

Written by Charles Waring

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There was a time when Prince's female protégés were gifted with good looks and not much else besides. But that's not the case with Los Angeles-born, **JUDITH HILL**, one of the Purple Potentate's final discoveries, whose combination of photogenic beauty and genuinely jaw-dropping musical talent shows why she deserves to be taken more seriously than the likes of Vanity, say, or Apollonia Kotero, or even Jill Jones. Though her mentor, sadly, is no longer with us, Prince's musical DNA certainly lives on in some of the blistering funk grooves that Judith and her six-piece band (which includes her mom and dad on keys and bass respectively), served up in Birmingham's Pizza Express venue. Sadly, and inexplicably, the place wasn't filled to the rafters, but that didn't seem to perturb Judith and her cohorts, who went full throttle from the start and never gave less than their all.

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Alternating between grand piano and electric guitar (which she donned for the harder funk numbers), Judith proved to be a charismatic performer whose gospel-reared voice proved to be a superbly expressive and flexible instrument. Though she can scream and holler like Aretha at a church revival - especially on the uptempo material - she also intuitively knows how to nuance her voice on the gentler songs and gradually unfurl a story in a sensitive and emotionally-intelligent way.

The highlights of her two-hour performance ranged from the juggernaut funk of 'Turn Up' and 'Jammin In The Basement' to reflective, life-affirming anthems such as 'We Are One' and the moving 'Angel In The Dark.' As well as playing key cuts from her 2015 Prince helmed debut album 'Back In Time,' Judith also premiered new material from her forthcoming opus and stage ballet, 'Golden Child,' including the super-funky 'The Pepper Club,' the anthemic 'We Are One' and the uplifting ballad, 'Irreplaceable Love.' She also threw in a delightful cover of The Staples Singers' Curtis Mayfield-penned '70s hit, 'Let's Do It Again,' where her terrific backing vocalists got to shine in the spotlight.

On this evidence, Judith Hill is a dynamite talent who deserves a bigger audience than the rather meagre one that turned out on a sticky Tuesday night in the UK's second biggest metropolis. Hopefully, at the Pizza Express in London tonight and tomorrow (18th and 19th July), more people will turn out to see her and experience this outstanding 21st century funk and soul phenomenon in person.

(CW)

*Read SJF's interview with **JUDITH HILL** here:*

<http://www.soulandjazzandfunk.com/interviews/5580-much-closer-to-stardom-rising-singersong-writer-judith-hill-talks-.html>