

Jazz

The Blessing **Carling Academy, London**

★★★★★

The Blessing splice the rhythm section of 1990s trip-hop stars Portishead with a sax-and-trumpet front line that originally played Ornette Coleman free-jazz, and

now sound more like Acoustic Ladyland. The upshot was loud, brash and hard-hitting music in which Portishead drummer Clive Deamer and bass guitarist Jim Barr made clear that the rock component of the label "jazz-rock" was a big priority. The young audience certainly got the point.

Staccato, horn-roaring hooks began over throbbing rock-bass vamps and Deamer's malevolently precise drumming. Wall-of-noise thrashes punctuated by tenor-sax honks stopped dead and turned into lyrical slower sections, then hurtled back into the blitz again. But the group don't have Portishead connections for nothing – Deamer began exploring a more hypnotically rumbly sound with mallets, and the horns started to mingle in a more mellow, trancelike and ambient-jazzy music.

The band like 1970s British jazz-rock, and as the dense early sound gave way to a mix of rugged reveries and a more uncluttered and straightahead funk, those origins became plainer. Pete Judge sounded somewhere between the late Don Cherry and the UK's Harry Beckett on a fluttering flugelhorn solo over Deamer's mallets pulse, and saxophonist Jake McMurchie had a rare extended break of ascending wails coloured by echoey electronics in a slow rocker. The horns wound up swapping riffs with an increasingly demented Deamer at the end. The Blessing are not really a band for lovers of intricately startling improv, but the tunes are great and the grooves make your spine tingle.

John Fordham

*At Pressure Point, Brighton, on Sunday.
Box office: 01273 684501. Then touring.*