

MUSIC

'A musician's job now is more than music'

Half-Irish, Catalonia-born singer Nuria Graham talks to **GREG WETHERALL** about her swift ascent in music and her gripes with using social media

Her songs are laced with a delicate beauty undercut with a seductive, urgent atmosphere and now with a headline show at The Lexington on March 16, Spanish singer-songwriter Nuria Graham heads to London to share the music that has been causing ripples in her homeland.

Signed to Primavera Sounds record label, her eclectic 2015 debut album *Bird Eyes* showcased a maturity at odds with her tender years. With echoes of career-artists such as Laura Marling and St Vincent – she supported the latter on tour – 20-year-old Graham stakes a bold case for a bright future.

"I started doing music when I was really young," she says. "I went to music school, studied classical guitar and then started writing songs. My dad is a guitarist and he introduced me to John Martyn and all that stuff. After I heard it, I wanted to be like that."

From there, Graham's ascent was sharp and it's not lost on her.

"It was quite crazy. I did my first show here in my city when I was 16 and that was the day that my manager came and saw me. She really liked my stuff and became my manager. That was four years ago. It was very fast! I was still in school. There was some material on YouTube, but not a lot, and yet I had just played my first show and two days later I had a manager!"

"But I am fine with it. She has helped me a lot."

With a diverse ancestral mix, the half-Irish, Catalonia-born Graham feels that her background has

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informed her music, with English emerging as her preferred method of communication in song form. "My dad is from Dublin," she says. "I am half-Irish and I have this connection with the English language. I hardly ever talk in English because I live in Spain but it's the music that I've always listened to. My language is Catalan. I would like to write songs in Spanish or in Catalan – and I have two songs in Catalan – but I feel more comfortable singing and writing in English."

When it comes to the imperious march of social media in the modern age though, with its increasing demand for artists to utilise the various platforms to sell their material in novel ways, Graham isn't too enamoured. "I've had loads of problems with that," she says. "My manager always gets angry with me. But, for me, it's really difficult to think, 'okay, today you have to do this post', because sometimes I feel like I'm selling myself and I don't really like that."

"I'm good on Instagram, because I use it a lot just for fun, but when I have to sell my 'product' on social media and everything, I never think

about it. I always forget to post things. I'm trying to change.

"Now, a musician's job is not only doing music. Doing music is just 20 per cent [of the job]. You have to be aware of loads of things: Facebook, Twitter etc. I always say that when you're a musician, you're supposed to be working. I don't mind replying to emails and doing stuff related to music, but when you feel like your job is just being on the computer doing things when you're supposed to be writing songs, you think, 'What the f*** am I doing?'," she observes with a laugh.

For those newly acquainted with Graham's music, there is her debut to consume, but there are promises that album number two will soon appear.

"I'm working on it now. I'm deciding the songs, finishing some stuff. I'm going to record in the studio this May or June and it's coming out, if everything goes well, this October. It's been a while since the last one!"

Whose footsteps does she want to follow in her career?

"Even though my music is not very jazzy, it would be Miles Davis. I don't compare myself to him, but he is an artist that I admire a lot."

As for a particularly inspirational record of his, she goes for his iconic, experimental opus: "Although I love all of his records, *Bitches Brew* is my favourite." It's a fitting choice for an ambitious artist destined for great things, who also holds music itself as the ultimate reward and in the highest of all regards.

Nuria Graham performs at The Lexington on March 16.



■ Nuria Graham will perform at the Lexington

Picture: IKRAM BOULOUM

REVIEW

Disability, women in combat, virtual reality

UGLY LIES THE BONE
NATIONAL THEATRE

★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

The latest pioneering therapy for injured soldiers is virtual: a headset transporting patients to another world, thereby reducing their pain during rehab. Gunner Jess, who suffered third-degree burns in Afghanistan, takes comfort in snow-capped mountains and handsome fir trees – a cool, quiet alternative to the fiery stretching of her skin grafts and psychological trauma of returning home a different person.

American writer Lindsey Ferrentino neatly parallels Jess's situation with her Florida town,

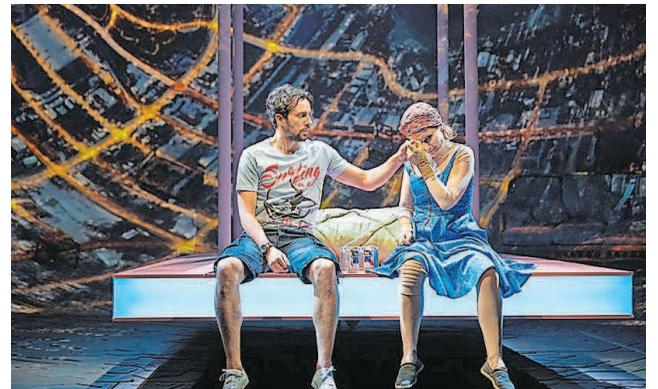
built around a NASA programme that's now ending – both are struggling to redefine themselves. Jess also has to contend with a now married ex, chipper sister and her slacker boyfriend, and dementia-suffering mother.

Heavy stuff, but Ferrentino's play is surprisingly funny, even sitcom-like in the domestic scenes. However, that leads to tonal lurches, as we go from Jess's compelling experience to more cartoonish supporting characters. There's too much to explore in one short play: women in combat, disability and the neglect of veterans, economic difficulties, escapist VR versus reality, and the politics of modern warfare.

Fortunately, a strong cast fill in some of the blanks, anchored by the superb Kate Fleetwood.

Though necessarily contained – the slightest movement causes Jess fresh pain – she's vividly articulate, automatic gestures radically altered by her body's frozen, almost robotic stiffness. Changing clothes becomes an act of extraordinary endurance. She's also bracingly relatable – sarcastic, mercurial and raw.

Olivia Darnley conveys the stress of the caretaker, Ralf Little is endearing as foot-in-mouth Stevie, reduced from NASA employee to gas station attendant, and Kris Marshall funny as buffoonish, goateed Kelvin. Indhu Rubasingham



■ Ugly Lies the Bone at the National Theatre.

Picture: MARK DOUET

directs with pace, and Es Devlin's moon crater-like set is effective for Luke Halls' attractive if rather pedestrian projections. A

flawed piece, but touching in its all-too-human fumbling towards compassion and healing.

Marianka Swain