



## Afropunk London 2017 review – maverick music and expression at this celebration of inclusivity

By [Fringe Frequency](#) in [LIVE REVIEWS](#) [MUSIC](#) [REVIEWS](#) ⌚ August 9, 2017

**Printworks, London on July 22-23, 2017**

In the midst of a turbulent social climate for us all, the Afropunk's worldwide festivals have been shutting up the doomsayers by creating spaces where inclusivity, love and good vibes reign supreme.

Last year at Alexandra Palace, the first ever Afropunk London festival was the [most refreshing festival experience we'd had in years](#).

Back for its second year in London, and its first full weekend, this time at Printworks nightclub, the festival turned the pressure up with a huge line-up of superstar talents, including **The Internet**, **Lianne La Havas**, **Willow Smith** and **Thundercat**.

As with last year's festival, self-expression was what set Afropunk apart from any other UK festival. Colourful, elaborate outfits, tattoos and tribal body paints, groups breaking out in impromptu dances to the sound of Solange and [SZA](#), encounters with fellow revellers continued to be Afropunk London's most unique attraction.




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The Fresh List (Fringe Frequency)



- 1 Bruised Fruit  
Ghostpoet
- 2 Anseo (Single Mix)  
Denise Chaila, Jafaris
- 3 Blue Stars  
Hatter, Ceezlin, Roxy Roberts
- 4 The Other Lover (Little Dragon & Mos  
Little Dragon, Moses Sumney
- 5 BBQ Energy  
Reuben James, Adam Flowers, Keyon
- 6 Tomb  
Xylaroo

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Below, we look back on the two-day festival, and share some of our highlights.

Split between two floors in the dimly-lit nightclub, Saturday kicked off with Toronto rock group, **The OBGMs**, downstairs. Their rendition to the burden of singledom went down well with the assembled "singletons", the lead singer getting the crowd to crouch down to the floor at one point.



Kojey was the first but sure wasn't the last to light up the crowd on the upper stage. When MOBO winner and fellow south Londoner, **Nadia Rose**, arrived with her posse, complete with backing dancers, she brought the fire with 'Tight Up' and 'Skwod', and left the crowd screaming for more.



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heavyweight on stage. Her set included favourites such as 'Closer', 'Like a Star' and 'Put Your Records On', to which the audience knew every word.

Straight after this, lyrical genius **Little Simz** was ruling the early evening crowd upstairs with a phenomenal display of rap skill. She was joined by surprise guests **Syd** on 'Shotgun' and **Ghetts** on 'King of Hearts'.

Rappers **Danny Brown** and **Jme** picked up where Simz left off with strong sets of their own. **Saul Williams**, meanwhile, wanted to break down barriers, and he did so, climbing into the audience to mosh with them to his percussive, rebellious music.



Warming up the stage for Saturday's headliner, Soul II Soul founder and DJ, **Jazzy B** kept the crowd swaying and side-stepping with old-school favourites, including Cameo's 'Candy', and he urged the elder revellers to show the young ones how the infamous dance is done with hilarious results.

Saturday closed with LA soul-funk alchemists, **The Internet**. Following 2015's *Ego Death*, the group has risen to greater success. Still, true to her melancholy persona, frontwoman **Syd** seemed almost indifferent to the wave of adoration flooding her, and the band, with every song. Playing hits including 'Special Affair', 'Girl' and '**Under Control**', the group brought serious baby-making vibes to Printworks, and closed the festival's first day in style.

## **Day two: Lianne La Havas, Willow Smith, Nao and a host of new stars**


After the euphoria of the first day, things were mellower on Sunday. Thundercat, Nao and Willow Smith drew large crowds nonetheless. But there were standout performances for many of line-up's rising stars, too.

Dublin group **Blackfish Collective** – winners of Afropunk London's first Battle of the Bands contest – opened the festival with tribal dances, tribal make-up and a clear afrobeat inspiration to the words of "Is she the love of my life".




Soon afterwards the boys from the **Blue Lab Beats** kicked off the upstairs atmosphere with their jazzy electronica. There was even an appearance by Kojey Radical to please the crowd, too.

Putting the “punk” in the Afropunk, Toronto’s **Sate** gave everyone another reason to “be who you wanna be, and do what you wanna do” with her infectious, defiant rock spirit. In a similar display of stage magnetism, **Black Orchids** guitarist and frontwoman Kay Elizabeth strummed her axe with the confidence of a future-rock queen, her curly hair swishing about as she did so – we wouldn’t be surprised if she told us she had ground fragments of her favourite Black Sabbath and Motörhead vinyl records into her protein shake every morning before a show.

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Stepping up to replace Congolese musician Petite Noir, who was unable to make it, were the **Nova Twins**. This show marked the girls’ third appearance at Afropunk, having played the first London festival, and the 2017 Paris festival earlier that same month. It’s not difficult to see why the organisers keep coming back to them: they completely embody the festival’s holy trinity of DIY aesthetic, extraordinary talent and maverick self-expression. Clad in custom-made outfits – heavy boots,



mismatching trousers, bralets made from thrift shop materials and safety pins, their eyes framed by broad strokes of red eyeliner, and highlights in their hair – Amy Love and Georgia South put on a tremendous show. A furious, ear-splitting combination of punk rock and rap, the girls stomped, jumped, posed and thrashed their way through their set. Pure dynamite.



Making up the remainder of Sunday were soul and funk acts. The soulful sounds of Leicester singer-songwriter **Mahalia** impressed; initially nervous, she settled into her groove with 'Independence Day', her smiles growing as she sang. **Kiah Victoria** turned out to be a revelation. "There's so much love in the room," said the New Yorker, before projecting epic, Whitney Houston-esque vocals on her songs 'Cold War' and 'Hollow'. Her energy and presence could have filled the place twice over.

Later, **Nao** had the room on steroids when she appeared, twirling and twisting her way through songs from her album, *For All We Know*. **Thundercat** showed off his formidable finger work with wozzy songs from his album *Drunk*, like the cathartic 'Friend Zone'.



The highlight of Sunday was the moment **Willow Smith** hit the stage. While she's young in age, she's an old soul at heart. She danced, she sang, she crowd-surfed, and she left us on a natural high. Closing the festival was British soul singer **Lianne La Havas**. She took to the stage in a flowing, floor-length gown, guitar in hand, as she struck up the tone of her picture-perfect love ode 'Au Cinéma'. After the wild energy of the last 24 hours, La Havas's acoustic performance was, admittedly, a stark departure from many of those before her. But while it may have lacked the extravagance of other acts, La Havas' songs lost none of their lustre under her careful caress.

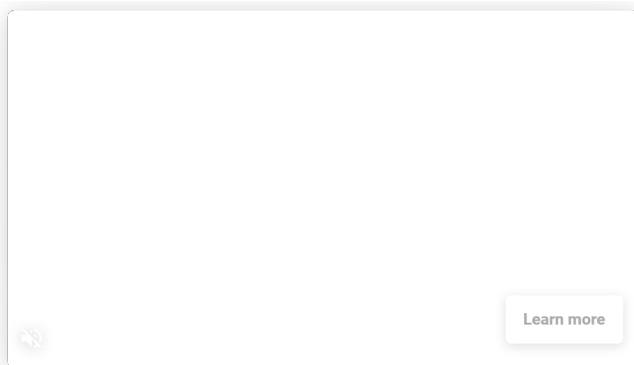
From revellers in neon box braids, larger-than-life dreadlocks and extravagant African outfits, to the marketplace, to the DJs, artists and vibemakers themselves, Afropunk London was wild. From all angles, it was a fusion of fire from start to finish.

Words by **Aaron Lee & Kemi Akilapa**

Photos by **Aaron Lee**

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The Internet and Lianne La Havas headline Afropunk London 2017



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