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REVIEW: 12 Points Festival 2018



Dowry, aka Éna Brennan
Photo Published by 12 points on Twitter

12 Points Festival 2018
(Sugar Club, Dublin. 5-8 September 2018. Review by Tony Dudley-Evans)

The 12th edition of the 12 Points Festival took place last week back in its home base of Dublin. It was celebrating 12 years of a festival that presents each year 12 young bands from 12 different countries in Europe. Thus over its history the festival has presented 144 bands many of which have become well-known across Europe as a result of their exposure in 12 Points; Laura Jurd's Dinosaur (then the Laura Jurd Quintet), the French duo Donkey Monkey and the Belgian piano trio De Beren Gieren are just three examples.

The 2018 programme was a fantastic success; it took place in the Sugar Club in Dublin, the perfect venue for live music with its excellent acoustic and very audience-friendly layout with fixed tables and chairs, and a slight rake which meant good sightlines from all angles. Each of the four days was really well attended with a very lively and responsive audience of all ages and a very good gender balance.

The music was also of a very high standard. The choice of young bands from different European countries gave a very comprehensive overview of the different trends in contemporary jazz. Of course, there was a huge amount of variety, but I was particularly struck by six aspects of the bands performing at 12 Points:

- Half of the bands were led or fronted by women.

- All the bands played music that was based on tunes. None of the bands played in a post-bop style of head + solos + head out, nor in a totally free style. They often used the language of free jazz or even occasionally noise music, but always in the context of a tune-based approach. Interestingly, only one group, the Dominic J Marshall Trio, featured vocals

- Nearly all the bands made extensive use of electronics.
- Many of the bands made use of a kind of aggressive minimalism, that is repeated motifs often presented with a rock-type energy. The drummers played the key role in this.
- The piano trio remains a dominant force in European jazz; four of the groups were piano trios. But the guitar trio (guitar, bass, drums) is also becoming more common; two of the bands were guitar trios.
- Two of the groups featured instruments not normally regarded as jazz instruments: Julie Campiche's Quartet is led by Julie on harp and the set from Dowry (aka Ena Brennan) featured solo violin.



Julie Campiche
Publicity photo by Gerard Langer

As regards bands which particularly impressed me, the combination of harp with saxophone, bass and drums in Julie Campiche's Quartet stood out; they created a very attractive and distinctive sound.

Of the four piano trios, I very much enjoyed the interaction and the wit of the UK representative, the Elliot Galvin Trio, and the fluency and integration of the Kjetil Mulelid Trio from Norway. Steiger from Ghent in Belgium had an interesting concept which involved playing seven tunes that were originally recorded in seven different venues with the aim of reflecting the differences in the settings, but I found the actual material rather stiff and in need of greater flexibility and improvisation. The Dominic J Marshall Trio was the only group in the festival that included vocals, but I found these disappointing and preferred Marshall's piano playing.

The Susanna Risberg Trio from Sweden led by Risberg on guitar was the most conventional of the groups in the festival, but Risberg's guitar playing is strong and impressive. The second guitar trio in the festival, the Rite of Trio from Porto, Portugal, was a particular highlight with constant movement between full-on and gentler passages of play.

The solo violin set by Dowry was interesting in its mixing of folk including traditional Irish music with elements of jazz and classical music, but there was an excessive use of loops that were created and then used as backing. The set by the French Nox.3 & Linda Olah was extremely varied in its use of electronics, and ambient sounds.

The programme is curated by the Irish Improvised Music Company; the selection is based on an application process and IMC director Ken Killeen had the task of choosing the 12 bands from a list of over 500 applications. The programme also included two very stimulating discussion sessions for delegates and musicians, the first, led by Ros Rigby, focussed on issues of gender balance in jazz while the second considered the future of different formats for accessing recorded music; this was led by Ken Killeen.

BANDS PERFORMING AT 12 POINTS

Julie Campiche Quartet - Switzerland
Susanna Risberg Trio - Sweden
Nox.3 & Linda Olah - France
Mia Dyberg Trio - Denmark

Steiger - Belgium
Kompost 3 - Austria
Dowry - Ireland
Elliot Galvin Trio - UK

Container Doxa - Slovenia
Kjetil Mulelid Trio - Norway
The Rite of Trio - Portugal
Dominic J Marshall Trio - Netherlands
On Tuesday, September 11, 2018