

Singer-songwriter Hattie Briggs performed at Nailsworth Festival this week. Katie Jarvis was there.

The chat before the Nailsworth Festival gig is interesting. Most people, it seems, have come along because they liked the programme description of Hattie Briggs and her accompanying musicians. “Singer-songwriter”; “natural performer”; “brought up on James Taylor and Eva Cassidy”. There’s one chap, though, who has her debut album, *Red & Gold*; he has it (he wants everyone around him to know) because he’s a convert; a fan. Because he already knows and loves the music of Hattie Briggs.

I’ve met Hattie once before, when I interviewed her for *Cotswold Life*, in a café in Ebley. First impressions? Much younger than I expected; taller than I expected; intelligent; considered; self-contained; delightful. Tonight, as she comes on stage, I find in front of me someone young; tall; intelligent; considered; self-contained; delightful. And - *and* - with a voice to melt icebergs in a way global warming can only dream of. Oh my. As the first notes soar into the silence, Mary Saunders, chair of Nailsworth Festival committee looks at me. We’re thinking the same thing: thank goodness we’ve got Hattie now; soon, she’ll be out of our league.

So. How can you describe a voice? I’m not sure. Hattie launches first into *Tilly’s Song*, written for one of her ‘best mates’:

*Many a time I've stepped into your shoes, though mine may be bigger you've stepped in mine too/
When flames flicker out, your fire is true. My-ay old friend Matilda here's to you*

It’s a voice like a friendship: pure, uplifting, lyrical, yet so, so strong. Utterly beautiful. And we continue - through songs Hattie has written, interspersed with a few, perfectly chosen covers. There are sad songs; songs about childhood; happy songs (a few); and songs that make you laugh and weep, both at the same time. Such as *Old Eyes*, dedicated to her 15-year-old dog, Panda; Panda, who won’t remember the happy times they had together but who knows and loves Hattie. It’s enough:

*You won't remember friend just don't take me for a stranger, when your hours are gone/
And when I think of all those times we spent together, I'll picture you forever young*

Ah! Beautifully-written heartbreak.

She chats to the audience between songs, in a way that’s as natural as her singing; no small feat for a girl who’s just 22. “There’s a Youtube video of *Old Eyes*,” Hattie explains at one point, “in which Panda steals the show and I sit around trying not to look too awkward”. (It’s a delight, by the way, also starring, as it does, the Stroud Valleys.) At another moment, when her keyboard inexplicably refuses to work for a few long seconds, no one worries; especially when Hattie looks us in the eye and sighs, “I thought I was going to have to start telling jokes instead.”

You think, as she opens up on stage and sings lyrics you’d once almost thought yourself, that you know her; that you’ve maybe always known her. But you don’t, of course. You probably don’t know that she went up to Oxford to study Russian. That, despite her whole life having been geared to academia, she gave it all up. She gave it up in her second year

because her heart was elsewhere. In the strings of a guitar; in the white and black of a keyboard. No regrets.

But there again, you do know her; you know her through her lyrics. Because there's something so natural and 'Nell Gifford' about this whole evening - a compliment indeed. Something young, yet ageless. Bang up-to-date contemporary, yet sepia old-fashioned. Something - I don't know - wonderfully contradictory. Nostalgia goes Interrailing, maybe. The covers are fantastic, too. *Fields of Gold* - wow. And then the encore - "Join in; it's nothing cheesy, I promise" - Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah*.

There was less chat, on the way out. No one needed to say much. Just a feeling that we'd caught this girl, who started off busking at Stroud Farmers' Market, before she soars way up out of our league.

- For more on Hattie, including details of how to buy *Red & Gold*, visit www.hattiebriggs.co.uk
- Nailsworth Festival runs this year from May 16-24; www.nailsworthfestival.org.uk