

The Observer MUSIC MONTHLY

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Bear with me

POLAR BEAR
Held on the
Tips of Fingers
(Babel) ****

£9.99 *Paul Morley*
hears jazz reinvent itself



5 POLAR BEAR exist somewhere wonderful between Centipede and Tortoise. That is, Seb Rochford's pretty, fierce jazz quartet Polar Bear, plus guests including electronic nut Leafcutter John, snort, shriek and wrestle somewhere ominous and charming between the tumultuous energy of Keith Tippett's 50-piece orchestra Centipede, and the eclecticism of Tortoise.

Held on the Tips of Fingers pushes even further out than their impressive debut *Dim Lit*. Polar Bear blast out of the past, full of straight cool school skills, and detonate the past, bursting with edgy, forward-looking lust. Rochford drums with hard bop wit and hip hop weight.



and alongside Mark Lockheart (tenor sax), Pete Wareham (tenor sax) and Tim Herbert (bass) confidently explores a mutant, poetic world where there is Mingus and 4hero, Ayler and Squarepusher, Carla Bley and Venetian Snares.

It's fantastic to hear British jazz finding ways to modernise the nearly lost ideas of Tippett, Kenny Wheeler and Mike Gibbs. Polar Bear's occasional songs are intimate, plaintive beauties; jaunty and then jagged, gentle and then furious, and always ravenously melodic.

This is not nu jazz, acid jazz, Jamie jazz, Parky jazz, Brit jazz, beardo jazz, post-jazz or twee jazz. It's dream jazz.

Burn it: 'Beartown'

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