

Review: 12 Points Festival at the Sugar Club, Dublin

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By Alan O'Riordan

Arguably, Ireland's best jazz festival — at least in terms of young, cutting-edge acts — 12 Points returned this week to Dublin for its 12th edition.

Though maybe calling it a jazz festival is a bit too narrow. Certainly, improvisation is what unites the 12 acts appearing over four nights at the Sugar Club, but what also unites them is that they collectively celebrate all that's vibrant and new in European musical culture. There's life in the old continent yet.



Susanna Risberg

Things kicked off on Wednesday night with Julie Campiche's harp-led quartet. An uncommon kind of ensemble, but, then, this Geneva group are an uncommon bunch of musicians, mixing the electronic and acoustic to create music that is by turns introspective and expansive. A sci-fi soundscape is created for her track Onkalo, which takes its name from a Norwegian nuclear waste dump, and is typical of this group's concerns.



Susanna Risberg followed, with her guitar trio, delivering a tight set, full of bluesy attitude and momentum — entirely lacking the directionless noodling that can sometimes afflict guitar-led jazz groups.

Next up, from Paris, was Nox.3, a sax trio adorned by the vocal gymnastics and electro effects of the Swedish-born Linda Olah. Crescendos worthy of a dance floor abound here, overlaid upon a dense, dark and driven sound. But the group has its quieter moments too, as in the the plaintive Longtemps, a song for Olah and piano.

Another female musician was to the fore in Thursday night's highlight, saxophonist Mia Dyberg, whose trio would win over even the most ardent free jazz sceptics. This is serious yet playful; sophisticated, but never boring. There's a Cage-like few minutes at the start of The Party Is Over, all silence and waiting; elsewhere the group makes intriguing music about music, and, at still other times, they just groove.

Tonight, the festival's final session takes in Norway's Kjetil Mulelid Trio, the exciting Porto-based Rite of Trio, and, finally, the Dominic J Marshall Trio, out of Amsterdam, mixing melodic jazz and hip-hop influences. If you care about music, and seek an antidote to the blandness of mainstream mass culture, you know where to go.