

## Jazz

### London Jazz Festival Various venues, London

★★★★★

There is something not quite right about an improviser's performance being introduced as an "act" – as if the show were a set piece, calculated to push audience buttons. The MC for the Esbjorn Svensson Trio and Polar Bear sets announced both bands that way. They certainly didn't play as if acting was part of the plan.

Polar Bear, darkly contemplative and a little melancholy, delivered a fast, exuberantly rough-hewn set, pitching

their signature two-sax harmonies against the spiky squeals and beeps of electronics operator Leafcutter John. New material was evidence that this inventive UK band is still growing, and Seb Rochford's drumming was compelling in its relaxed precision.

EST then swept through a mix of older material and pieces from the new, more classically delicate Tuesday Wonderland album. Extended episodes signalled that we were in familiar territory: softly lyrical piano figures against steady drum shuffles and guitar-like bowed bass sounds. The set had a long, freely improvised centrepiece sprung off the Tuesday Wonderland material, and Svensson's long piano rhapsodies exerted a mesmerizing power.

Elsewhere at the festival, the guttural-

toned, melodically nimble Dutch alto saxophonist Benjamin Herman joined British trumpeter Guy Barker and pianist Stan Tracey's trio in scalding form at the Pizza Express Jazz Club, playing some of the most vibrant bop-based straight-ahead jazz of the week. Danish singer Malene Mortensen seemed uncertain as to whether she should be a cabaret artist or a contemporary vocalist; mostly, cabaret won.

However, music came first for the excellent Ayse Tutuncu trio from Turkey – a promising group who blend smoky tenor-sax sounds, improv, John Surman-like bass clarinet harmonies, blues and Turkish traditional elements. If there's any justice, they'll be back.

**John Fordham**

*The festival ends tomorrow. Details:  
[www.londonjazzfestival.org.uk](http://www.londonjazzfestival.org.uk)*