

**POP**

**Lianne La Havas**

Village Underground,  
 London



By **ENJOLI LISTON**

Peddlers of hype would have people believe that singer/songwriter Lianne La Havas is very good at what she does. They would be wrong – she is exceptional.

From the moment the 22-year-old London-born soul singer takes to the stage for the first of two nights at Shoreditch's Village Underground, to launch her debut album, *Is Your Love Big Enough?*, it is little wonder that she has attracted attention from celebrities as diverse as Prince and Bon Iver.

In her endearingly honest and not yet fully PR-trained manner (please let her stay that way), La Havas expresses bitterness at having been beaten to a higher slot by Newton Faulkner (her record took the Number 4 spot in the charts in its first week in early July). But she laughs it off, throwing her head back with the same I'm-on-top-of-the-world grin that adorns her elegant Greco-Jamaican features throughout the evening.

"Wow, I'm trying not to exclaim by swearing but this is pretty effing overwhelming," she says after receiving a rousing applause for the opener, "Don't Wake Me Up", which regains its confidence with ease after a false start. It is followed by a delightful "Au Cinema", beautifully underlined by La Havas' delicate finger-picking (a skill taught to her by her father as a



**The new Adele: Lianne La Havas** RICHARD GRAY/MUSICPICTURES/REX

teenager) and her four-piece band. But it is that voice that really wows.

The heart-breaking stripped-back vocal flutters of "No Room for Doubt" (La Havas stresses she wrote this one), and the poignant "Empty" are both stunning, inspiring silent deference from the crowd as she displays depths of hopeless romanticism beyond her years.

With fluency, maturity and womanly glamour (she is draped in a cut-out black ball gown), she then transforms into a spurned lover for "Tease Me", before venturing into Marilyn Monroe territory with the sultry retro stylings of "Age" ("So is it such

a problem that he's old?/ So long as he does whatever he's told").

The result is an eclectic collection of soul, folk, rock, pop, jazz and indie unified by La Havas's consistently impressive vocals – the raw, natural tone of which, sadly, she doesn't quite manage to bottle on her recorded material.

The stage suits La Havas, as the love ballad "Gone" shows. She works the crowd effortlessly – introducing it with dripping sarcasm ("This is an ode to my ex-boyfriend, who sadly couldn't make it tonight") before unwinding a spine-tingling performance that easily earns comparisons with Adele. Enough said.

