

Hip and open-minded

The 12 POINTS! jazz festival, now in its third year, is going from strength to strength, writes
Cormac Larkin



If I had a euro for every time I've heard the immortal cop-out line "I'm not going because I don't know anything about jazz", I would probably have enough to foot the public service pay bill single-handedly. You think I exaggerate, but only slightly. Most people have an opinion on most things, but when it comes to improvised music, there's a curious reticence: "Oh, I don't listen to jazz because I don't understand it."

What's to understand? You open your ears and listen. It's a pleasurable experience, you stay. If you'd rather negotiate the next social partnership agreement, you leave. Simple.

The Improvised Music Company's 12 POINTS! festival, now in its third year, is an event specially designed for the open-minded. You can go to it safe in the knowledge that nobody in the audience knows much more about what's happening on stage than you.

12 POINTS! (say it in French and you'll get the joke) is a veritable gem of a festival and now stands amongst the most important fixtures on Ireland's music calendar with a reputation that is rapidly growing internationally. What the IMC has done is to find a way to bring brand new music and a brand new audience together in a conducive listening environment. Most people taking their seats over the four days of this week's event will have made their choice based not on the reputations of the performers but on the brand identity of the festival, to borrow an expression from the world of follet paper, and that is a signal achievement for a non-profit promoter.

As for those taking the stage, the 12 POINTS! policy is to identify the innovators and the soon-to-be-famous in the younger generation around Europe. So for the musicians too, this unique festival is a golden opportunity and one that they'll be very excited about.

I should warn you, however, that they'll also be shockingly young. Don't believe anyone who says that jazz is an old man's music. Sure, it takes a few years to learn how to play your instrument well, but most of the great innovators of modern jazz have done their most important work as young men. Charlie Parker was just 22 when he burst onto the New York scene with bebop. Miles Davis was in his early 30s when he recorded *Kind of Blue*, and even John Coltrane's mature masterpiece, *A Love Supreme*, was recorded when the saxophonist had hit 40. That's still pretty



Clockwise from top left: Paavo, Albatross, Ali Rissanen and the Emilie Parisien Quartet

young from where I'm standing.

Of course, you have to wonder if the IMC is beginning to regret the name. It was a funny joke at first, but now it must seem like something of a milestone. With a festival that is going from strength to strength, planting Dublin firmly on the international jazz map, surely the time can't be too far away when it might be appropriate to have more than a dozen acts. Then what? Would the audience, even one as hip and open-minded as the 12 POINTS! crowd, stand for such a flagrant breach of linguistic accuracy?

The 12 POINTS! festival runs from Wednesday 11 to Saturday 14 February in the sympathetic surroundings of the Project Arts Centre in Dublin's Temple Bar. The very reasonable €20 admission gets you into all three shows on a given night and there's a €60 season ticket for the really enlightened who want to go every night. More info from the Project box office (01 8819983) or at www.12points.ie

WEDNESDAY

1. Auditeefing: 7.30pm

The indocently youthful Polish pianist Pawel Kazanowczyk leads a classic quartet line-up of saxophone, bass and drums, drawing on American influences like Wayne Shorter and Brad Mehldau but also on Europeans like the late Esbjorn Svensson.

2. Morla: 9pm

Ireland's entry unites two of the most original voices on the Dublin scene: saxophonist Sean Og and guitarist Simon Jermyn, who will be wheeling out a battery of noise-making devices, including televisions and 'preparations'. Over-ear headphones recommended.

3. Paavo: 10.30pm

From the far-flung Swedish scene come singer Sofia Jernberg and pianist Cecilia Persson with a seven-piece group. The pair's intricate, ear-popping compositions are playful and engaging, a useful trick when you're exploring a very contemporary soundscape.

THURSDAY

4. Hyperactive Kid: 7.30pm

Berlin natives Hyperactive Kid take the

4. You can go to 12 POINTS!

safe in the knowledge that nobody in the audience knows much more about what's happening on stage than you

5. Ali Rissanen: 9pm

Solo pianist Ali Rissanen, winner of second prize at the International Montreux Jazz Solo Piano competition in 2004, trained initially as a classical pianist but was lured over to the dark side by studies with Finnish jazz master Jarmo Savolainen.

6. Luca Aquino: 10.30pm

The trumpeter from Benevento, near Naples, started out as a be-bopper but fell under the spell of Scandinavian hipsters like Nils Petter Molvær and Arve Henriksen, and has now imported that Nordic sensibility into the Mediterranean tradition.

FRIDAY

7. Albatross: 7.30pm

Winners of the Jazz Intro Prize in Norway last year, Albatross is a duo of pianist Eyolf Dale and saxophonist André Koligstein, without the clatter of bass and drums to fill out the sound, but with the creative energy and the technical virtuosity to pull it off.

8. Curios: 9pm

Recently voted best band at the BBC Jazz Awards, Curios is a piano trio led by Tom Barwell, one of the musicians behind punk jazz pioneers Acoustic Ladyland. Curios is a slightly more ruminative affair, but the same anarchic sensibility prevails.

9. Emilie Parisien Quartet: 10.30pm

Parisien is, per se, a Toulouseian and though just 26, his group will probably most resemble a jazz group as the older generation would understand the term—saxophone, piano, bass and drums exploring the post-Coltrane musical landscape.

SATURDAY

10. Ginja Valle Group: 7pm

Barcelona bassist Ginja Valle, who cut her teeth backing flamenco artists, has made a series of recordings for the prestigious Fresh Sounds New Talent label. She brings a group that includes two saxophonists, a pianist who plays the trumpet, and a drummer.

11. Zapp String Quartet: 9pm

Jazz groups composed entirely of strings are rare, but Zapp from Amsterdam give the lie to the idea that genres don't swing, diving straight into the heartland of jazz with deep grooves and an almost bluesy sound.

12. Magnus Fria Gaarden: 10.30pm

Copenhagen has been good to the 12 Points festival, sending Hammond organ iconoclasts Boran Gurevich last year. Magnus Fria Gaarden are cut from a similarly rugged cloth, sounding like a head-on collision between a jazz group and a punk band.