

Tables and Chairs

Jazzwise Magazine Review May 2013

Bristol-based saxman Kevin Figes is the archetypal late starter: he was in his twenties before he really discovered jazz (Charlie Mariano's contributions on Mingus Mingus Mingus Mingus were a major revelation) and got motivated to pick up a horn. Elton Dean then gave him some coaching; now, two decades on and several albums into his career, Figes is the real deal. His current quartet features a fluidly funky backline in the shape of Will Harris and Mark Whitlam, who can put some heat under a tune: the pulsating final section of 'Here you are' wouldn't sound out of place playing behind a chase sequence in a silent movie. Jim Blomfield adds great colour, especially on Rhodes: he doesn't waste the opportunity to lay out his wares on piano on 'Last Outpost' either. Figes himself is a fine shaper of lines and blows with gritty romantic gusto. For the all-original material here, the leader cites influences including David Binney and Hermeto Pascoal: there's also a hint of old tutor Dean and Soft Machine in the jazz-rock rhetorical underpinnings of 'New Clothes'.

Robert Shore.

Jazz Views Review

Free –Bop, Soul –Bop, Hard –Bop , Rock and Latino rhythms plus a couple of extended shape shifters; you get the lot on this lively, resourceful set from Kevin Figes and his talented crew. In their accomplished hands the various components of contemporary jazz are assembled with acuity and an intelligent understanding of the traditions from which they emerge making for an impressive example of jazz craftsmen at work. All compositional credits go to Figes who, as already noted, has put together a varied programme of catchy, optimistic themes and slinky, modal meditations combining deft, exploratory twists and turns with carefully grafted in retro touches. This is particularly evident in the last track, 'Hability' where he takes up his baritone and blows a testosterone fuelled line reminiscent of Pepper Adams. On alto he inhabits similar territory

to David Binney, clear toned and articulate, astutely avoiding cliché driven solutions and displaying every bit as much virtuosity as the American. Of his companions drummer Whitlam adroitly executes all the rhythmic formulae with precision and panache whilst Will Harris on bass fulfils all his contractual obligations to the letter . On keyboards Jim Blomfield moves between acoustic piano and fender rhodes as appropriate and there is no doubt that on the funkier tracks the electric instrument is the best choice and doesn't sound the least bit dated. Elsewhere his impressive technique equips him to move between pellucid linearity and harmonic opulence that lends momentum and adds dimension in equal measure. As far as this recital goes Blomfield is much more than accompanist/sideman , deserving star billing for his exemplary contribution. In summary this an extremely likeable recording and to say that is not to damn it with faint praise but to recognise that not every musical enterprise has to aim for genre busting significance to be considered worthwhile. Tables and Chairs is an eminently collectable example of first class British contemporary jazz and those who are fortunate enough to catch the quartet on their up-coming tour will certainly want to leave the gig with a copy.

Euan Dixon

LondonJazzNews Review

For his fourth album as leader, saxophonist/composer Kevin Figes has again surrounded himself with musicians sympathetic to – and skilled in interpretation of – his musical world, which consists chiefly of straightahead contemporary jazz (jaunty pieces with the occasional tricky time signature) interspersed with flashes of drum and bass, free improvisation and tasteful funk.

Long-time collaborator Jim Blomfield (piano), bassist Will Harris and drummer Mark Whitlam bring a pleasingly informal live-in-the-studio feel to Figes's pieces, their default setting an attractive breeziness well suited to the leader's tumbling alto style, but the band is also capable of grittier playing (especially when Blomfield switches to Fender Rhodes), and even the perkier numbers are likely to contain passages where airiness alternates with funky shuffling ('Scrap Board') or fleet double-time passages ('Here You Are').

An intelligently varied set also includes a dreamy ballad ('For Becky'), a slightly more adventurous, multi-textured piece ('Last Outpost'), and a baritone feature ('Hability'), and overall, Tables and Chairs is a worthy successor to Figes's work with the likes of Riaan Vosloo and Tim Giles and his more recent band, 4-Sided Triangle
Chris Parker

This is Bristol Review

Kevin Figes can be something of a musical enigma. For many years one of the most interesting local jazz saxophonists, the last few years have seen him mature as a composer, too, both for the Resonation Big Band and his own quartet. He has a deep association with Latin music – particularly his cutting Brazilian-style flute – but has an equal interest in free jazz, playing with spontaneitymeister Keith Tippett among others. His recorded music has usually been characterised by a self-imposed restraint, however, that never quite reflected the restless energy of his alto and baritone sax playing. Which is why the new Kevin Figes Quartet CD Tables and Chairs is such good news – a collection of diverse tunes whose interestingly complex structures seem to finally liberate the fuller range of Figes' sax styles. He's well-helped by regular collaborators Jim Blomfield (piano), Will Harris (bass) and Mark Whitlam (drums). It's a great album that reflects a confident player stretching out at last.

Tony Benjamin

Jazz Mann Review

This is a very exciting band and their new album is a good candidate for Figes' best yet.

Bristol based saxophonist, flautist and composer Kevin Figes is a versatile musician who appears in a number of different bands across a variety of jazz genres. I've seen him perform with the Resonations Big Band, the Dave Stapleton Quintet and as a leader of his own groups.

Figes concentrates on saxophone as a leader of his own bands, mainly playing alto but also sometimes performing on baritone. His

latest quartet release is his fourth album as a leader following two previous quartet recordings “Circular Motion” (Edition Records 2008) and “Hometime” (2010), the first release on Figes’ own Pig Records imprint. These albums featured Bristol based pianist Jim Blomfield plus the London rhythm team of Riaan Vosloo (double bass) and Tim Giles (drums). Those records explored broadly post bop territory but Figes has also recorded with the more funk and fusion orientated 4 Sided triangle featuring Mike Outram on guitar, Dan Moore on Fender Rhodes and sometime Get The Blessing member Daisy Palmer at the drums. This group’s eponymous début was released on Pig Records in 2012.

For his latest offering Figes has returned to the classic quartet configuration, retaining the services of Blomfield and bringing in an all new West Country based rhythm pairing of Will Harris on double bass and Mark Whitlam, recently seen and heard with trumpeter Nick Malcolm, at the drums. The quartet are currently on a Jazz Services supported UK tour and I was lucky enough to catch the first night at the Queens Head in Monmouth. On the evidence of their performance there I’d urge anyone reading this to get out and see them if you can, this is a very exciting band and their new album is a good candidate for Figes’ best yet.

Figes’ inspirations include Ornette Coleman (“Clutter” from “Circular Motion” which served as the encore at Monmouth gave evidence of that) but recently he’s also fallen under the spell of more contemporary altoists such as David Binney. It was the Binney influence that struck me when I first heard “Tables And Chairs” and it seemed to me that although this record may have been recorded in Penarth, South Wales it still had something of a New York vibe to it.

Figes’ eight original compositions cover a lot of ground with the opening title track’s clipped alto phrasing and the hip hop influenced bass and drum grooves immediately expressing something of that New York/Binney influence. Harris’ sturdy bass is at the heart of the piece which includes a fluent but urgent solo from Figes with Blomfield following on Rhodes.

“Here You Are” is a two part composition, initially an abstract ballad that begins with just bass and alto before expanding to bring in the whole band. It may be gentler and less frenetic but there’s still an element of “edge”. Solos come from Figes on alto and Blomfield at the piano, the latter particularly flowing and lyrical. Blomfield is a

fluent and adventurous soloist and at Monmouth he frequently threatened to upstage the leader despite being confined to just the Rhodes.

The second half of "Here You Are" is a return to the energetic feel of the title track. Blomfield's insistent piano vamp is the catalyst for features from Whitlam and Figes. "Scrap Board" begins in breezy Latin inflected fashion before Harris' powerful bass motif re-establishes something of that New York vibe. The prevailing mood alternates throughout the track and along the way there's some inspired soloing from Figes and Blomfield plus an engaging feature for Harris who enters into dialogue with his drum partner above the backdrop of Blomfield's sparse piano chording. "New Clothes" is another excellent example of the quartet's energetic Binney inspired post bop. Propelled by an urgent bass and drum groove the piece features a series of exciting alto/Rhodes exchanges which hot up increasingly as the track progresses. The piece is climaxed by a drum feature from Whitlam above Figes' repeated saxophone phrases. "For Becky" is an unashamedly beautiful ballad with Figes adopting a softer tone on the alto and with gently lyrical solos from Harris at the bass and Blomfield at the piano and Figes himself with Whitlam adding discreet and sympathetic support. "Fortunately Unfortunately" opened the Monmouth show and adopts a funk/fusion groove as Figes takes elements of 70's/80's smooth jazz and updates them in a contemporary jazz setting that frames excellent solos from himself and Blomfield. "Last Outpost" begins atmospherically with the gentle probing of Fige's alto but metamorphoses into a Blomfield piano feature, a lengthy unaccompanied passage embracing minimalist ideas and a gentle dissonance. Later there's an extended dialogue between Blomfield and Figes before the saxophonist plays us out, soloing anthemically and at length with full band accompaniment before a gentle alto/piano coda.

For the final item "Hability" Figes unleashes his baritone to solo with power and an admirable fluency on a funk flavoured offering that also offers outings for Harris on bass, the impressive Blomfield on Rhodes plus a final feature from Whitlam.

"Tables And Chairs" is an highly accomplished album of contemporary jazz with strong melodic themes and plenty of bright rhythmic ideas. Although conspicuously influenced by American models (plus Brazilian composer and multi instrumentalist

Hermeto Pascoal) it's a convincing piece of work in its own right covering a variety of jazz bases and with excellent contributions from all four protagonists. Figes and Blomfield are frequently inspired soloists and Harris and Whitlam are a flexible and adaptable pairing more than capable of handling the often complex rhythmic challenges Figes throws their way. What's more they can swing and groove when required too. As mentioned previously the band are currently out on the road touring this material. I thoroughly enjoyed their show at Monmouth and you can catch them at the following venues;

Ian Mann

Reviews of 'Hometime'

Independent On Sunday. Phil Johnson 3 April 2011

If new UK jazz groups sometimes seem marred by superficiality with, as an older bandleader put it, "everyone sounding different, everyone sounding the same", saxophonist Figes has strength in depth. This is due to the skill of his writing, the fluency of his playing and the go for it oomph of the rhythm section. Bassist Riaan Vosloo and drummer Tim Giles are fairly well known but Jim Blomfield is the best British pianist you've never heard of and an absolute marvel.

Venue Magazine, Tony Benjamin 18 February 2011

It starts with a bang: alto sax player Kevin Figes races away with opener 'Little Miles'. His raucous-toned solo ebbs, flows and spits, stirring pianist Jim Blomfield to stab back with equal vehemence. Later in the album, however, the fine lyricism of 'Angel' reveals Tim Giles's subtly creative drumming and Riaan Vosloo's precision bass. It's Figes's band and compositions but the album's a democratic showcase for all four. 'Way of Life' is particularly pleasing, the tune's complex structure opening up for a free-ish exchange between Figes and Giles and then a full-tilt piano trio. You end up seriously

impressed by a crisp recording of an intelligent jazz band having a great time in the studio. (4 stars)

Jazzwise Magazine, Robert Shore June 2011

Bristol-based composer and altoist Kevin Figes was a late starter, only picking up a saxophone for the first time in his twenties. He learned well from his early masters (Elton Dean, Keith Tippett, Tim Garland), however and really comes into his own as both writer and player on this, his third release as leader. For this new set featuring nine original compositions by the man with the horn, Figes has retained the same collaborators who served him so well on his previous outing, 2008's Circular Motion. There's the familiar mix of influences, from free through to bop and on to Latin and funk: opener 'Little Miles', which gives both Figes – a player blessed with a distinctively gritty-but-warm tone- and principle sparring partner pianist Jim Blomfield plenty of chance to spread out there wares, is a nice bluesy shuffler, while 'Lounge Life' is a fast Brazilian-style groover, while free-ish exchanges recur throughout. Overall, it's a very smart piece of work. (3 stars)

Reviews of “Circular Motion”

Jazzwise Review August 2008

Kevin Figes Quartet

Circular Motion

Edition records

three stars

Kevin Figes' blossoming career is proof positive that it's never too late. The Bristol-based composer and altoist didn't pick up a saxophone until he was nearly 23 but mentoring from Elton Dean, Keith Tippett and Tim Garland among others has helped to mould him into one of

the most interesting emerging talents on the UK scene. His debut release for the new Cardiff-based Edition records imprint serves as a boldly eclectic introduction to his skills as both writer and player. Straightahead, funk and free influences mix freely across the nine track, Figes' sidemen (including stand-in sticksman Tim Giles from Fraud) proving themselves more than equal to the successive shifts in style; the gospelly 'Song for Sometime' acts as a prologue to the Ornette Coleman-ish 'Clutter', while proceedings draw to a close with Wayne Shorter's 'Lester left Town', on which Figes gets to show off his distinctive tonal combination of post-bop grit and warm glamour.
Robert Shore

Vortex Jazz Club Review

**Kevin Figes Quartet
Circular Motion
Edition Records**

“Stuff that isn't too impenetrable but has substance to its harmonies and rhythms..... Circular Motion represents different aspects of my background, whether it's playing freer things with Keith Tippett or the funk side of my playing” thus alto player Kevin Figes on his debut album, which also features pianist Jim Blomfield, bassist Riaan Vosloo and drummer Tim Giles.

This is actually a perfect summing-up of the music, from the bright opener 'Listless' through the slightly gospelly 'Song for Sometime', the alternatively freeish and swinging 'Clutter', the lightly funky 'The Grind' etc.

Figes is a gutsy but thoughtful saxophonist and a skilful composer with his eye always on the musical resources available to him, which in the case of Blomfield in particular are considerable, whether he's negotiating the tricksier time signatures('Sevenup') or simply digging into the juicier changes provided by his leader like Figes himself, he's definitely a man to watch out for.

Overall, a lively, absorbing and attractively varied set from a fine band that should, given the evidence provided by this album, really

**deliver the goods live.
Chris Parker**

Review Independent on Sunday 20 July 2008

KEVIN FIGES QUARTET

**Circular Motion
Edition**

Alto-saxophonist Figes- who studied with Elton Dean and Keith Tippett- has an inclination to hard, rhythmical swing, and a contrasting gift for composing memorable, sensitive tunes. It's this combination of rich writing with an outstanding band that gives Figes's solo LP such distinction. Pianist Jim Blomfield, a star of jazz in Bristol and the West for a decade or so, shows an astonishing range, from the mad chromaticism of "Clutter" to the gospel romance of "Song for Sometime" , while bassist Riaan Vosloo and drummer Tim Giles offer the subtlest of support. Phil Johnson

Download this. 'Song for Sometime' as beautiful a ballad as you'll hear.

Jazz UK December/January 2009 review

**Kevin Figes Quartet
Circular Motion
Edition**

Bristol-based altoist Figes appeared at Swanage this year and last and made quite an impact. Now comes this varied quartet CD with his regular companions , Jim Blomfield on piano, bassist Riaan Vosloo and drummer Tim Giles. As was evident when heard live, Figes has interesting things to say and this Figes-fest is a rewarding listen, bass and drums breaking things up in heroic fashion as he plants his Pepper-like imprint on a series of pieces, all but one of nine, his own. 'Listless' is far from, while 'Song for Sometime' is an elegiac piece,

Blomfield eloquent as Figes sashays nicely around the melodic outline. This is poised, distinctive music. 'Clutter' is just that, a rickety thing with Ornette-like movements and boppish thrusts. 'The Grind' offers contrast, the theme shapely in Dankworth style, Figes's sound quite delicate and assured, Blomfield's gift for impactful, Hancock-ian outcomes pleasingly apparent. Treat this as a calling card for Figes's skills as soloist and composer. (Peter Vacher)

Time Out says (2010)

Compelling Bristol-based altoist Figes mixes up old school bop with contemporary attack and edgy harmony.