

# Reeperbahn Festival, Hamburg

*Kate Wellham*

'RULE NUMBER ONE IS HAVE FUN', shouts the colourful poster from the wall of the Generator hostel in Hamburg, muttering in smaller letters underneath: 'checkout is at 10am'.

In the interests of being an efficient and obedient guest, I head straight to the Reeperbahn - the European home of fun.

Whether city-based or field-based, most music festivals bring the party - scaring either the rats or the squirrels with their sudden monsoon of fag ends and lager. Until a festival kicks off, day-to-day mundanity rules the location.

Not on the Reeperbahn. This festival barely makes a dent in the chaos that is a normal weekend in this sticky throng. Where it does mingle with the regular routine, it comes out looking the more composed of the two. The pen running down the centre of the strip seems to be protecting the stalls and stages of the outdoor part of the festival from the noise spillage and rampant marauding from the other side of the fence, rather than vice versa.

To ease myself into this chaos, something familiar: Kate Nash is here for some reason, standing out (with James Blunt) like a well-established thumb among the burgeoning Eurotalent competing for attention.

She's playing at Docks, which is one of my favourite venues on the strip, so I think: 'What the hell'. And then after listening to her for 30 seconds: 'What the hell?!'

I came in for a bit of polished cockney spunk, but instead I get sleepy-eyed grunge. It's not bad, but it's hard to take at face value a transition back in time from the girl on the night bus with sick on her brand new trainers to the girl glitching in her mate's garage with scuffs on her Docs. However, German fans don't seem to have any problem processing this.

As a contrast to the graffitied wooden cavern of Docks, it's then over to the sleek Moondo, where German producer Roosevelt's Caribou-ish calm is a palate-cleansing reassurance of the high quality this festival usually delivers.

You can tell, because even the corporate promo is shit hot. Knowing what they're up against, Jagermeister have foregone their shot fairies in orange nylon garlands in favour of a full marching band - dancers and all. For their part, O2 are giving out light-up wristbands. Oh, and organising the entire aftershow party at their own expense. Clearly having your brand seen here is such an investment in looking cool that it doesn't even matter if it's taking up real estate

between cowboy gear and dildos.

On paper, I hate Robert DeLong. Some guy from Washington stamps his face and all earthly belongings with a gimmicky symbol and ditches his bandmates to become part of the awkward cover-all that American kids call EDM, or 'Electronic Dance Music' (which is exactly what Alan Partridge would call it).

On the night, though, I can't get enough of it. The pacey refrains are expertly minimal, and he has the whole room in the palm of his hand from beat one. He missions around the stage looping, adding live guitar, drums and vocals, and pogoing at the front whenever he hits the sweet spot. Robert DeLong isn't just for a Hamburg club at 2am, he's a keeper.

In a world where Paloma Faith is considered 'eccentric', the only accurate terms to sum up Kirin J Callinan would need to be pulled from an Attenborough documentary on deep sea creatures. Like many of the Reeperbahn's residents, Kirin has made an art of hanging around in his knickers, but in his case he's less a pornographic promise, more a freshly unfrozen neanderthal new to the modern restrictions of clothing. Tonight he starts the gig in some sort of 80s printed pyjama suit that my mum would describe as 'snazzy', and strips down to a vest while eyeballing us intensely and screaming what sounds like a stream of consciousness rant detailing various issues he has with the human race and specific representatives thereof.

It's either going really well, or really badly, and I love the fact that we can't tell. "He looks like he wants to kill us all", "Yeah but he looks like he'd fuck us first, so it's fine". I leave with a commemorative tea towel.

The chaos of the Reeperbahn Festival is what makes it such an incredible place to see new acts. This place is a year-round party, and standing at the back of the room with your arms crossed takes much more effort than loosening up and joining in.

So strictly do I adhere to the rule about having fun - and for so long into the night - that it eventually makes the second rule about a 10am checkout time totally impossible, much to the annoyance of the Generator staff, but they can't have it both ways during Reeperbahn Festival.



