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Review

Kim Cypher Quartet

# Kim Cypher Quartet, Pudleston Village Hall, Pudleston, Leominster, Herefordshire, 11/11/2022.

★★★★★



Joanne Shaw Taylor  
**Stroud on December 9th**

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by Ian Mann  
November 14, 2022  
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A gig that combined good music & good humour and which explored a wide range of musical territory, yet always within a jazz framework. The standard of the playing and singing was excellent throughout.

Kim Cypher Quartet, Pudleston Village Hall, Pudleston, Leominster, Herefordshire, 11/11/2022.

Kim Cypher – tenor, alto & soprano saxophones, vocals, Chris Cobbson – guitar, Mike Green – acoustic & electric bass, Mike Cypher – drums

A local gig for me, only six miles from home - and it was also a local connection that brought Cheltenham based saxophonist / vocalist Kim Cypher and her quartet to Pudleston Village Hall in the heart of the Herefordshire countryside.

Cypher and her band had played at the same venue in the summer of 2020, during the brief slackening of Covid regulations. On that occasion they had performed in a marquee outside the hall and got the locals up on their feet and dancing with their brand of melodic, swinging jazz. Fronted by the vivacious Kim Cypher the band's music embraces a broad variety of jazz styles and their lively presenting style ensures that there is something in their repertoire for everyone, but without detracting in any way from the high quality of the musicianship. This is a band capable of appealing to jazz 'newbies' and to hardcore aficionados alike.

Tonight's show was a virtual sell out with around fifty people crowded into the intimate confines of the well appointed Pudleston Village Hall. A well stocked bar helped to create a lively atmosphere, with Kim and the band joshing between themselves and also bantering readily with the audience, something that the intimate and friendly nature of the venue helped to encourage.

I missed the 2020 Pudleston gig but subsequently caught up with the Cypher group online as part of the 2020 Wall2Wall Virtual Jazz Festival which was filmed by Black Mountain Jazz Club at the Melville Centre in Abergavenny. On that occasion the band was a quintet with the four musicians listed above joined by Swedish born pianist / organist Anders Olin. I suspect that adding Olin to tonight's line up was not a practical proposition given the small size of the venue, but the members of the quartet performed magnificently in any case.

The Abergavenny online production featured a full concert set from the quintet plus footage of the husband and wife team of Kim and Mike Cypher in conversation with jazz journalist and broadcaster John Hellings. The full production is reviewed here and represents the source of some of the following biographical details.

<https://www.thejazzmann.com/reviews/review/kim-cypher-quintet-wall2wall-virtual-jazz-festival-2020-abergavenny>

The Cyphers' story is an interesting one. Despite sharing a lifetime's love of jazz the couple came late to the professional ranks, as they explained to Hellings. Based in Cheltenham Kim and Mike first met as fifteen year olds in the ranks of the Gloucestershire Youth Jazz Orchestra. After eventually "getting together" both held professional 'day jobs' for some thirty odd years, Kim as a primary school teacher and Mike as an employee of one of the major banks. Throughout this time they pursued their shared love of music, performing on the local jazz circuit. I seem to recall first seeing them at one of the regular 'Saturday Jazz Cafés', free lunchtime events in the foyer of the Courtyard Arts Centre in Hereford, more than a decade ago now.

By their own admission Kim and Mike both felt like 'outsiders' in their respective day jobs and eventually took the brave decision to become professional musicians, a decision neither has ever regretted. Free to concentrate on music full time their playing and stagecraft improved by leaps and bounds and Kim has released two successful albums "Make Believe" (2016) and "Love Kim x" in 2019. These recordings have helped her to gain a national reputation and she has since toured successfully throughout the UK and performed in many of the leading London jazz venues, such as Ronnie Scott's and the Pizza Express Jazz Club.

Even during lockdown the Cyphers' enthusiasm remained undimmed and throughout that period they hosted their regular "Twilight Jazz Sessions" and "Morning Coffee" broadcasts on social media, featuring an entertaining mix of music and conversation.

In this regard it's tempting to think of them as the jazz equivalent of Toyah Wilcox and Robert Fripp.

The couples' years in 'conventional' employment have sharpened their musical appetites and as fully professional musicians they always ensure that they put on a 'good show'. Their performances, even the 'virtual' ones, are full of good humour, energy, enthusiasm and some genuinely excellent singing and playing. Sometimes it's a little bit too mainstream, or even 'show biz', for my personal tastes but there's no doubting their love for their chosen material and their current way of life. Having taken a life changing decision Kim and Mike are clearly determined to make the most of it.

Tonight's show commenced in energetic fashion with guitar, double bass and drums establishing a shuffling groove on the Jerome Richardson tune "The Groove Merchant". Kim's earthy tenor sax helped to establish a strong blues / r'n'b feel as she shared the solos with Cobbson on guitar and Green on double bass. The latter stages of the piece also saw Kim and Cobbson exchanging phrases. An excellent start with the band getting the audience onside from the outset.

Kim remained on tenor for a rumba style arrangement of "Temptation", which also featured her sultry vocals. Instrumental solos came from Kim and Cobbson, skilfully supported by Green's propulsive double bass and Mike's vigorously brushed drum grooves.

Being based in Gloucestershire the Cyphers often play to rural audiences and frequently include jazz style arrangements of popular songs in their performances. The presence of familiar tunes in their set lists helps to smooth the way for the more obviously jazz focussed material. A particular case in point was an arrangement of the Santana hit "Europa", which also incorporated a detour into the jazz standard "Autumn Leaves". Kim made it a competition for audience members to spot the two tunes and tonight's was obviously a jazz crowd with more people identifying the standard than the rock hit. A high energy performance included a tenor sax solo from Kim and an authentically Santana-esque, sustain heavy guitar solo from Cobbson.

The Latin rhythms continued on a bossa style arrangement of "Spring Fever" with Kim featuring as a singer once more, although her voice was a little too low in the mix on this occasion. The vocal episodes were augmented by instrumental solos from tenor sax and guitar.

A tune that the audience may have been less familiar with was "Water From An Ancient Well", a beautiful composition by the South African pianist Abdullah Ibrahim. This was ushered in by a tenor sax / guitar duet, subsequently joined by double bass and brushed drums. Solos came from tenor sax, guitar and melodic double bass. Kim explained that the piece was first introduced to her by Cobbson, who had previously performed it as twin guitar piece with his fellow axeman Cameron Pierre.

A swing style arrangement of the jazz standard "But Not For Me" was the final vocal item of the first set and the song also included instrumental solos for tenor sax and guitar. Mike Cypher was then featured at the drum kit, trading fours with Kim's scat vocals and also with guitar and double bass.

The first set concluded with a little audience participation as Kim encouraged the crowd to clap all the way through an arrangement of the Luiz Bonfá "Samba D' Orfeu". I managed to survive this stamina test, but it precluded me taking any notes. I did however register that Kim had switched to alto sax and as I recall she shared the soloing with Cobbson.

By this stage of the proceedings everybody in the room had earned a drink and business at the bar was brisk during the interval.

Set two commenced with the Cobbson original "A Time To Reflect, A Time To Forget", a piece that he dedicates to Desmond Tutu. The tune appears on the "Love Kim x" album and in a different version on the guitarist's own recent solo album "My Favorite Things". Tonight we heard the "Love Kim x" version with Kim featuring on pealing soprano sax alongside Cobbson's South African guitar stylings. Ghana born Cobbson is a highly versatile guitarist who can play across a variety of genres. He is a member of the Bristol based 'world music' band Baraka and has also enjoyed high profile engagements with Courtney Pine and the Afro-beat / hi-life group Osibisa. This proved to be one of the most rapturously received performances of the evening, the immediacy of Cobbson's composition enhanced by some brilliant playing, particularly Kim's stunning solo sax cadenza at the close.

Green moved to five string electric bass for a slowed down bossa arrangement of "Bring Me Sunshine", the song famously associated with Morecambe and Wise. This featured Kim on tenor sax and vocals with Cobbson sharing the instrumental solos on guitar. It all sounded very different to the M & W version, the happiness of the lyrics inflected with a subtle element of musical melancholia.

Cypher's local connection is with Andy Offer, one time Pudleston resident and bassist / vocalist with the popular local folk / Americana quartet Grey Wolf. Offer picked up Green's double bass to guest on a version of Duke Ellington's "Take The A Train", the newcomer sharing the solos with Kim's tenor. Other members of Grey Wolf were in the audience and there was also plenty of support from the local populace.

Green returned for "You're Just In Love" which featured Kim on vocals, tenor sax and whistling and sharing the instrumental soloing with Cobbson.

"Tomorrow's Song" was written for Kim's "Brighter Tomorrow" project, designed to celebrate and promote the revival of the Arts post Covid. It proved to be a gently anthemic piece featuring the sounds of soprano sax, guitar and double bass, with Green's solo incorporating a substantial passage of unaccompanied playing. One of the Midlands' premier bass players Green has previously been seen in Pudleston as a member of groups led by guitarist Remi Harris.

"I Love Being Here With You" brought an authentic blues feel to the proceedings with Kim featuring on tenor sax and vocals and with Cobbson's bluesy guitar solo demonstrating his versatility.

The quartet explored yet another musical genre as Green switched to double bass for an upbeat funk arrangement of Grover Washington's "Mr. Magic", with Kim featuring on alto sax and Cobbson guitar.

The inevitable encore was a Latin-esque arrangement of Duke Ellington's "Caravan" that saw Green restored to double bass and Kim soloing on soprano sax. It was rounded off by a Mike Cypher drum feature as the quartet sent the audience home feeling very happy.

This was a gig that combined good music and good humour and which explored a wide range of musical territory, yet always within a jazz framework. The standard of the playing and singing was excellent throughout and it was clear to see why this band has established something of a cult following. The audience wasn't just comprised of local residents, there were people here who had travelled a substantial distance to see the band play.

The gig was a triumph, both for the band and for Linda and Roger Fryer, plus the other members of the Village Hall Committee, who has organised the event. Thanks to them for a very enjoyable evening.

It was also a pleasure to meet Kim and Mike Cypher in person for the first time, and also Chris Cobbson. My thanks to Chris for providing me with a review copy of his 2022 solo album "My Favorite Things", which I will endeavour to take a look at shortly.

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