MUSIC & TAB BLACK SABBATH'S "HAND OF DOOM"
LEARN GEEZER BUTLER'S IRONCLAD BASS LINE

bassplayer.com

dig deeper

bassplayer

THE BEST GEAR FROM NAMM 2016

BRIAN RITCHIE
VIOLENT FEMMES

ANDY CICHON
LIVE AND UNSCRIPTED WITH BILLY JOEL

ESPERANZA SPALDING

WILD RIDE WITH A SPIRIT GUIDE

REVIEWS
GALLIEN-KRUEGER MB800 & CX410
MTD SARATOGA
PRA WiC WIRELESS

APRIL 2016 $5.99
0 74808 01012 7 04
A NEWBAY MEDIA PUBLICATION

Originally printed in the April 2016 issue of *Bass Player*. Reprinted with the permission of the publishers of *Bass Player*. Copyright 2016 NewBay Media, LLC. All rights reserved. *Bass Player*, 1111 Bayhill Dr., St. 440, San Bruno, CA 94066. T. 650.238.0300. Subscribe at www.bassplayer.com

See Emily Play

How A Spirit Guide Inspired The Most Complex Music Of Esperanza Spalding's Career

IT'S BEEN SAID THERE ARE AS MANY WAYS TO WRITE a song as there are songwriters. Some follow a strict regimen to invite the muse, while others depend on the harsh reality of deadlines and bills to inspire their creative process. Still others swear by long walks, prayer, yoga, or just the right psychedelics. A few even mine their dreams.

Emily, however, needs none of this. She knows exactly what moves her, and she knows how to get it: Complex chords, hard-hitting drums, multi-tracked vocals, shifting time signatures, loud guitars with overdrive, and theatricality are the things that rock her world, and when it's time to shine, Emily is happy to step up and wail. Oh, and by the way, she never, ever plays upright.

Fortunately for us, "Emily" is the alter ego and spirit guide of

By E.E. Bradman & Chris Jisi

Photographs by Holly Andress

Esperanza Emily Spalding, the badass electric and upright bass ace who's also an agile singer in three languages and an inspired composer. Over the course of her first four albums, the 31-year-old Portland, Oregon native has become associated with a widely accessible style of contemporary jazz, Brazilian music, and R&B-tinged pop that has made her the darling of critics and audiences worldwide. But *Emily's D+Evolution*, the album Spalding manifested for Emily last year with help from bandmates and producer Tony Visconti, is a deep, multicolored Afro-punk explosion of authoritative fretless, snarling guitar, sophisticated harmonies and rhythms, judicious dissonance, and poetic lyrics that tackle identity, relationships, fear, and ambition. It is challenging, expressive, and masterful, and it signals the arrival of a bold new voice. But it took awhile for Emily to show up.

BUSY LADY

Spalding first picked up upright bass in high school after years of playing violin and other instruments in school orchestras. A period of writing lyrics for indie-rock group Noise For Pretend, and learning to harness her vocal gifts, eventually led to her first bass gigs and enrollment at Portland State University, which prepared her to successfully audition for a full scholarship to Berklee. Just after she graduated, in 2005, 20-year-old Esperanza became one of the youngest instructors in the school's history; *Junjo*, her first album, came out in 2006.

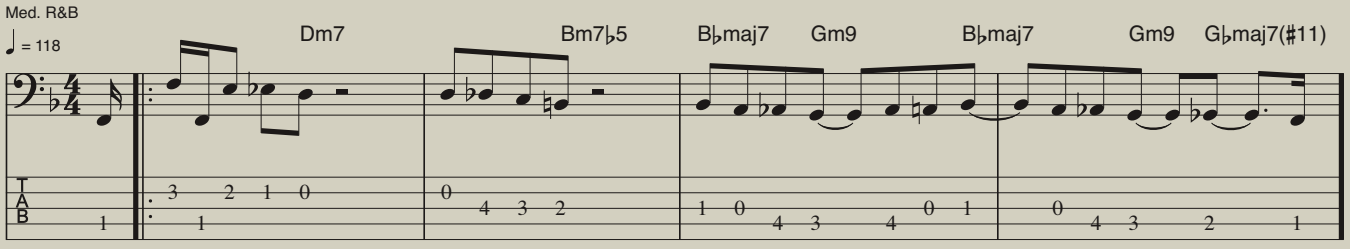
Spalding has been busy ever since: She released the chart-topping *Esperanza* in 2008, played at the Nobel Prize ceremonies in Norway with President Barack Obama in 2009, put out *Chamber Music Society* and rocked a BET Prince tribute in 2010, became the first jazz artist to win a Best New Artist Grammy in 2011, released *Radio Music Society* in 2012, won two more Grammys in 2013, and took home a fourth in 2014 for "Swing Low," her collaboration with Bobby McFerrin. Her connections to luminaries such as Pat Metheny, Wayne Shorter, Patti Austin, Joe Lovano, Geri Allen, and Herbie Hancock—with whom she performed at the Kennedy Center Honors in 2014—put her squarely in the "jazz" camp. But her interests have always been wide: Witness her exquisite cover of Prince's "If I Was Your Girlfriend," her general Stevie Wonder-ful accessibility, and her collaborations with artists

Continued on page 40, See music, page 38

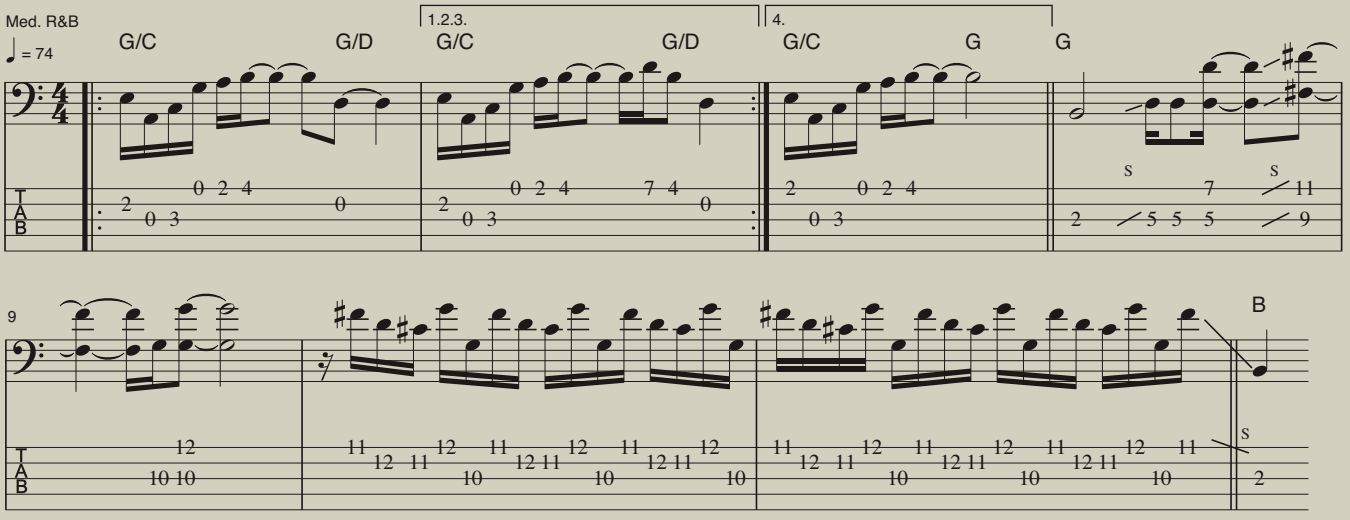
Emily's Roots

COMBINE EMILY'S FREE-spirit creativity with Esperanza's exceptional bass instincts, and the result is some new sub-terrain for Ms. Spalding, who played her fretless Simon Propert custom 5-string on most of *Emily's D+Evolution*. **Example 1** has the opening (and chorus) groove of "Judas." Play the notes evenly. **Example 2** (at 1:50) contains the second chorus into the bridge (bar 9) of "Rest in Pleasure." Explains Esperanza, "This was the most collaborative track on the album. I just sent everyone the bass line and vocal, and we figured out our parts in rehearsal. We wanted to build some intensity in the bridge, so I came up with the five-against-four line in the last two measures." An alternate way to execute the five-note phrase is to play the last note as an open *G*, rather than on the 10th fret of the *A* string. Finally, **Ex. 3** is from "Farewell Dolly," written on piano but recorded with just fretless 5 (with a chorus plug-in) and voice. Bars 1 and 2 (with repeats) show the first ten measures upon the vocal entrance (at 0:14). Esperanza had no chords in mind, just the linear lines of the bass and melody. Bars 3 and 4 have the ten measures that occur at 1:07, when she double-times the bass line against the same melody for contrast. Note how the 5-string's range allows her to play everything in basically one position. —CHRIS JISI

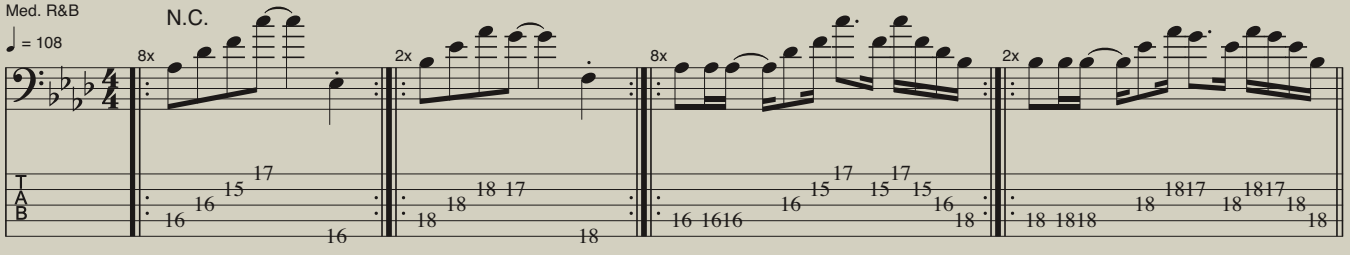
EX. 1



EX. 2



EX. 3



Continued from page 36

as diverse as Brazilian guitar master Guinga, pop megastar Bruno Mars, and multi-hyphenate performer Janelle Monáe, whose distinctive aesthetic may have helped bring the Emily out of Esperanza.

FUNK THE FEAR

D+Evolution, released a full four years after *Radio Music Society*, is an abrupt departure from Spalding's warm upright and contemporary jazz aesthetic. The album's Emily-mandated vocal arrangements are perfectly matched by distinctive bass parts, powerful drumming, and angular guitar moments worthy of Battles, Between The Buried & Me, and Minus The Bear. Theory and harmony geeks will find plenty to enjoy, including skillful use of common tones and slash chords, catchy melodies written from upper-chord extensions, exemplary voice-leading, cool modulations, and nods to Stravinsky's "Petrushka chord" and Prokofiev-style half-step modulation. "Earth to Heaven" recalls Steely Dan, while "Judas," "One," and "Noble Nobles" conjure mid- and late-'70s Joni Mitchell. The embarrassment of riches—multitrack vocal magic in "Ebony and Ivy," the funky theatricality of "Elevate or Operate," post-rock sprawl in "Rest in Pleasure," bass-and-vocal tandem in "Farewell Dolly," fingerstyle nastiness underneath Wayne Krantz-like guitar outro in "Funk the Fear," that high ostinato sustained through chord changes in "Unconditional Love"—finally concludes with the album's only cover, a darkly psychedelic and appropriately childish "I Want It Now" (yes, from the original 1971 *Willy Wonka* soundtrack). Throughout, Spalding plays her upfront and muscular fretless parts like an arranger, supporting the proceedings with a sure hand and an economical touch.

If all this makes *D+Evolution* sound like a dazzling and dense tapestry, well, it is. Some fans of Esperanza Spalding's previous, somewhat mellower work may be slow to warm to Emily and her prodigious gifts, and to them, we say: Hang in there. This is one album that will definitely reward repeated listening.

Welcome to this plane, Emily. We hope you stay awhile. And thank you for manifesting Emily's feverishly multilayered vision, Esperanza, even as her identity remains somewhat of a mystery.

Who is Emily?

Emily is a reconciling figure from within. She reaches out, arms stretched as wide as necessary, to grasp the primal and the cerebral.

At the beginning of this project, I saw a distinct character—I don't even know if "character" is the right word—knocking on the door, and I had to figure out what I was going to do. *Emily's D+Evolution* is about me as a composer, bass player, and singer, giving body and voice to this being who needs to say this stuff right now. I opened the door and made myself available so that she could bring her sound and her thoughts into reality. I see her from a distance. So I'm learning more about who she is, too.

Did you have a concept for the role of the bass? And was acoustic bass a consideration?

Acoustic bass is my thing, not Emily's. Emily plays electric bass because she's loud. And it's not even about bass; I hope people forget there's even an instrument in her hand. She's here to sing and move and perform, which is why live I have [vocalist] Corey King playing keyboard bass on some songs. Acoustic bass was not even on the radar.

How did the sound of the album come to be heavy on guitar and light on keyboards?

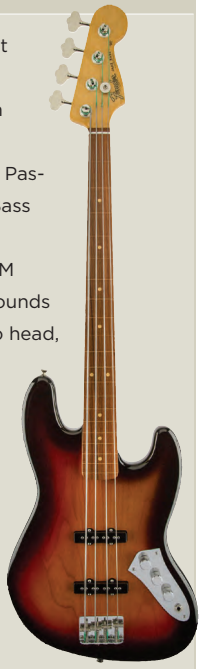
INFO

LISTEN

Esperanza Spalding Presents: Emily's D+Evolution [2015, Concord]

EQUIP

Basses Simon Propert South Paw custom fretless 5-string (with Bartolini Music Man 5 pickup), Fender Jaco Pastorius Fretless Jazz Bass 4-string
Strings Fender 9050M Stainless Steel Flatwounds
Rig Ampeg SVT-4Pro head, Ampeg Pro Neo 410HLF 4x10



I think a lot of it stems from the band I put together. Matt Stevens, who has been involved from the very beginning, developed a sound on guitar, just like Karriem Riggins and Justin Tyson did on drums. I didn't have a specific ensemble sound in mind, but the songs implied a sound, so as we were putting them together, I'd say, more of that or less of this.

I will admit that as a trio, Matt, Justin, and I have listened to a lot of Wayne Krantz, especially *Greenwich Mean*, his 1999 live album. We love his music and his philosophy. There's a YouTube video from the 1999 Marciac Jazz Festival where before the performance, Wayne talks about having the courage to give up what you're good at to try to find new ways to express yourself. That applies to us because although we're the characters in the nightly performance and staging of *Emily's D+Evolution*, we're also the musical directors. So we have to take what's happening dramatically in a given moment and express that musically.

You seem very relaxed onstage. Are you directing the band while singing and playing?

Onstage, I'm not thinking about much. I'm just having fun and being available for the possibilities that arise from the context we've prepared. The people in my band don't need much directing, and if so, generally only once or twice for adjustments once we learn the music and performance. I hire people who want to be with the music—people who bring ideas, retain what we work on, and are comfortable being a piece of something that's not about them.

Did you put a lot of thought into developing the album's complex harmonic elements?

While the music and lyrics were being written and then rehearsed, I truly felt like I was trying to produce Emily's vision, not my own. So it's not like I was analyzing—"Oh, this chord sounds more Emily because of the ♯9"—it's more like, "That's the sound that needs to be here, with Emily in mind."

Did you write on bass?

The only song written on bass for this album was "Rest in Pleasure"—everything else was written on piano. Later, when it came time to record those piano-written parts on bass, well, I'm a bass player, so I put the right lilt here, the right attack there. The music dictated what I needed to do.

Your bass line on "Funk the Fear" stands out for your improvisational approach.

That was the only song where I was just comping through the changes, aside from the one unison riff; the rest of the songs have written bass lines. "Funk the Fear" is basically chords and a vibe. We recorded it live, so it was the three of us interacting together and going crazy. For the outro, I never asked Matt

exactly what he was playing harmonically—we're just stretching out and going for it.

How did you connect with Tony Visconti, and what did he bring to the table?

I had heard David Bowie's *The Next Day* [2013, Columbia], and was struck by the sound and the balance; you can hear everything, almost like you're in the room with the band. I saw that Tony produced it and I learned about his history with Bowie, so I reached out, and he agreed to work with me. By the time we got together, I had already recorded the album, but he made some sound painting and textural contributions, and he helped with the mix. More important, Tony believed in the music and provided moral support at a time when I was feeling a little insecure about the project and needed someone I trusted to affirm that it was worth doing.

Could you imagine producing other artists one day?

I think I'm too immersed in my various things to carve out enough time to produce for someone else. But you never know. I just produced this whole project for Emily!

How long do you think this collaboration with Emily will last?

I don't know. Mount St. Helens will always have a crater, even when there's no lava or smoke; in the same way, Emily opened a door, and I think that door is going to remain open.

And what door did she open?

I think it has to do with elements of performance and expression that I've never needed to explore, because they weren't part of the aesthetic goals of the projects I've done. But now, after reaching into these performance ideas for the sake of realizing this vision, I've gotten a taste for them. I'm intrigued, and I don't think they're going to go away.

So we can expect more Emily in the next few years.

I don't think Emily will be a project that happens for like, five years. But I could be wrong. Maybe she needed to come now and say what she had to say and be fully realized and expressed, and that'll be enough. But I don't know.

What's the best way to tune into intuition and listen to a creative alter ego?

Practice listening and following through on what you interpret as the required action. I'm not trying to figure out what it means … I'm just doing it, and I guess I know when it's matching the image that I saw or the inspiration or instruction that I've been given.

The *D+Evolution* songs feel like a long way from "Black Gold."

Well, these songs feel like a long way from "Apple Blossom," and "Apple Blossom" is far away from "I Adore You," and "I Adore You" feels far away from "Mompouana." I mean, if you look at it like that, everything is kind of far away. But from my perspective, just studying and listening and experimenting and writing all the time, it doesn't feel far away. A yellow leaf curled up on the ground looks really different from that leaf in the spring, but it's part of that tree's cycle, you know. In the grand scheme of things, it makes perfect sense, like, "Oh yeah, of course"—when things change within and without, you change, and the expression of it changes, and the color changes. The location of it changes. So yeah, nothing feels far away—it all feels very close, and I remember what I was exploring at that time.

I've heard you talk about a new relationship to lyrics on this album.

Yeah. This is the first time that I had a sense of what the songs were about before the lyrics came. It was almost like making a libretto for the story or the idea. Before, if I decided that I wanted to have words, then I just put words in, and I figured out what I was saying as the words came along. But this was a very different process. I'm working for Emily; I got a sense of what she wanted to say with each song, and it's my job to put it to words, to make the lyrics express that.

You've also discussed a newfound appreciation of poetry.

I always got a kick out of reading poems, and I assumed that poetry was something that just happened: If you had a poetic eye, you could write poetry, and if you didn't, you couldn't. I knew that in a mild way, I had poetic sensibilities, but I didn't think it was something that could honed, per se, other than by practicing and hoping to get better. But then a few things came into my orbit that really busted open whatever limitations I had, and that helped me see that, like anything, there's a methodology: You can study, apply, and practice specific techniques and incorporate them into your work. That was revolutionary—for me, anyway, as a writer—and I'm sure it affected the process of writing the lyrics on this album.

Some stories about you mention that you were self-taught before you went to Berklee in 2002.

That's not true. When I first started playing violin, I didn't have a private teacher, but like any intelligent musician, I got a teacher, which is how I got better and ended up becoming concertmaster of that orchestra—I had an awesome teacher who

really kicked me in the ass and wouldn't let me just do my thing.

You began as a self-taught player . . . .

There's really no such thing. Even if you learn from YouTube videos, you're still not self-taught. Autodidactic learning is awesome, but everyone needs a teacher, just like we need parents. We need someone outside ourselves to see what we can't see.

I tend to step out way beyond my comfort zone, so in the beginning, when I was interested in violin, I just got one and figured out how to play it. On bass, I did my first gigs before I had a teacher. That's just my style; I don't like to conceptualize things. I'm not even saying that's the best approach—it's just what I tend to migrate toward. But I totally believe in teachers, and I recommend that everyone have a teacher.

Who were some mentors that made a difference?

My first teacher worked with me until I was good enough to audition for Portland State University. Fortunately, I got a scholarship to that program, where I studied with the late, great Ken Baldwin. Because of studying with him, I was good enough to audition for Berklee; I got a scholarship, and I studied with amazing bass players there—Bruce Gertz and John Lockwood and Herman Hampton, among others. I still study with bass players today. I have one class with Scott Colley, and I study with Rufus Reid. I studied for a minute with Ron Carter, and most recently, I studied with Gerald Cannon. I recently had a great lesson with John Patitucci, too.

You also taught at Berklee. What kinds of classes were you teaching?

I had private students, I had a bass lines class, and I taught a reading class. Those were like entry-level positions, for the teachers and for the students. I didn't get to really know all the students in the classes, but some of my private students were amazing. Wow!

How would you counsel a student who was struggling with singing while playing?

Schedule time every day for the elements you want to improve. And then—I don't know how else to say this—do it!

Any advice on developing good intonation?

Record yourself, listen, and adjust. Practice carefully so your muscles learn where the spot of most "in-tune-ness" is. I feel like kind of a poser talking about this, because my intonation on bass is not great. I use my ears mostly to micro-adjust in real time.

You're big on transcribing as a tool for learning harmony and theory, too.

Transcribing is great, and not just on bass. There are so many things you learn by getting in touch with how it was played, the energy that it was played

"Everyone needs a teacher, just like we need parents. We need someone outside ourselves to see what we can't see."

with, and of course, the context. No excerpt from a book can give you the context for what was played and when it was played. That's part of the reason transcribing is so nourishing—you get a lot out of it. Even a little goes a long way.

Also, it's cool to not know exactly what something might be—it leaves room for your interpretation. Wayne writes all his symphonic scores by hand, so obviously, he can't play every part at once on the piano. Every once in a while, something will happen that he didn't expect, and he believes that's important because that might be a surprise he wouldn't have gotten to otherwise.

What's one of the things you've learned by being around masters like Herbie and Wayne?

Work really hard and then have fun. Wayne knows the ins and outs of everything he puts his hands, mind, and heart to. Whether it's drawing, composing, playing, or arranging—whatever it is, he has researched it, really studied it, in a deep way. Then he can just have fun and go for an idea rather than the technical application of a concept he learned that's supposed to be the "best" for this moment. He has fun, like he's finger-painting, but everything works because he has laid the groundwork. I know it's really cliché—you know, "learn it then forget it"—but it's hard, actually, to forget it. It's hard to just be willing to go for an idea and not check if it's gonna work, to trust your foundation and have fun.

Herbie and Wayne are incredibly intelligent, but they're not wrapped up in their own intelligence. They're *playing*—they're using everything they've studied to have fun. They're engaged in the now and with other musicians, whatever level those musicians are at, with each other, with the news and the world. They are great examples of how you can live a life being dedicated and somehow carefree at the same time. It's so nourishing to be around Wayne and Herbie, so educational; you leave their company feeling like you're floating a bit. You feel happy inside, and inspired—like, "Whatever I put my hands on next, I'm gonna be more charged, more efficient, more productive, more creative." That's an incredible gift. **BP**