



Jazz

Esperanza Spalding

Barbican, London



The double bass has never been exactly fashionable, but if the overnight stardom of the 26-year-old Esperanza Spalding is any indication, schoolgirls will soon be queueing up to

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demand why their music department does not have one. The slender American and her bulky bass make an incongruously graceful partnership, and she couples virtuoso jazz and classical techniques on the instrument to a light but evocative voice. The combination earned Spalding a best newcomer award at the Grammys in February, to the fury of runner-up Justin Bieber's fanclub.

Spalding arrived on stage to sit at a dimly lit stageside armchair while her cellist, violinist and viola player sighed softly romantic chords. She removed her coat and shoes, then came centre stage to greet the double bass. The procedure was reversed when she left, but it was the only piece of star-power stagecraft in the whole show, and her musicality made it fit. Spalding's fragile duet with vocalist Leala Cyr (accompanied only by the bassline and Cyr's handclaps) on Jobim's *Inútil Paisagem* was spellbinding. She set jazz violinist Sara Caswell loose by hand-drumming on the bass's woodwork around former Herbie Hancock percussionist Richie Barshay's washes of arrhythmic energy. And she shifted from enquiring intimacy to fierce yelps against deep string sounds on *Wild Is the Wind*.

Spalding really uncorked her jazz-bass resources on a hard-driving piano-trio excursion with Barshay and the imaginative Leo Genovese in the midst of *Winter Sun*. A dropping pin would have spooked the house during the duo encore for Spalding and Genovese on the singer's poetic love song *Fall In*.

John Fordham