ESPERANZA SPALDING SWINGS HOME

FOUR-TIME GRAMMY WINNER RETURNS TO PORTLAND WITH A NEW ALBUM 'EMILY'S D+EVOLUTUION'

BY MATT ROWNING

Esperanza Spalding's new album "Emily's D+Evolution" has the last part right anyway: this record is an evolution for the already acclaimed jazz artist hailing from our own sweet Stumptown.

Spalding's bell like voice and virtuoso bass playing have built a mythos all of their own. She played and left PSU's orchestra as a teen and graduated from Berklee College of Music at 20 to begin teaching at the same age. She's since won four Grammys; most rewardingly was her 2011 "Best New Artist" victory over Justin Bieber and Drake.

Spalding's new album is only jazz as much as Miles Davis' "On The Corner" was jazz: rock music from jazz musicians. "D+Evolution" is best described as a progressive rock album. Even that broad categorization falls short though, the album really shirks all labels and preconceptions of genre to be something really well, awesome.

The first song and second single "Good Lava" fades in on a dissonant string sound. Spalding spits out the first line, and you can almost see her smirk as you hear it: "See this pretty girl, watch this pretty girl flow!" The note carries upwards and dissonant, riffing bass and guitar lay down the beat. It's avant-garde, it's not easy to listen to at first, it's a jazz inspired work that listens like Miles playing his trumpet through a guitar pedal.

Which is to say the song is built from a genius' intellect. It may be a bit much for the average listener, but most everyone will appreciate the technicality.

"Unconditional Love" is the album's second and arguably best song. Spalding's golden voice rings out a hauntingly beautiful melody. Apparently Spalding had a dream about her childhood that became inspiration for this record. There's a sort of mellifluous nostalgia to "Unconditional Love:" one could fall asleep and start having the same dream that inspired Spalding to create such a work of art.

Other highlights include "Noble Nobles," whose dark acoustic guitar opening reminds more of 90s grunge band Alice in Chains than it does jazz, "Earth to Heaven" has a driving rock chorus down to spar with any metal band, and the intro to "Ebony and Ivy" is plain frightening. Out of tune voices touch on "bastardized Darwinian logic" and other racial themes, then slide into a nice groove.

Spalding's new album is all around good, and if you're a jazz or progressive rock fan, it's damn great.

Courtesy of Concord Records

ESPERANZA EVENTS:

On March 9, Spalding is giving a lecture called "Going Natural: Don't Flat Iron your Creativity" at Reed College. Content will include her creative process and how to bring an artistic idea into fruition. It will begin and end with Q&A sessions, and is free and open to the public. She also has a concert Friday March 11, at the Wonder Ballroom.

Peach Freckles