

Grace Jones at Meltdown: mesmerising and magical

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Tom Horan reviews Grace Jones at Massive Attack's Meltdown at the Festival Hall

- Culture Minute: Tom Horan on Grace Jones's comeback

These days, every pop act that ever sold a record is on the comeback trail.



This is how a star should be: Grace Jones at Massive Attack's Meltdown at the Festival Hall

But so often a ticket bought for an evening of nostalgia simply makes performer and punter feel old and knackered.

But my goodness the model-turned-singer Grace Jones buried that tired idea forever with this extraordinary performance. The most familiar tunes she played were 25 to 30 years old, but through the mesmerising force of her personality she made each one sound as crackling and relevant as the day it was recorded.

Jones is a compelling mixture of the defiant and the malleable. Her years as a catwalk model have fostered the ability to carry and present a look and completely subsume her sense of individuality. Yet there are few more fiercely recognisable artists in all of music.

When she appeared on stage to open with the thundering Nightclubbing she brought all of the eerie, hollow glamour of the fashion world with her, yet her warmth and loony joie de vivre seeped through in every line.

At this stage she was wearing some kind of Islamic headdress that had two thin horns with tiny red lights on them, and a hat at least four feet high that looked like the cake at an Iraqi-Jewish wedding. All around the gawping, whistling, cheering Festival Hall was the sense that this is how a star should be. Jones was by turns droll and dismissive. She giggled and then turned away in utter contempt.

She switched to the patois of her birthplace for My Jamaican Guy. “Keep it up, boys,” she growled to her super-tight band, a gang of youths the eldest of whom could barely have been half her unbelievable 60 years.

They swung into a new tune, from her comeback album, due for release in the autumn. Jones forgot the words, but seemed unfazed. “This is life!” she repeated 20 times to fill the gaps. As she swayed and gyrated on her 5in stilletos, with her limitless legs glistening in the blue light, this seemed pretty much accurate.

Hats off to Massive Attack, the Bristol group curating this year’s Meltdown Festival. They brought Jones here for this one-off, and tapped into a well of glamour, goodwill and celebration that beamed out from Jones and back from the jubilant hall.

If the new album — her first in 19 years — is a patch on this show, it will make this winter one to look forward to.