



Just three days after picking up her second Jazz FM award (this time for Best UK Jazz Act, voted by the British public), high-flying Camden Town saxophonist **Nubya Garcia** found herself playing in a Cheltenham department store. But this wasn't in front of active shoppers during peak opening times but, rather, at night in a long basement room that had been converted to resemble a dark and dingy low-ceilinged dive bar. Packed to the rafters with a wide range of punters - from young fanatical hipsters to middle-aged broadsheet readers and curious pensioners - 28-year-old Garcia, backed by a stellar band, showed why she's such a hot commodity right now.

Introduced by DJ and tastemaker, Gilles Peterson, Garcia played five long-form compositions that showcased her skills as a composer as well as her prowess as a saxophone player. Her tenor sound - robust and not too rich but also characterised by a dreaminess as well as a spiritual, searching, quality - has distilled some elements from Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders and Wayne Shorter, but is also, more importantly, uniquely her own. Her saxophone was framed by a lush chordal backdrop provided by the impressive Joe Armon-Jones on Fender Rhodes while the energetic Danile Casimir on double bass and Sam Jones's drums injected her music with a powerful rhythmic impetus.

The opener, 'Fly Free' - taken from her 2017 debut album, 'Nubya's Five' - found her saxophone gliding over a giddy maelstrom of percussive polyrhythms, with each member of the band enjoying a solo moment in the spotlight, while 'Source' - taken from her latest EP, 2018's 'When We Are' - found its seismic rhythms tipping its hat to dub reggae, though Garcia's saxophone gave the music a probing quality. Sam Jones's volcanic drums began a new song, 'Hold,' which evolved from an orgy of percussive sounds into a pulsating Latin-style number with Garcia's saxophone - elegant but passionate - surfing over a surging, rolling, wave of groove. Another freshly-penned new song, 'Pace' - inspired by the hustle and bustle of her home city, London - also showcased Garcia and her ace band to good effect. She closed her set with the title song from her EP, 'When We Are,' though it was re-worked in a way that almost made it unrecognisable from that version, beginning with an unaccompanied saxophone solo, which not only showed off Garcia's technique and breathy tenor tone but also her emotionally-nuanced delivery.

LIVE: Nubya Garcia @ Cheltenham Jazz Festival 3/5/2019

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Sunday, 05 May 2019 08:07 - Last Updated Monday, 06 May 2019 22:45

Most people witnessing this enthralling concert would have recognised that the praise lavished by the press on Garcia is well-deserved and that she is most certainly a real and potent force in contemporary British jazz. Believe the hype.

(Charles Waring)