

La Route du Rock, St Malo

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On paper the curation of Saint-Malo's [La Route Du Rock](#) makes little sense. There's no clear thread running through it leading to any indication of what a typical ticket-holder here might look like.

But neither is there that desperate cross-genre mishmash of a bill that chases variety so hard that it barely touches the surface of any soft spot enough to really please anyone.

Only when you get here do you realise that this is a festival for connoisseurs – and nothing more complicated than that. If only the French had a word for such a thing.

It's the very finest of everything, in just the right amounts.

The entree is a pre-festival gig on Wednesday night at La Nouvelle Vague, a venue in Saint-Malo acting as a loose year-round base for La Route Du Rock.

Frànçois & The Atlas Mountains throw some ballet shapes against the backdrop of a romantic landscape where Belle & Sebastian meets Wild Beasts, before Ought rip the whole thing apart with an incredible, jittery call to arms all of their own (if Talking Heads are left out of the equation).

There aren't a ton of things to do during the festival before the music starts. In fact there's probably only one thing – but that one thing is taking the bus to the beach and swimming in the sea in the blazing sunshine, maybe trying some local oysters; your basic provisions.

On the festival site itself – just your standard 18th Century fort really – two stages alternate as the festival ask us to place total trust in their ability to curate our experience so well that the idea of choice is a passé distraction. It's a responsibility they prove themselves more than worthy of.

Among the best of the smaller Rampart stage over the weekend are acts as disparate as blistering noise band Metz and Missouri folk singer Angel Olsen. A particular highlight are fun Parisian post-punk band Cheveu – a sort of French Art Brut with extra pop sensibility.

Downpours on the first day turn the uneven ground between the stages into a series of huge muddy pools, with wooden boards sinking uselessly into them as the crowds slop from one to the other. By nightfall the conditions around the champagne stall are barely humane, but somehow people battle on in the spirit befitting such surroundings.

The weather even adds something as Caribou takes to the Fort stage, transforming the wispy drizzle from an inconvenience into just another magical prop in a stunning, all-enveloping performance that the whole festival has turned out to see.

By the time Darkside close the first night it's suitably, dramatically pouring down on the depleted but dedicated number still intent on dancing and dealing with the sopping consequences.

We've already been tipped off about the festival's affection towards bits of the 90s British alt pop scene, and indeed Portishead's Friday night headline slot is responsible for the festival selling out this year.

The Fort stage hits its weekend peak as the hypnotic light show and slinking melancholy wash over an adoring crowd that must surely include every single punter on site. That Portishead probably wouldn't draw this kind of crowd at home suddenly looks like our shameful display of bad taste.

Ensuring we end on a high, rather than in an existential rut, the final day sees Mac DeMarco's smoking-whilst-crowdsurfing shtick delight the afternoon crowd as much as anything he actually plays.

Jamie XX and Todd Terje bring the festival to a euphoric close with back-to-back DJ sets on the Fort stage as the staff from the champagne bar run round with a measuring jug carefully delivering their leftover stock directly to people's mouths.

Back home, the finale might be marked by flying cups of warm lager enthusiastically shared with anyone near enough to catch a few drops from above, but La Route Du Rock has far better taste than that.

