

with flute meandering while Rudolph repeats a line on *sinter* (an Arabic bass lute) and chants quietly in the flute breaks. It's the most haunting and beautiful track on the album, even if it sticks out like a sore thumb.

Towards the Unknown and *Yeyi*, then, represent the contrast between the sacred and the profane. Talk about running the gamut—and in doing so, finding that both have rich rewards to offer. **MICHAEL J. WEST**

ESPERANZA SPALDING

Chamber Music Society (Heads Up)



Esperanza Spalding could have coasted on her follow-up to 2008's *Esperanza*, her debut album for Heads Up and second as a leader overall. That

release was something of a phenomenon in 21st-century jazz, selling vigorously and landing the upright bassist/vocalist on high-profile TV programs, in a Banana Republic ad campaign and major magazines, onstage in Norway at the Nobel Peace Prize Ceremony, and even at the White House—twice.

But rather than playing it safe and cozy in the mainstream, Spalding chooses instead to revisit the chamber music that inspired her during her violin-studying youth. With a core band of Terri Lyne Carrington on drums and Leo Genovese on piano, joined by percussionist Quintino Cinalli, violinist Entcho Todorov, violist Lois Martin, cellist David Eggar and vocalist Gretchen Parlato, Spalding—who co-

produced *Chamber Music Society* with Gil Goldstein—searches for, and quite often finds, that place where the restrained formality of the classical string ensemble and the fiery improvisation of jazz speak the same language.

Opening with “Little Fly,” based on a poem by William Blake, Spalding and company set a tone of rarefied grandeur, the boldness and litheness of her basslines and the airiness of her dramatic vocals meshing seamlessly with the chamber musicians’ high-minded arrangement. Some tracks (“Inútil Paisagem,” which highlights Parlato, and “As a Sprout”) are almost brittle, so crisply arranged and executed they feel that they might just break. “Apple Blossom,” featuring Brazilian vocal icon Milton Nascimento (who also appeared on *Esperanza*), is sparse and delicate, and the closing “Short and Sweet” allows the piano-bass-drums trio to spread out in their own time with the strings lying low.

But all's not lofty and proper here. There are occasions for the group to bust out and get looser than any traditional chamber group might dare: “Knowledge of Good and Evil” is a scat-singing tour de force, “Chacarera” a percussive tropical treat, and “What a Friend,” with its layered vocal harmonies, rich interplay and ebb-and-flow tempo, is nothing short of dazzling. With *Chamber Music Society* Esperanza Spalding serves notice that she's not about to be pigeonholed, nor is she one to take the easy route. Success may have found her early on, but she will not kiss its ass. **JEFF TAMARKIN**