



The 12 Points Story

Before you ask, let's dispense with the understandable query as to why a jazz festival based in Dublin has this slightly cryptic title of 12 points. The answer is twofold. Keen followers of the Eurovision Song Contest, and let's face it, we all do it, will know that twelve points is the maximum score that can be awarded in the competition that, for all its camp eccentricities, is hugely significant, bringing Europe's citizens together as no other event does, not even its great sporting tournaments. It's just a shame that the music falls so far short of its social ambition. Our festival is a more modest affair, somewhat less reliant on Norse rockers in prosthetic make up, transgender divas, folk dance bombast, Xena the warrior princess lookalikes, burlesque choreography, singing turkeys and hyperactive twins. The last two are Irish gifts to our fellow Europeans, but when it comes to Eurovision, let he who is without guilt cast the first stone

More Be bop than Boom Bang-a-Bang, here 12 Points has a different interpretation. It refers to the festival's structure, under which twelve brilliant ensembles are invited to participate in an event that illuminates Europe's best new jazz talent, 12 creative beacons on the European map.

12 Points Festival started in 2007, but its impetus came three years earlier, during Ireland's 2004 presidency of the EU, which coincided with the May accession of ten new member states. Improvised Music Company's involvement with Bray jazz festival that year, sought to bring musicians from several of the ten new member countries to celebrate this historic landmark in the European project. Estonian, Cypriot, Hungarian, and Czech artists all came, and it's fair to say that the first Polish national to reap the benefits of the new ease of mobility was the celebrated trumpeter Tomasz Stanko who memorably performed in Bray on 1st May, within hours of the accession treaty coming into effect.

That exercise left us in no doubt as to the potential that existed to go deeper into the narrative of contemporary European jazz, particular with regard to emerging artists. Jazz can lay claim to being Europe's musical lingua franca, a conduit for cultural dialogue that transcends borders, a celebration of regional diversity and ethnicities, and a platform for education and cultural exchange. Evidence of this momentum can be witnessed across the EU, with thriving jazz ecologies in all its major cities, a growing cohort of young soloists and ensembles at the highest level of artistic expression, and jazz artists, record labels and festivals as net contributors to the cultural export economies of many countries throughout Europe.

For their part, jazz festivals are a distinctive and long established presence on Europe's cultural landscape, and many of the world's leading celebrations of improvised and related music are found within its borders, from large international events such as Germany's Berlin Festival Rotterdam's North Sea Jazz, and Norway's Molde Festival, to national festival networks, such as France, which hosts over 200 jazz festivals per annum. If modest in stature, Dublin is also home to a thriving jazz environment, but since the last edition of ESB Dublin Jazz Festival in 2003, the Irish capital had been without a festival presence. Our proposed festival, entitled 12 Points, would re establish that presence in the Irish cultural calendar, within an innovative model that could have positive implications for young artists not just in Ireland, but throughout the expanded EU.



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A concept was taking shape, there was no shortage of exciting artists to consider and the organization and structure was in place to deliver it, but our speculative venture needed partners. Who could we turn to underwrite this risky proposition, which sought to bring a dozen unknown bands to one of Europe's more peripheral capitals? Appositely, help was at hand via another EU presidency, this time on the German watch. In the spirit of cultural pluralism and co-operation which I have found to be a leitmotif of Goethe Institut's philosophy, 12 points was embraced into the programme of activities to mark the German presidency in Ireland. It was a key moment, and provided much needed impetus to unlock the support of other key agencies like Culture Ireland, Dublin City Council and a panoply of partners throughout the EU such as Europe Jazz Network, Musik Centrum Nederlands, AFIJMA and many others.

Guided by the vision of Director Rolf Stehle, Goethe Institut in Dublin immediately grasped the core proposition, and helped us amplify it out to other prospective stakeholders. It was straightforward; if 12 Points was to be truly representative and pan – European, it was of the utmost importance that the breadth and diversity of the union was reflected, specifically with regard to the ten new members. With cultural subvention in some of those states at best limited, in some cases non-existent, it was incumbent on those states with greater available subventions to act altruistically, and maximize the pooled resources to the collective benefit. In short, Goethe Institut put their money where their mouth was, as we are keen to say in Ireland.

Organisation and financial resources in place, in late 2006 the call went out for artists for the first edition of 12 Points. We were looking for twelve ensembles who could fit within an artistic rationale that continues to inform our work. Within existing festival structures, there exists a vacuum with regard to the presentation of a pan European group of young artists, typically those that have recently concluded formal studies within a 3 to 5 year window. This cohort, at an average age of 25 -30 years old, are at a pivotal point in career development and are highly motivated, generating original material and forming new ensembles with their peers. Concurrently, a certain frustration is evident among them, specifically around the dearth of performing opportunities beyond the borders of their respective countries. The importance of international performance in artistic development is well understood, and yet significant barriers exist for younger, less established performers, markedly so in the smaller member states, where talented artists can quickly exhaust the opportunities afforded by their domestic performing environment, while lacking the resources to leverage a presence on the broader European scene. Unlike the dynamic, fast reacting structures that prevail in rock and pop music for example, the wider European jazz sector can be slow to pick up on emerging trends, creative directions and important emerging artists.

12 Points is a very targeted response to this structural issue, which affects artists through the EU/EEA, including those in the most successful jazz countries such as Germany, Netherlands and Norway, but acutely so in small member states such as Ireland and the Baltic states. 12 Points can be viewed as a “mezzanine” festival, providing an important platform between the domestic structures from which these artists have emerged, and helping them on their way to the international stages to which they aspire. The festival's mission to bring these emerging



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artists into a demanding performance environment, presenting their work to an international audience, in many cases likely to be the first time to do so. A significant part of that audience is their fellow participants and musical peers from other member states, facilitating another key objective of the festival's mission, the germination of organic networks between artists across the EU. While many national cultural agencies directly support the international careers of their artists, those same agencies will assert that often the most effective and durable partnerships are those facilitated by artists themselves. While not unique to jazz, this peer to peer networking is a recurring motif of jazz practice throughout Europe, and indeed the music worldwide. The jazz *modus operandi*, with its shared pedagogical systems, collective understanding of standard repertoire, technique and form, ability to absorb instrumental diversity and accommodate other areas of expression, such as rock, classical and folkloric music, seems particularly suited to this approach. These organic networks can often take many years to germinate, but the artistic rewards can be potent when they mature. Many examples could be cited in this regard, such as artists recording for the renowned Munich based label ECM. A typical ECM project will be led by one individual artist, for example Norwegian saxophonist Jan Garbarek, but musicians participating may be drawn from across the EU, perhaps Germany's Eberhard Weber, France's Manu Katche or England's Hilliard Ensemble. While the artists cited here are very established figures, it is valid to state that often the genesis of these collaborations will have taken place many years prior though artistic first contact. 12 Points exploits our gathering of young artists from twelve European states to facilitate that same first contact.

Artists are selected through an open call and submission of an online application via the festival's website <http://www.12points.ie> For the most recent edition, we received in excess of 300 artist submissions. Additionally we seek and receive recommendations via an extensive peer network that includes previous 12 Points participants, other festivals, education institutions, music journalists and the member organizations of Europe Jazz Network, which includes festivals, venues, and national organizations throughout the EU, and of which we are the Irish representative. This annual call for artists is in effect the most exhaustive audit of who is coming through on the European jazz scene, and becomes more effective with each edition, with a growing database of practitioners, media and industry professionals.

12 Points has a straightforward structure, and takes place over four days, with three ensembles performing nightly for 60 minutes each. All ensembles participate on an equal footing, work for the same financial terms, and break the same bread. All visiting artists are in situ in Dublin for the duration of the festival, and in addition to performance, private rehearsal facilities are provided for informal musical encounters between participants, with other social and cultural activities to generate a sense of community among the artistic corpus. This can sometimes involve the dark beer with which this city is synonymous.

However, five years into our journey we realised that 12 Points need not limit itself to Dublin, and so developed a model that could be applied in other like minded European cities of similar scale. In the spirit of exchange that informs everything the festival does, 12 Points itself is now on the road. While The first three editions (07,08,09) took place in Project Arts



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Centre, in the heart of Dublin's Temple Bar Cultural Quarter, in February 2010, 12 Points undertook its first host edition, when it took place as a co-production with Stavanger Jazz Forum in Stavanger, Western Norway.

Thus in alternate years, the festival rotates between Dublin and a network of partner organizations in other European cities, with successful festival editions in Casa De Music, Porto, Portugal in 2012 and Norrland Opera, Umea, Sweden in 2014. Through this partnership model, 12 Points becomes a powerful tool for sharing networks, resources and expertise on an organizational level, akin to the artistic network model articulated above.

As we rotate the festival's location, it is our intention to generate awareness and creative momentum away from recognized centres of activity in Europe's larger cities, focusing on peripheral locations, of which we acknowledge Dublin as one. Thus the festival can be a potent catalyst to stimulating activity in those cities it visits on an annual basis, and also creating lasting residual connections between creative communities in Dublin and elsewhere.

From the outset, it's been our intention to maintain a relationship with the artists beyond their once off festival appearance, using its resources and contacts to generate more awareness of their work. As 12 Points' reputation has grown as a key window into the best of Europe's emerging jazz artists, we're now harnessing that resource toward a more direct intervention. This comes through a new, EACEA funded mobility project called 12 Points Plus, whereby we're liaising directly with other festivals to present a 12 Points Stage within their own programme. The first of these stages took place in March 2011 at the jazz festival of The Sage Gateshead, UK, at which Trio VD (UK), Mari Kvien Brunvoll (Norway) and Donkey Monkey (France), all alumni of the 2010 edition, performed. This is a template under which we'll realise multiple events up to 2013, with 12 Points acting as a de facto agent for these ensembles, securing engagements, organizing transport and logistics and liaising on their behalf with receiving festivals. 12 Points negotiates fees on their behalf, and subvents their participation, supporting travel and other appropriate costs. These events at other festivals take place in the 12 Points livery, and promote the developmental work of the festival to a wide European audience. We see 12 Points Plus as a logical extension of our mission, and through this intervention we now have an opportunity to make a dramatic impact on broader awareness of these important practitioners. Beyond 2013, we foresee other important applications of 12 Points Plus, as a representative showcase of pan-European jazz that could be deployed at major rock and pop festivals and international music showcases like MIDEM, APAP and SXSW.

12 Points also recognizes that it is engaging with emerging artists at a critical point in their career development and we try to support these talented individuals on the road to career success and longevity. Since 2010 we've included a senior artist who attends the festival in a mentoring, non-performance capacity, artists like the celebrated Norwegian producer Jan Bang. The mentor offers valuable perspectives and insights to the festival performers on areas of performance presentation, programme content and other key areas. Mentor and artists interact freely to consider aesthetics, technology, sustainability, the broader cultural discourse and other areas that affect the lives of young artists. As the cultural and economic



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landscape has shifted, many of the traditional routes by which young musicians amassed experience, such as via record labels or apprenticeships with established artists, have dramatically contracted. Equally, in some cases young artists now make the transition from student to performer very rapidly, and while they may be at the highest musical level, they may also be ill equipped for the challenges that lie ahead of a life in music. Given that 12 Points strives to identify the 12 key ensembles across Europe in any given year, we place great value on the opportunity it presents for mentoring them at the highest level.

Of course, we want to do business too. While many national showcases exist throughout Europe, 12 Points has a unique proposition, i.e., the opportunity to showcase a comprehensive selection of new artists from across the EU under one roof. This is an unrivalled opportunity for introducing artists to key European industry professionals, and since its inception, 12 Points has managed an invitation programme which has to date included London Jazz Festival, North Sea Jazz, Jazzahead Bremen, Bimhuis Amsterdam, Skopje Jazz Festival, Copenhagen Jazzhouse, The Sage Gateshead, Oslo Jazz Festival and Tampere Jazz Happening to name several. Indeed, the calendar period in which 12 points takes place in early spring has been set with this in mind, occurring in the critical final programming window for the summer/ late autumn events that dominate the European jazz festival circuit. As 12 Points continues to develop, we envisage it becoming the key European showcase event for other festival programmers and directors, thus generating further performance opportunity for its participants. A good example in this regard is the wonderful French duo Donkey Monkey, who came to the 2010 edition as complete unknowns, and subsequently secured engagements at prestigious European festivals including Moers Festival, Tampere Jazz Happening, Umea, Oslo Bergen and London Jazz Festivals. Accelerating the progress of young artists who we believe in, especially the unpredictable and creative ones like Donkey Monkey, makes us very happy.

An informed scrutiny of the festival's history since 2007 will yield the names of artists who are increasingly assertive in European jazz, demonstrating that 12 Points has an eye for emerging talent, and is playing its part in ensuring that their work reaches the widest possible European audience.

Like other artforms, jazz is not immune to the immensely disruptive forces at work in Europe, of which the economic crisis is only one. The profound information, transmission and technological shifts through which we are collectively living, are asking searching questions of how we provide a meaningful cultural dimension to the lives of Europe's 500 million citizens. Those same forces are also eroding much of the traditional models through which artists themselves have aspired to a life of economic sustainability through their creative work. 12 Points is a very tiny cog in that machine, but sometimes the view from the periphery can be clearer, and from our vantage point here in Dublin we can see that our concept, elegant in its simplicity, has real resonance throughout Europe's jazz community. Small, not quite perfectly formed, but almost.

Perhaps it was that quality that the Goethe Institut saw in 2007. Whatever their rationale, it was in every sense, an investment, a moment of cultural venture capital that has repaid itself



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many times over. For Dubliners, it brought them the music of Carsten Daerr, Hyperactive Kid, Matthias Schriefl, Lisbeth Quartett and Pablo Held Trio, the generation of young German artists whose music has conveyed such strong impressions of the creative dynamic in German cities like Berlin and Munich. Over the past five years, they've been joined by potent musical personalities from Leeds, London, Belfast, Dublin, Brussels, Amsterdam, Rome, Skopje, Budapest, Vienna, Geneva, Warsaw, Luxembourg, Sofia, Vilnius, Tallinn, Helsinki, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Gothenburg, Oslo and Bergen, and we won't rest until we've brought forth all the riches that Europe's cities, great and modest alike, have to offer.

12 Points is a beautiful, noisy map joining all these young artists and audience together. Such are the daydreams of people who live on an island, at several removes from their continental companions. We islanders are inquisitive too, and when we started out with 12 Points, it was as much to satisfy our curiosity as to what was the sound of European jazz, for there is a received wisdom that such a thing exists, a "European sound". We've put that shibboleth to rest, and if 12 Points demonstrates anything, it is that jazz around Europe is anything but homogenous. Europe's young musicians are clearly listening voraciously, embracing technology, collaborating in other artistic spheres, going deep into the tradition and on it goes in a virtuous cycle that keeps the creative flame alight. Together, they're powerful evidence that jazz in Europe is a shared language that celebrates all its regional accents. Individually, they embrace all the willful diversity that keeps music young. The wheels of European jazz keep on turning, bringing forth exciting and personal perspectives on a great music tradition from emerging artists with plenty to say.

As for Eurovision? We say, Allemagne, douze points!

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