those by Portishead. Two members of that thinking-fan's group, bassist Jim Barr and drummer Clive Deamer, have now returned the compliment by forming a jazz-rock quartet of their own. And unlike so many hideously shambolic attempts to merge these two streams (think Led Bib, Acoustic Ladyland) this one actually sounds enjoyable.

Two seasoned soloists, tenorist Jake McMurchie and trumpeter Pete Judge, blended artfully with the Portishead Two in witty, well-harmonised originals of a distinct jazz sensibility. Barr, a very dry MC, gave the titles as Pizza Venezia, Salad Nicoise and other items from this venue's menu, but a glance at a test-pressing cover revealed the more likely names to be Suki's Suzuki, Cakehole and Small Fish, Small Pond.

Judge, switching between trumpet and flugelhorn, gave these two-part harmonies a Horace Silver slant. And the inventive McMurchie, his sensual tone falling somewhere between early Sonny Rollins and Pink-Panther tenorist Plas Johnson, was a revelation. Where has he been? Signed by Alan Bates, whose Candid label catapulted Stacey Kent and Jamie Cullum to fame, this band release their debut album in February. Look out for it.
