

Jazz breaking news: Danish newcomer Julie Kjær closes 2009 F-IRE sessions at The Others with promising set

Thursday, 17 December 2009 11:07

As the 2009 "F-IRE Presents" series at The Others in north London came to a close last night signs of future treats were unfurled. Fresh to the UK, Danish saxophonist/flautist/composer **Julie Kjær** led her **Cardboard Whale** ensemble in shadowy and ethereal directions. Though lacking the services of the fearsome free-improv bassist John Edwards, as a quartet the group still managed to cut a distinctive musical character.

As if to ease the listener into her sound-world the set began with a selection of her own compositions. Dark, otherworldly imagery was palpable as Kjær on alto saxophone and **Dylan Bates** on cornet interwove folkloric melodies like the unravelling of a malign Heinrich Hoffmann nursery rhyme. On occasion Bates edged into Don Cherry-like territory while a bristling rhythmic cushion was provided by **Paul May** on drums, whose highly illustrative style teased out the percussive nuances of his stripped down kit. Abrasive harmonies and irregular rhythmic interjections were the salient characteristics of **Roland Bates'** performance on keyboard which at times strayed into Sun-Ra-influenced domains of discourse. Indeed, as the group settled Kjær's playing reached Braxton-esque levels of surreal linguistic expression. This was a synthesis of dark Scandinavian folk with the Art Ensemble of Chicago.

A brief sojourn into two Ornette Coleman covers somewhat diluted the effect. It felt as though her voice was being lost in the prism of Ornette. The group's renditions of 'Dee-Dee' and 'Round Trip' were honest, inventive and interesting but lacked the shock factor that this material can provide. However, on closing the set with another of her own compositions it was immediately apparent that she can achieve a thoughtful depth of sensitivity. It is as though when she, herself has something to communicate her playing reaches into the inspirational heart of the piece. She seems to understand the music and how to communicate it with considerable efficacy. This last piece entitled 'Mount Pleasant' in recognition of one of London's less visited land-marks suggests Kjær's openness and investment in her surroundings. 2010 looks fruitful for this new arrival.

– Joseph Kassman-Tod [Jazzwise December 2009]