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A Jazz Festival That Doesn't Book Stars?

Jazz.com's [Stuart Nicholson](#) travels far and wide in search of the best new music on the jazz scene. He recently sent us a fascinating update from Norway (see "[Jazz Meets Thrash Rock in Oslo](#)"), and now provides this intriguing report on a Dublin jazz festival where even the headliners are unknown acts.

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Yes, I know we just survived St. Patrick's Day. Even so, it's worthwhile dwelling again on the pluck of the Irish, who have contrived this event. Of course, no one is better than Nicholson at tracing the cross-cultural currents now shaping the current jazz scene. By the way, did you hear the one about the Norwegian tenor saxophonist playing with an Irish pianist, an Italian bassist and a Finnish drummer? No, it's not a joke, it's the latest entry in the [jazz.com](#) blog. T.G.

Ever heard of vocalist Kadri Voorand from Estonia, pianist Urs Bollhalder from Switzerland or drummer Olavi Louhivuori's Oddarrang from Finland? Chances are you're no wiser than the large audience that turned out for Dublin's 12 Points! festival. But that is, er, the point of 12 Points! By turning the standard procedure for promoting a jazz festival on its head – that you first book a couple of headliners, and then fill-out of the program in descending order of name-awareness until at the end you slip-in one or two unknown young talents deserving of wider recognition – 12 Points! sets out its store with a roster that comprises entirely unknown talent.

Now in its second year, the festival is a showcase for young European jazz musicians who have gained recognition in their own countries, but have no profile beyond their national borders. "The received wisdom is that every festival needs headliners, known quantities that provide a collective comfort zone, where shared expectation can be met," observes Gerry Godley, the festival director. "12 Points! removes this zone and everyone – performers, organisers, audience and journalists – are more or less in the same boat. This definitely creates a tension that adds to the excitement of the event."

It's an audacious concept that has gone down well with young Dublin audiences who are excited by the challenge of confronting new musical ideas. "The enthusiastic way they've embraced the festival's proposition, which asks for an open mind and a trusting disposition, has been wonderful," says Godley. I asked Sean Fitzpatrick and Siobhan O'Kelly, students at nearby Trinity College, one of the seven ancient universities in the English speaking world, how they felt about parting with their hard earned Euros for a series of concerts by artists they had never heard of. "Well, it might sound like a typically Irish idea," they laughed, "But actually all the music is very good, but naturally you like some bands more than others. We came last year and really got a lot out of it, same this year."

The festival's bold music policy has enabled 12 Points! to carve out a niche for itself as a major showcase for exciting young talent. Although theoretically "a union" of European states, it remains a fact that each nation's jazz scene (and much else) remains splendidly autonomous from each another, so that jazz musicians in Finland have no idea what jazz musicians in Italy are doing, while Italian jazz musicians have very little idea of what is happening in Norway. Equally, French musicians haven't a clue about what's going down in Estonia, a situation that is repeated throughout the European Union's community of twenty-seven member states.

It's a situation 12 Points seeks to rectify. Although Ireland may be Europe's most westerly nation, the festival has placed Dublin at the crossroads of European jazz. In just two years it has become the place to check the pulse of emerging young talent. With three one hour concerts a night spread over four successive nights, this year's line-up included bands from Ireland, Lithuania, Austria, Germany, Finland, Denmark, Norway, the United Kingdom, Estonia, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Italy. And when the concerts wound-up at midnight, the scene shifted to an informal jam session at traditional Irish corner pub called Thomas Reads.

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