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HEADS UP INTRODUCES ESPERANZA SPALDING, A BRILLIANT NEW TALENT ON THE JAZZ HORIZON

Acoustic Bassist/Vocalist/Composer's Self-Titled Debut Set For Worldwide Release On May 20, 2008

Every few years, a new artist comes along with talent and potential so great that it challenges and redefines the common perceptions of what jazz is and where it's heading. The new light on the horizon may be a compelling vocalist one year, or perhaps an unmatched instrumental virtuoso a few years later, or maybe a brilliant composer a few more years down the road.

Bassist/vocalist/composer Esperanza Spalding is all of these things and more. And she will, in fact, challenge and expand your perceptions of jazz.

Esperanza (HUCD 3140), her debut on Heads Up International, is set for worldwide release on May 20, 2008. Armed with uncanny instrumental chops, a siren voice that spans three languages, and composing and arranging skills that weave together the best elements of the old-school with the progressive, this 23-year-old has crafted a debut album that takes a completely fresh and refreshing approach to jazz by incorporating the rich traditions of soul, pop, world music and so much more.

Her accelerated backstory follows a breathtaking arc. A musical prodigy since her childhood in Portland, Oregon, Esperanza enrolled at Berklee College of Music at 16 and not only excelled there but eventually became the youngest professor in the school's history. Before finishing school, she had already landed coveted touring gigs and recording projects with the likes of Patti Austin, Joe Lovano, Pat Metheny and other luminaries who were, in many cases, the shining lights of their own generations.

But even with all this early success, Esperanza approached her Heads Up debut album with an unwavering work ethic and a fierce sense of commitment to making a recording that not only captures who and where she is now, but offers a glimpse of all that she could yet achieve. "In preparing for this album, I worked really hard on my playing, my singing, my composition, everything," she says. "I'm confident and I'm proud of what came out. I feel like it represents me at this time, and it shows the world what I'm capable of."

Esperanza is joined in the studio by a crew of A-list session players, including flamenco guitar virtuoso Niño Josele, percussionist Jamey Haddad, drummer Horacio "El Negro" Hernández, saxophonist Donald Harrison and several other seasoned talents – all of whom collectively serve as further evidence of the kind of creative energy and magnetism that she radiates.

“All of us had the same intentions in the studio,” she says. “Everybody really gave everything we could give, because we really wanted it to be the best that it could possibly be. It was like a family affair. There are things on there that you’ll dig if you’re a jazz listener, and things you’ll dig if you’re not a jazz listener. That’s the objective – to serve as many people as possible with the music.”

The album opens with the “Ponta de Areia,” the Brant Fernando Rocha / Milton Nascimento composition made famous in the jazz world by Wayne Shorter on his *Native Dancer* album in 1974. Esperanza delivers the lyrics in Portuguese, with a vocal line that’s smooth and never the least bit strained. Backed by Haddad, pianist Leo Genovese, vocalist Gretchen Parlato and drummer Otis Brown III, she takes the song on a journey that’s exploratory where it needs to be, yet never prone to disharmony.

“Fall In” is Esperanza’s own composition, arranged for vocals and piano, with Genovese creating a lush bed for lyrics that ponder the potential hazards of romantic love but soar at the same time: “They say if you live in a dream you’re hopelessly lost / Well this ain’t just any old dream for our paths have crossed / And I may be hopelessly lost / But somehow I’ve managed to find heaven / And I won’t worry if we fall in love / We will never touch the ground / Just fall into a dream...”

Esperanza takes the bold step with a 5/4 time signature interpretation of “Cuerpo Y Alma” (“Body and Soul”) by singing an American jazz standard in Spanish. “The second-to-last syllable is always the one that gets the emphasis in Spanish, and that really doesn’t work for American jazz,” she explains. “It’s pretty much the opposite of the way we emphasize English lyrics in American jazz. So that was the challenge – whether I could make ‘Body and Soul,’ this well known American jazz song, swing in Spanish. In the end, I think it’s pretty killin.’”

If *esperanza* is the Spanish word for hope, then “Espera” is an apt title for a song that defies the cynicism of our age and envisions a better world. She sings: “I’ll keep the faith, like so many souls who won’t be drowned by evil in the world / I have faith in mankind, that we can guide our choices towards a healthy world in time to ease our bind / For only hard work through time can change men’s minds / I know if we make some small changes now / We’ll heal ourselves, some way, somehow...”

“Samba Em Preludio” is the silky, atmospheric closer driven by the minimal arrangement of Esperanza’s bass and vocals (lyrics sung in Portuguese) accompanied by Spain’s flamenco sensation Niño Josele’s subtly textured guitar. “I’m proud of my singing on this song, and the arrangement that Niño did is so amazing,” she says. “I sent him this bare-bones track, and he painted a beautiful landscape with it.

For as bold a statement as Esperanza Spalding makes in her *Heads Up* debut album, the obvious truth by the end of twelve tracks is that what we’re hearing is just a taste of what’s to come from this bright young star. But as first steps go, *Esperanza* is a giant leap. “They say you’re never supposed to apologize for your art, and I’m totally unapologetic,” she says. “I have complete confidence that this is the best record I could make, and I have the same confidence that it’s just the beginning. There are so many different things that these songs are about, so many different colors, that the only consistent theme throughout the record is me. I had my hand in so many parts of this record, and I was so adamant about keeping it how I originally envisioned it. This record really is as close to me as you can get.”

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