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Ensemble Scratch the Surface

Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin

Scratch the Surface is a contemporary music ensemble founded in 2006. The programming for its recent Music Network tour was based on the premise that the old boundaries which once designated sounds as either musical or non-musical no longer exist.

It's a concept that generally remains newer to audiences than it does to composers, who were already dabbling with it early in the last century. The audience at this concert was engaged by it, even by the most extreme example, Claudia Kappenberg's *Upon the Place Beneath*. Six movement artists stood gracefully moving their arms, silently at first, until they began to release beads from their hands which poured down on to various resonant objects and created a random interplay of sounds. Everyone seemed gripped - it looked beautiful, sounded interesting, we wondered what it might mean.

The other works in the programme were closer to the familiar orthodoxy in that they required musical instruments. The full ensemble of clarinet, violin, viola, double bass and percussion played thoughtful pieces by Linda Buckley - her *Nikuda (Nowhere)* opens and closes with a busy, funky pulse that goes into hiding but remains implicit when the scoring pares down to a single voice - and by Claudia Molitor, whose *Between the Marks* takes something lyrical and distorts and reshapes it, mirroring what happens after a painter's first brushstroke on a new canvas.

In Jean Martin's *Viola Pulse*, what once were agreed to be non-musical sounds (for example, rubs and scratches) were created on viola, recorded and electronically manipulated to form one half (on tape) of a duo, the other half being the viola soloist, ensemble director Conall Gleeson, playing live. Not a new idea, but intriguingly conceived and executed here. Also combining tape and live instruments was Donnacha Dennehy's *Glamour Sleeper*, in its urban accent growing to a great wall of industrial sound.

For sheer entertainment the concert's best piece was Roderik de Man's four-minute *Case History*, a sparkling solo for energetic percussionist Joel Farland, who rapped, tapped and shouted through a piece played entirely on his aluminium mallet case. - **MICHAEL DUNGAN**