

Quiet Music Ensemble NCH Kevin Barry Room

QME – Improvisations. Solfa Carlile – Standing Chill. Adam McCartney – Trio. Alyson Barber – Apparitions. Aristides Llanaeza – Below the Surface. Susan Geaney – Vacuum.

It was appropriate that the Quiet Music Ensemble's concert began with improvisation.

This Cork-based group was founded back in 2008 by the composer, guitarist and keyboard player John Godfrey, to explore specific kinds of experimental music-making.

Improvisation lies at the core of what they do.

The most defined, and the most strikingly crafted piece of the evening was Solfa Carlile's *Standing Chill*, a duo for cello (Ilse

de Ziah) and saxophone (Seán MacErlaine) in which a seemingly traditional, quasi-modal harmonic language brims with tension between the materials allocated to the two instruments.

It was easy to appreciate why Carlile has attracted attention in Britain, and why Alyson Barber, whose *Apparitions* was an unsettling exploration of texture and colour, has also done well in having works performed by ensembles with a high reputation.

All this music requires a very close kind of listening, in which the players are able to respond to minute inflections created in live performance.

That was evident in the colour-laden *Trio* by Adam McCartney, and in the play of timbre that was one of the most prominent aspects of Aristides

Llanaeza's *Below the Surface*.

This is an extreme kind of performers' music.

Its horizons seem infinite; and in that respect the most tantalising piece was *Vacuum* by Susan Geaney.

She says she likes to create music that dispenses with "the invariable 'whys?' for just a moment".

So, like almost all the music on this programme, *Vacuum* dispenses with process – though it still progresses.

Perhaps its most enticing aspect is not so much the absence of "whys?", but the fact that it sets up its own world of sonic experience, and of interaction between the players. On one level the audience is shut out. On another it is inexorably drawn in.

– Martin Adams