

JAZZWISE

April, 2009

12 Points! Festival

Project Arts Centre, Dublin

The jazz equivalent of a Eurovision Song Contest without the contest, Douze Points! (the exclamation mark is mandatory) originated in Dublin, though next year's event will be held in Stavanger, Norway. The good news from this year is that Euro-jazz is as varied as ever. The bad news is that, even though I unavoidably missed three of the 12 groups, there was far too much to cover adequately in a short review.

The national stereotypes we glibly apply were less noticeable than expected. Only solo pianist Aki Rissanen (from Helsinki) hinted at Scandinavian send-you-to-sleep sounds, while the duo Albatross (from Oslo) opted for sub-tone sax effects and tricky time-signatures, with rather banal results. Bassist Giulia Valle (Barcelona) may have Catalan phrases in her compositions, but was let down by the stiffness of her quintet, while Luca Aquino (Rome) had a tight rhythm-section but his potentially lyrical trumpet drowned in artificial echo. Interestingly, a similarity between the sax-guitar-drum trio Hyperactive Kid (Berlin) and sopranoist Emile Parisien's Alet (Paris) showed that a "free" vocabulary can lend itself to organised tunes and tight structures.

English observers were done proud by Curros, who didn't tinker at the edges of traditional forms but played the hell out of those edges. An equally enthusiastic response greeted the string quartet Zapp (Amsterdam), who swung like the clappers, boasting three strong blowing soloists and an impressive variety of textures. The whole festival was brought to a riotous close by Magnus Fra Gaarden (Copenhagen), whose raucous post-punk rock with horns – and costume changes – included a hilarious free-jazz walkabout. Of course, there is a Euro-broadcasting presence which saw all 12 sets were recorded so, as well as being replayed on Irish and Continental stations, maybe there'll be a chance to hear some of this via BBC Radio's *Jazz On 3*. Brian Priestley