

Pop. JOHN GRANT'S NORTH ATLANTIC FLUX, various venues, Hull

The American singer-songwriter played a rapturously received selection of barbed ballads at his own boutique festival

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The Scandiphile American singer John Grant was host, curator and headliner of his own boutique festival over the bank holiday weekend. Part of Hull's year-long tenure as UK City of Culture, North Atlantic Flux was a kind of mini-Meltdown celebrating East Yorkshire's deep-rooted Nordic connections with a rich smorgasbord of eclectic sounds and eccentric characters. The musical mixtape may have been bracingly experimental in places, but the road to Hull was paved with good intentions.

Perhaps inevitably, despite a broad menu of Scandinavian and Yorkshire performers, North Atlantic Flux heavily favoured

Benediktsson brought a welcome blast of confrontational mischief as half of the techno-punk duo Ghostigital, who mixed dadaist rants with gnarly hooligan beats like rowdy cousins of Sleaford Mods.

Humberside's thousand-year trading history with other North Atlantic port cities was woven into the festival programme. Local poet Adelle Stripe's highly personal *Humber Star*, set to a sublime chamber orchestra score by Iceland's Halldor Smarason, drew on a quietly devastating family history of maritime tragedy. The Icelandic sculptor Steinunn Thorarinsdottir's elegant waterfront statue *Voyage* also served as a pop-up stage for the premiere of a mournful, angular trumpet piece by the synaesthetic composer Deborah Pritchard, which was played by the Hull university lecturer Simon Desbruslais.

Packing out the cavernous vaulted interior of Hull's Victorian-era City Hall on Sunday night, John Grant played a rapturously received selection of barbed ballads in pared-down, piano-driven arrangements. As ever, he balanced hilariously vitriolic lyrics with deceptively sweet melodies, adding an extra twist of spiteful fury to the already acerbic *Queen of Denmark* with thunderous squalls of distorted guitar. A spoonful of poison always helps the sugary medicine to go down.

North Atlantic Flux also bade farewell to Gate No 5, a ramshackle nightclub on Hull's insalubrious industrial fringes. Fittingly, the venue's swansong was a ribcage-rattling late-night set from Wrangler, a dystopian electro-funk trio fronted by Stephen Mallinder, formerly of Sheffield's industrial techno pioneers Cabaret Voltaire. Bouncing away in the dancefloor scrum was Grant himself, keeping the party rocking right to the bitter end. Nordic sophistication is all very well, but nothing beats a wallop of vintage Yorkshire grit.

