

# Downbeat

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Esperanza Spalding, *Chamber Music Society* (Heads Up)

By FRANK ALKYER

Esperanza Spalding has quickly demonstrated that she's an artist of great beauty, grace and daring. With *Chamber Music Society*, Spalding takes all the well-earned hype she received from her 2008 major-label debut, *Esperanza*, and shows she is just that good, and even better. The opening number—"Little Fly," a William Blake poem set to music composed by Spalding—is one of my favorite tracks of the year. It's a lush ballad with a string quartet arrangement by Gil Goldstein and Spalding. She could do an entire set of songs like this and become Norah Jones with a bass, but that's where her daring comes in. Spalding dives headlong into sophisticated, complex jazz vocalizations and arrangements on tunes like "Knowledge Of Good And Evil," "Really Very Small" and "What A Friend." She basks in a very original version of "Wild Is The Wind," giving new life to the tune by adding tango overtones—complete with David Eggar's aching cello solos and Leo Genovese harkening the flavor of Astor Piazzola. She duets lovingly with Milton Nascimento on another fine original, "Apple Blossom Time," and Gretchen Parlato (a terrific young vocalist in her own right) on Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Inutil Paisagem." The program closes with "Short And Sweet," a fine ballad where Spalding uses her voice as another instrument in the arrangement, rather than singing lyrics or scatting. Spalding will be featured on the cover of DownBeat's September issue ... with good reason. With *Chamber Music Society*, she's become one of the most exciting artists on the music scene.