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Teenage Spanish prodigy makes London debut, ready for the giant footsteps

by [Matthew Wright](#) | Wednesday, 01 October 2014

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Sublime expressive gift: Andrea Motis, right, with Joan Chamorro

Amy Winehouse, Esperanza Spalding, and Roberto Fonseca were the names tossed and banded after a London debut of extraordinary charm and maturity from the 19-year-old Spanish singer and multi-instrumentalist Andrea Motis. While a modest Soho crowd was dwarfed by the audience at the Barcelona Jazz Festival where she became, in 2012, the youngest performer to headline, there was a communal tingle of recognition, that we'd witnessed the start of something big.

Motis sings an already broad repertoire of standards, both American and Latin, with a sprinkling of modern repertoire such as Amy Winehouse's "You Know I'm No Good". This piece, an absolute treat for Motis' voice, and Baden Powell's "Samba em Prelúdio", an instrumental riot, were perhaps the most distinctive. A couple of the American standards, especially "My Favourite Things", worked slightly less well. All that icky rhyming imagery is both a tongue-twister and a mind-bender for a native English speaker; what a teenager from Barcelona is supposed to make of phrases like "schnitzel with noodles" isn't clear, and it didn't become so during the song. An album of Winehouse, however, would be very special.

That said, Motis' voice was sublime, with a tone like grainy honey that becomes liquid and aromatic upon warming. She was able to crescendo effortlessly from an audible but not-too-theatrical whisper to a balladeer's commanding heights in the blink of an eye. Her command of phrasing was confident and creative, and she wasn't afraid to stretch the words in original ways. There's also a pleasant but perfectly comprehensible accent that adds something different to the English-language songs; quite helpfully so, in the case of the most familiar standards. For jazz and the reflective end of pop, it's a superb instrument.

Motis was spotted at a music school run by the bassist Joan Chamorro, and his quintet now accompanies her. Playing double bass for the first set, he was a calm hand on the tiller; on tenor saxophone for "Samba em Prelúdio", and a couple of songs either side, he ripped the tiller from its fixings and beat the band about the head with it, with some monstrosities of domineering machismo. Pianist Ignasi Terraza, who would in other circumstances have been top of the bill, played some delightful melodic solo improvisation.

Musically, they were playing in a well-established, melodic swinging style - technical cutting edges were kept out of harm's way - but it was often extremely beautiful, and the melodic interplay between Terraza and guitarist Josep Traver captivating. Motis' own instrumental work, on both trumpet and saxophone, is not yet at the level of her singing, but the trumpet was used to vary and punctuate her vocal solos, and she showed an instinctive gift for trumpet phrasing as lyrical as her voice.

"Your name will be up in lights soon, dear," congratulated a kindly old lady on the way out. Motis is now managed by the same team as Esperanza Spalding, who,

“ Motis’ voice was sublime, with a tone like grainy honey that becomes liquid and aromatic upon warming ”

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