



# NUBYA GARCIA

## COMMUNITIES RISE TOGETHER

### BY WIF STENGER

For many, East London-based saxophonist Nubya Garcia's warm, majestic tenor sound popped onto the radar in 2018 through Chicago drummer Makaya McCraven's *Universal Beings*. Two years later, Garcia's full album leader debut, *Source*, showed off her mighty compositional and improvisational chops and wide-open embrace of genres with guest vocalists, while her live gigs won over audiences with a high-energy, ebullient style and a razor-sharp band of young Londoners. Now, Garcia looks back to her first live experiences with McCraven and their shared incendiary approach: "I was really inspired to watch him work, how he ignites the stage and the room of people around him. That's something I also try to do. You know, 'I want to go here, come with me.' Most of the people that I play with have that in them, and Makaya has that fire, spirit and soul."

That first impression was mutual, says McCraven: "The first time Nubya and I played was live at the Total Refreshment Centre in London in 2017. From the start, we locked in; musically we were able to go in many directions on the fly. I really love her openness and vibe paired with her big sound and sense of groove." McCraven reworked the title track of *Source* for her *Our Dance* remixes EP, and featured Garcia on several other releases, including his *Where We Come From: Chicago x London Mixtape*. She sees an affinity between the long-simmering jazz scenes in the two cities due to their common link and relationship to electronic dance music: "You can hear it in the way that jazz musicians play in Chicago. So when we play together, there's a language that we share."

Her first visit to the Windy City (in 2018) to play with McCraven and fellow multi-instrumentalist/producer Miguel Atwood-Ferguson was a "life-changing experience," she says. Atwood-Ferguson, whom she describes as one of her heroes, inspired her to do her own orchestrations for *Odyssey*, Garcia's highly produced—and highly acclaimed—sophomore album from last year. Before that visit, earlier that same year, she had played NYC Winter Jazzfest and SXSW, and a decade before that took part in a five-week summer course at Berklee College of Music in Boston, when she was 17. She earned a scholarship to attend the university but couldn't afford to relocate to Boston. Instead, she graduated from London's Trinity Laban Conservatoire in the same class as drummer Moses Boyd and pianist-keyboardist Joe Armon-Jones (who became a longtime member of Garcia's band), both part of a tight-knit community of artists who have supported each other as they gained international reputations.

Garcia's education began at home, with its "shelves and shelves of vinyl," as she fondly recalls. Her Guyanese mother (and older siblings) played her Cuban music, reggae, dub, funk, classical and took her to concerts. She began lessons at a local community music center in multicultural Camden Town. "When you play music from the age of three, it's almost when you learn to talk. It's always been part of me. I've been around so

many gigs and musicians that it was just like, well, that's my path." Soon she joined the Camden Jazz Band, led by Malaysian-British pianist Nikki Yeoh, who introduced Garcia to Herbie Hancock's music. "She brought in 'Chameleon' and 'Watermelon Man', fun tunes we could play at ages 10-12. It was just funky and cool. Then when I was 12 or 13, I saw Herbie at the Barbican Centre and he played both of them. I was up in the balcony, just leaning over and it was absolutely incredible!" A second "life-changing" gig was Sonny Rollins at the same venue. "He played 'St. Thomas', another of the tunes that Nikki brought us. I'd listened to *Saxophone Colossus* and *Way Out West* so many times." Besides Rollins, Garcia cites John Coltrane and Dexter Gordon as early influences. But as a teenager, consciously trying to develop an individual sound seemed remote: "Everyone is telling you to transcribe these people, to emulate this and that; that's how you learn to speak a language. But I had no understanding that I could be myself. I was just like, 'why would I want to be anything other than 1% as great as these greats who changed the course of music?'"

Finding like-minded millennials through jazz education group Tomorrow's Warriors helped launch her and others' careers, such as the band Nérija, which Garcia joined in 2016, as well as Shabaka, Ezra Collective, saxophonist Cassie Kinoshi (who sings on *Source*) and vocalist Zara McFarlane, who guests on the multilayered *Odyssey* alongside other vocalists such as esperanza spalding and Georgia Anne Muldrow. Shabaka (Hutchings), a frequent collaborator of Garcia's says: "Her uniqueness as a saxophonist and composer lies in her ability to express herself clearly, and forcefully, but taking into account and without excluding what's going on around her. So we get her unique cultural perspective in relation to the London musical zeitgeist."

A revelation for Garcia became "understanding that this is not two separate universes: the music that I listen to with my friends and the music listened to learning jazz at Tomorrow's Warriors or the Royal Academy of Music. They all merge, the sounds at home and the popular music that we were hearing, like garage, dubstep, jungle and grime, these UK sound system collectives." For kids of Caribbean immigrants, the sound system culture was "a huge part of our experience. It's what we bonded over when we got to Tomorrow's Warriors. From a rave one night to next week I'm going to see Herbie Hancock. These worlds seem so far apart, but you finally find your unit of people who understand."

Many of those Tomorrow's Warriors alumni debuted on the 2018 compilation *We Out Here*, on the Brownswood label. It featured one track by Garcia and another featuring her in the group Maisha. In understanding what a younger generation wants to hear, she points to record labels such as Brownswood, as well as Jazz re:refreshed (which released her 2017 debut EP *Nubya's 5ive*). About today's jazz musicians in London, she says, "We're a generation of many mixes and influences." All of that is reflected in her albums to date, but as to the next: "When I'm ready to talk about it,

I'll talk about it, but I'm very excited by the music that is happening right now!"

For more info visit [nubyagarcia.com](http://nubyagarcia.com). Garcia is at the BRIC Jazzfest Oct. 18. See Calendar.

#### Recommended Listening:

- Theon Cross — *Aspirations* (s/r, 2015)
- Nubya Garcia — *Nubya's 5ive* (Jazz re:refreshed, 2017)
- Makaya McCraven — *Where We Come From* (Chicago x London Mixtape) (International Anthem, 2017)
- Nubya Garcia — *Source* (Concord Jazz, 2019)
- London Brew — *London Brew* (Concord Jazz, 2020)
- Nubya Garcia — *Odyssey* (Concord Jazz, 2024)

#### BAR BAYEUX

1066 Nostrand Ave.  
Brooklyn, NY 11225  
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#### OCTOBER 2025

#### JAZZ CALENDAR

##### TUESDAYS 8-11 PM

Weekly Jam Session  
House Band: Diego Voglino  
with guests

##### WEDNESDAYS 8 & 9:30 PM

Caroline Davis Portals (10/1)  
Alex Kautz Quartet (10/8)  
Kevin Sun Quartet (10/15)  
Hamish Smith Quartet (10/22)  
Jerome Sabbagh Quartet (10/29)

##### THURSDAYS 8 & 9:30 PM

Adam Kolker + Jeremy Stratton with guests:  
Jacob Sacks (10/2) Glenn Zaleski, Kayvon Gordon (10/9)  
Dan Tepfer (10/16) Grassroots Jazz Effort (10/23)  
Randy Ingram, Jay Sawyer (10/30)

##### FRIDAYS 8 & 9:30 PM

Tomoko Omura (10/3) Simón Willson (10/10)  
Sara Serpa (10/17) Kenny Warren (10/24)  
Michael Shekwaoga Ode (10/31)

**NO  
COVER  
ONE DRINK  
MINIMUM**

##### SATURDAYS 6 & 7:30 PM DUET SET(s)

Kelly Green Quartet (10/4) Chet Dexas Organ Trio (10/11)  
Michael Blake (10/18) Gui Duvigneau (10/25)

## INTERPRETATIONS

SEASON #36 2025-2026

# OCT 23 THU



**J D PARRAN**

with Nels Cline, Andrew Drury  
and Hilliard Greene



#### ONE SYSTEM:

Juraj Kojs, Margaret Lancaster  
and Alex Lough

ROULETTE 509 Atlantic Ave Brooklyn NY

\$20: General \$15: member, students, seniors

[INTERPRETATIONS.INFO](http://INTERPRETATIONS.INFO), [ROULETTE.ORG](http://ROULETTE.ORG)

Concerts begin at 8 PM