



of klezmer and Irish music," he says.

Klezfest is on at the Project Arts Centre on Thursday 5 April from 5pm to midnight and features Kate Ellis's Xorto, Francesco Turissi's Tarab, Justin Carroll's Triple Piglet, Oleg Ponomarev's Shara, Nick Roth's Yurodny and The North Strand Klezmer Band, with a full ensemble performance for the finale.

Jon Ihle

## Klezmer finally takes to an Irish stage

WHEN cellist Kate Ellis's Xorto takes the stage on Thursday at the Project Arts Centre to open Dublin's first 'Klezfest', she'll be inaugurating a unique event in the musical history of the country. It will not only be the first time Ireland hosts a festival of klezmer music but all six of the groups and two DJs performing are based in Ireland.

Originally established in New York by members of the seminal Klezmatics at the genesis of the klezmer revival in the 1980s, the Klezfest eventually expanded to London, Paris, St Petersburg, Kiev, Cracow and many other cities around the world. Now it's Dublin's turn.

The ecstatic dances and despairing melodies of klezmer, which arose out of the mixing of Jewish and gypsy musical culture in eastern Europe and the Balkans in the 19th century, never got much of a foothold in Ireland. Apart from Andy Irvine's *East Wind* album 15 years ago, klezmer sounds were virtually unheard here. But the efforts of saxophonist Nick Roth and a growing body of klezmer players, especially in Dublin, have helped change that.

The Klezfest emerged from a series of packed gigs that Roth's group, Yurodny (pictured above), played with the North Strand Klezmer Band (NSKB) in the Boom Boom Room in Parnell Street last year. Seeking a larger venue, Roth approached Project and secured the 5 April date. Soon, other musicians, such as jazz pianists Francesco Turissi and Justin Carroll, approached Roth with klezmer projects of their own and the gig grew to festival proportions.

"I'd like to say the interest is a result of recent immigration, but these people are based in Ireland for years," says Roth. "The biggest reason is the music is great and the exponents are playing it well for the first time here."

At first the 'scene' consisted of Roth and the various incarnations of his Kai project but then he was approached by NKSB - "proper Northside lads" - who knew the Yiddish repertoire as if they'd grown up with it. As other musicians and audiences came within the orbit of these groups, popularity started to build. The phenomenon hasn't surprised Roth, though.

"Klezmer is popular everywhere but it was never played here," he says. "Trad has always been strong in Ireland and klezmer isn't a million miles away - that has helped strengthen its hold."

A sold out concert featuring Yurodny, NKSB and Romanian gypsy superstars Mahala Rai Banda at Tripod in December underlined that hold.

One thing common to most Klezfests but missing from its Dublin incarnation is an educational aspect. In New York, for instance, musicians give lessons, seminars and master classes to interested patrons and other musicians. Roth is investigating funding possibilities for developing the educational side for the next Irish Klezfest - whenever that may be.

"In three or four years you'll be hearing hybrids