

Esperanza Spalding's "what it is" Style: A Case Study in Genre-Fluidity and Inter-Textuality

When Esperanza Spalding was awarded "Best New Artist" at the GRAMMYs (2010) for her third album *Chamber Music Society*, both mainstream and jazz audiences were shocked; not only did she beat out immensely popular artists like Justin Bieber and Drake, but it was also the first time that award had ever been given to a jazz artist. What makes this moment in musical history even more fascinating though, is that at the same time, traditional jazz critics and audiences were starting to become embroiled in heated discussions over whether Spalding's music could even be considered jazz at all. Indeed, the opening track from *Chamber Music Society* ("Little Fly")¹ could be considered quite unconventional for traditional jazz; Spalding sets the text of a poem by William Blake, includes a classical string arrangement, and ends with an improvised bass solo in a perfect example of what Nicholas Baham calls "radical genre hybridity".² However, this level of inter-textuality and genre-fluidity was only the beginning for Spalding, as each of her following albums would continue to challenge traditionalist conceptions of jazz as a genre even further. Through a socio-cultural exploration of the term "genre" itself, musical examples from Spalding's most recent album *Songwrights Apothecary Lab*,³ examinations of interviews with Spalding and her colleagues, and a survey of the press surrounding her work, it will be argued that though her use of genre-hybridity and inter-textuality poses many difficulties for those trying to classify her work under traditional genre labels, it simultaneously demands that her work be contextualized in many musical spaces, and could partially explain why her music has achieved such crossover appeal among fans of jazz, classical, rock, and pop music.

As artists like Spalding rise in the awareness of the musical public, writers often struggle to determine what language they should use to describe the music, particularly when it comes to labelling the genre that is most descriptive of the musical style. In terms of Spalding's work specifically, consider Jim Macnie's review of *Songwrights Apothecary Lab* (also abbreviated *S.A.L.*) for *Down Beat* magazine, in which he uses the phrases "prog motifs with folkie

¹ Spalding, Esperanza. "Chamber Music Society". Beverly Hills, CA: Heads Up International, 2010.

² Baham, Nicholas L. "I Know You Know": Esperanza Spalding's Hybrid, Intertextual, Multilingual, Relevant Jazz Aesthetic. 2012.

³ Spalding, Esperanza. "Songwrights Apothecary Lab". Beverly Hills, CA: Concord Records, 2021.

tangents”, “non-pop song structures”, “pop-adjacent ditties”, and names American minimalist icon (Steve) Reich at one point as a reference while trying to describe the album.⁴ For Jason Zhang, various tracks on *S.A.L* evoke “mystical foreign and sonic landscapes”, “musical theatre or cabaret”, “minimalist...with a quasi-baroque bassline” and Ornette Coleman.⁵ *S.A.L* is certainly Spalding’s most stylistically diverse album to date on a track-by-track basis, but even the press coverage around earlier releases like *Chamber Music Society* and *Emily’s D+Evolution* struggles to neatly label her music as belonging to a particular genre.⁶ In reviewing *Emily’s D+Evolution*,⁷ some describe the album as Spalding’s “venture into alt-rock”⁸ while others question if “a lack of emphasis on improvisation”⁹ means it could even be considered jazz at all.

In order to contextualize this discussion around Spalding’s work, an examination of the term “genre” itself is in order. As one might expect, there is no universal definition of what exactly constitutes a genre, though there are “genre theorists” who are dedicating their scholarly work towards developing working theories of genre: how they function, what value they may hold beyond marketing, what a genre label conveys about the music, its practitioners and audience, and more. Though an exhaustive survey of the different approaches to genre theory is well beyond the scope of this paper, it will be useful to examine one sociocultural framework of genre as outlined in Jennifer Lena’s book “Banding Together: How Communities Create Genres In Popular Music”.¹⁰ Lena defines genres as “systems of orientations, expectations, and conventions that bind together industry, performers, critics, and fans in making what they identify as a distinctive sort of music”. In other words, the identification of the genre is dependent on the consensus of the practitioners and others who partake in that practice. For obvious reasons, this could (and does) lead to contentious discussions about what constitutes a genre, exactly like the debates around the “death of jazz” and attempts to classify Spalding’s work as one genre or the other. Lena goes on to outline four different types of “genre forms” based on twelve different “dimensions”, including technology, organizational forms, sources of

⁴ Macnie, Jim. “Songwrights Apothecary Lab.” Down Beat. Chicago: Maher Publications Division, 2022.

⁵ Zhang, Jason. “‘SONGWRIGHTS APOTHECARY LAB’ Is Musical Therapy.” University Wire. Carlsbad: Uloop, Inc, 2021.

⁶ Cummings, Jozen. "The Root Interview: Esperanza Spalding on Taking a Big Risk." The Root (2010).

⁷ Spalding, Esperanza. “Emily’s D+Evolution”. Los Angeles, CA: Concord Records, 2016.

⁸ Hobart, Mike. “Esperanza Spalding: Emily’s D + Evolution -- Review.” FT.com (2016).

⁹ Lutz, Phillip. “Esperanza Spalding: Inviting ‘Emily’ Out To Play.” Down beat 83, no. 4 (2016): 28–.

¹⁰ Lena, Jennifer C. “Banding Together : How Communities Create Genres in Popular Music.” Course Book. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

income for artists, genre ideal or member goals, codification of performance conventions, and more.

The four different genre-forms and ideals Lena outlines are avant-garde, which has a genre ideal of innovation; scene-based which is concerned with creating community; industry-based, which is focused on creating revenue; and traditionalist, which aims to preserve heritage and pass it on. The model is fluid in the sense that a genre may be born with one genre-form/ideal, but over time can shift through the different genre-forms in what Lena identifies as “trajectories”, the most common of which she labels as “AgSIT” (Avant-Garde to Scene-based to Industrial to Traditionalist). It is notable that even as Lena attempts to trace the trajectories of different genres through this model, she cannot use “jazz” as a genre, but instead traces bebop jazz, Chicago jazz, and jazz fusion among other styles of jazz. This diffusion of genre labels that all fall under jazz is a strong indicator that jazz may be more appropriately considered as what Lena terms a “stream”, which are “musical styles, [that] over the course of decades, spawn a number of variants. These families of music retain their coherence through shared institutions, aesthetics, and audiences.”¹¹

That said, in some regards the genre/stream of jazz does fit Lena’s model of a traditionalist genre: press coverage for jazz is centered on “genre-based advocacy and critique” such as in *Down Beat* magazine, jazz artists often earn income through self-contributions, grants, and festivals; and the organization locus of jazz could certainly be considered “festivals, tours, and academic settings”. However, it is in the dimension of the genre-ideal that jazz most clearly violates Lena’s outline of a traditionalist genre. Although there is of course an element of heritage preservation in jazz, the practitioners of jazz seem more often than not primarily concerned with either innovation (like an avant-garde genre) or community (like a scene-based genre). As an example, “New Orleans” jazz, “West Coast” jazz, and “New York” jazz are all markedly different from each other in terms of musical style, venues, and culture. Each is associated with a community in a particular geographic area, and would support the claim that jazz still operates in some respects as a scene-based genre. Additionally, one could easily argue that jazz was always concerned with innovation (perhaps within the context of community) as new flavors or styles of jazz emerged as musicians reacted to each other; bebop and hard bop,

¹¹ Lena, *Banding Together*, 8.

cool jazz, and free jazz all were reactions to the jazz that came before, and brought new musical ideas and innovations that were all contextualized under the larger “stream” of jazz.

However, Lena’s model is useful in contextualizing the press coverage of jazz critics who question whether the genre is dead or whether Spalding’s work constitutes jazz because it can now be argued that these critics treat the genre as having a the genre-ideal of a traditionalist genre (which Lena herself implies) despite the fact that historically, the practitioners of jazz have tended to operate with the ethos of an avant-garde or scene-based genre; consider the definition of jazz that the iconic jazz musician Wayne Shorter shared with Spalding in an email: “I Dare You.”¹² According to this definition, both Shorter and Spalding consider their music to fall under the category of jazz. Thus, we may consider the genre stream of jazz to simultaneously co-exist as multiple genre-forms, depending on the specific sub-genre or style that is being discussed, and argue that critics who mis-understand Spalding’s music as the death of jazz are more concerned with traditionalist models of jazz rather than allowing the genre to expand and grow to cover new musical territory as its “avant-garde” practitioners have always sought to do. As Nicholas Baham puts it:¹³

The failure to comprehend genre hybridity and ever-expanding definitions of jazz music is complicated by the presence of jazz purists and conservationists who have long failed to recognize the kind of radical hybridity and experimentation that has always been happening at the margins. It may be said that Teachout and Nisenson et al. fall prey to the very same “high art” bias - with a smattering of sexism - that they so stridently critique.

Spalding’s music does not share the same concerns as those looking to preserve big band swing music, or bebop jazz, although all three will be reviewed by the same press publications, will be presented in somewhat similar venues, and are supported by common institutions, thus resulting in this confusion over what belongs to the genre and what does not in a debate between Baham’s “jazz conservationists” and those who are actually involved in writing new music that contributes to the this larger musical lineage.

The latest entry in Spalding’s discography (*S.A.L.*) will be useful in highlighting how Spalding’s melding of a variety of musical influences confounds the jazz press at large, while she seeks to carve out a musical language that is authentic to her and “a source of radical healing and liberation” in a “white supremacist caste system”.¹⁴ Indeed, though the album received generally

¹² Lutz, *Esperanza*, 28.

¹³ Baham, *I Know You Know*, 2010.

¹⁴ Spalding, *Esperanza*. Black Aesthetic/s as divine lover of No End In Sight. *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy*, 21 no. 1 (2021).

favorable reviews, the eighth track (or “formwela” as they’re referred to on this album) in particular seemed to be disappointing in its repetitive nature to mainstream reviewers. As an example, consider this excerpt from Tarisai Ngangura’s review for Pitchfork of *S.A.L.*:¹⁵

Where the album falters is when formwelas lose the sense of space and intimacy crafted at the beginning. “Formwela 8,” a nearly 12-minute track, trudges at the same pace and never finds footing, its harmonizing bookended by drums and saxophone. After a few bars, the repetition starts to lag, weighing down the gentle piano notes. According to the guide, it’s a “formwela” meant to foster the “buoyancy of a secure, comfy, and same home-place.” But the track has none of this lightness and assurance.

Subjective statements about lightness and assurance aside, a broad formal and musical analysis of “Formwela 8” will help illustrate why indeed this track would be confounding to mainstream reviewers writing about a jazz record. First, the instrumentation (drums, saxophone, guitar, bass, piano and eight singers including most of the instrumentalists) could be construed as a jazz quintet or classical chamber ensemble or band. Even though there are eight singers, there are actually no lyrics in “Formwela 8”; instead singers switch between open vowels and humming in the manner of a vocalise in the classical tradition, and unlike most music in the jazz or pop traditions. At just a few points in the track, there are what seem to be candid clips of Esperanza herself speaking un-intelligibly, perhaps recorded while the album was being made, and the entire piece contains only the five notes of the F-major pentatonic scale. The last element worth noting before beginning a macro-level examination of the form is that there is almost no improvisation on the entire track, with the exception of the piano which floats in and out of the sophisticated layers created by the rest of the band.

With these characteristics outlined, a formal discussion of the unfolding of “Formwela 8” can be undertaken. The track opens with a solo plucked bass line consisting of two short phrases, which sounds like it is in 4/4 time, and ends on “F” as shown below in Figure 1. However, the third time this bass line is played, the drums enter on what we can eventually construe as a simultaneous meter of 12/8 being super-imposed (or vice versa) on the bass line in 4/4. Here the piece is notated in 12/8 simply as a matter of convenience, and is not intended to provoke a debate as to which meter would technically be correct, nor to incite other discussions around the most effective notation for the scenario.

At 0:50 in the track, the piano enters, shortly before the first main melody in 12/8 is presented by Esperanza herself humming plus one other singer (while also playing the bass-line

¹⁵ Ngangura, Tarisai. “Esperanza Spalding: Songwrights Apothecary Lab.” Pitchfork. Pitchfork, September 30, 2021.

in 4/4) at 0:59 (Fig. 2). Over seven repetitions of this melody over the bassline while the piano continues to improvise, more singers gradually get added to the melody, and eventually Spalding moves to an open “ah” vowel instead of humming.

Just over a minute later, Esperanza and the saxophone player switch to the second melody, which is in 4/4 and while metrically corresponds to the bassline, still results in a cascading sensation because of the spacing of the different phrases (Figure 3). After the second melody is repeated, the main melody returns accompanied by the bassline. This return to the main melody after an introduction of new material is consistent, and it could be argued that the form here is somewhat reminiscent of the classical “rondo” form, which features an A section that is repeated after each introduction of new musical material (A-B-A-C-A-D, etc.). In the context of jazz, one could similarly argue that the form is a highly condensed version of how a typical jazz tune progresses: first the “head” or the main melody is played, before ensemble members take turns soloing, and then the head is played again. Even at this formal level, there is a degree of inter-textuality present that is perfectly natural given Spalding’s background playing classical music as a child before discovering jazz bass in high school.¹⁶

After two more separate repetitions of the main melody and the second melody (Figure 4), the third melody (also in 4/4) is finally introduced, however its’ very first appearance is marked by super-imposition over the main melody (Figure 5). Again after this introduction of new material, the “A” section or main melody returns, enforcing its’ primary status in the hierarchy of melodies. At this point, with all three melodies introduced, Spalding and her ensemble start to super-impose two of the three melodies in various combinations in a manner that could just as equally have been achieved through improvisation or pre-determined decisions, returning to the “unaccompanied” main “A” melody between each combination. Finally, at 7:22, we hear all three melodies super-imposed on top of each other as well as the bass-line: four melodic ideas in total, with two in 12/8 and two in 4/4 (Figure 6). From this point until the end of the track (a little over four minutes from this point), super-impositions of the melodies are presented in similar manner, always alternating with the “A” melody, until the very last iteration when all the lines stop after two measures leaving the bass to finish out its’ last repetition alone before, punctuated by a piano chord on the last note and drums afterwards.

¹⁶ Russonello, Giovanni. "Esperanza Spalding: Star Time." *JazzTimes*, 2012.

Given the repetitive nature of “Formwela 8” and its’ formal construction being more akin to something found in American minimalism (recall Jason Zhang’s mention of Steve Reich when reviewing this album)¹⁷ than jazz, plus all of the other aforementioned characteristics (instrumentation, vocalise-style singing, etc.) about this track, it is perhaps not surprising that mainstream reviewers are not sure what to make of it, never mind the album as a whole which consists of twelve astonishingly unique tracks. However, Spalding is well acquainted with setting her own goals for her albums and letting audiences and critics figure out what to make of it for themselves. When she released *Radio Music Society*,¹⁸ Spalding set out to create an album that served as a musical manifesto for the power of black radio and its’ ability to bring jazz to new audiences,¹⁹ while engaging in the kind of re-contextualization of jazz that Jason Moran had previously undertaken with his project of bringing the music of Fats Waller to dance clubs.²⁰ After *Emily’s D+Evolution*, an album crafted around Spalding’s “alter-ego” named Emily (also Spalding’s last name) was released in 2016 featuring mostly electric instruments and little improvisation, Spalding expressed her apathy towards what genre her work is classified as in an interview with the Wall Street Journal, stating “I don’t care if I’m considered a jazz or pop musician...”²¹ Indeed, the task of assigning a genre or category to one’s artistic practice has tended to be of greater concern to theorists, critics, industry executives, and marketing agents than artists themselves. However, in the case of Spalding’s work, they would do well to heed Baham’s advice that “trying to understand Esperanza Spalding as ‘this’ type of musician who makes ‘that’ type of music is going to be futile. We ought to approach her from the other direction: Every bit of work she offers is just another light she’s turned on for us, illuminating one more room where she’s been laying her plans and charting her way;”²² in other words, we are all just here for the ride, waiting to see what Spalding will do next.

¹⁷ Zhang, *SONGWRIGHTS APOTHECARY LAB’ Is Musical Therapy*, 2021.

¹⁸ Spalding, Esperanza. “Radio Music Society”. Beverly Hills, CA: Heads Up International, 2012.

¹⁹ Lordi, Emily J. “Black Radio: Robert Glasper, Esperanza Spalding, and Janelle Monae.” *In Are You Entertained?*, 44–. Duke University Press, 2020; Staff, NPR. “Esperanza Spalding: Jazz as ‘Radio Music’.” NPR, 2012.

²⁰ Williams, Janaya. “Jason Moran Takes Fats Waller Back To The Club.” NPR, 2011; Staff, NPR. “On Jazz Day, Jason Moran Makes the Case for Relevance.” NPR, 2012.

²¹ Blumenfeld, Larry. “An Alter Ego Helps Esperanza Spalding Rediscover Her Passions; Grammy Winner Returns with New Album, ‘Emily’s D+Evolution’.” *The Wall Street Journal*, 2016.

²² Baham, *I Know You Know*, 2010.

Formwela 8

Esperanza Spalding

$\text{♩} = 124$ Opening bassline

Alto Saxophone

Double Bass

pizz.

3

Dr.

D. B.

6

Dr.

D. B.

9

Dr.

D. B.

Figure 1: Broad-level transcription of the opening to Formwela 8.

12

Dr.

D. B.

15

Dr.

V.

0:59 - "main" melody

D. B.

18

Dr.

V.

D. B.

Play 7 times

Figure 2: First melody is introduced over bassline.

21 2:18 - 2nd melody

A. Sax.

Dr.

V.

D. B.

23

Dr.

V.

D. B.

Figure 3: Second melody introduced over bass-line.

4

25 main melody

Dr. V. D. B.

28

Dr. V. D. B.

31

Dr. V. D. B.

The image shows a musical score for three systems of music, each consisting of three staves: Drums (Dr.), Violin (V.), and Double Bass (D. B.).

- System 1 (Measures 25-27):** Labeled "main melody". The Dr. staff has a series of 'x' marks. The V. staff has a melody starting with a quarter note, followed by eighth notes. The D. B. staff has a bass line with eighth notes and quarter notes. Red dots are placed under the first four eighth notes of the first measure.
- System 2 (Measures 28-30):** Labeled "2nd melody". The Dr. staff has a series of 'x' marks. The V. staff has a melody starting with a quarter note, followed by eighth notes. The D. B. staff has a bass line with eighth notes and quarter notes. Red dots are placed under the first four eighth notes of the first measure.
- System 3 (Measures 31-33):** This system shows the return to the main melody. The Dr. staff has a series of 'x' marks. The V. staff has a melody starting with a quarter note, followed by eighth notes. The D. B. staff has a bass line with eighth notes and quarter notes. Red dots are placed under the first two eighth notes of the first measure.

Figure 4: Return to main melody, re-iteration of second melody.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a jazz ensemble. The first system, starting at measure 33, features a drum part with a steady pattern of eighth notes marked with 'x'. The vocal line (V.) is labeled "main melody" and contains a sequence of notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6. The double bass part (D. B.) plays a bass line with notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6. The second system, starting at measure 36, introduces a new element. The saxophone part (A. Sax.) is labeled "4:25 - 3rd melody" and begins with a rest followed by a melodic phrase: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6. The drum part (Dr.) continues with the same eighth-note pattern. The vocal line (V.) is labeled "'main' melody" and contains notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6. The double bass part (D. B.) continues with the same bass line as in the first system.

Figure 5: Return to main melody, and introduction of third melody super-imposed over main melody and bass-line.

69 7:22 - all superimposed (3rd melody)

A. Sax.

Dr.

"main" melody

V.

E. Pno

2nd melody

D. B.

71

A. Sax.

Dr.

V.

E. Pno

D. B.

Figure 6: All three melodies are super-imposed over each other as well as the bass-line.

Annotated Bibliography

Baham, Nicholas L. "I Know You Know": Esperanza Spalding's Hybrid, Intertextual, Multilingual, Relevant Jazz Aesthetic. *Americana* (Hollywood, Calif). 2012;11(2).

Baham starts by discussing previous discussions around Esperanza Spalding, the "death" of jazz, and why most jazz critics seem to fundamentally misunderstand Spalding's work when deciding that her music is not jazz. He goes on to build the argument that Spalding's work is both commercially and artistically relevant because of the intertextuality and "radical genre hybridity" in her work, which he argues are the some of the only methods with which to have socially relevant discourse as an artist in the 21st century: a time dominated by capitalism, transnationalism, an aspiration to post-racialism, and significant demographic shifts. He partially achieves this by examining specific songs, citing "Little Fly" from *Chamber Music Society* as an example of radical hybridity; poetry by William Blake, sung by Esperanza Spalding, in a chamber music arrangement with strings, that ends with an improvised bass solo.

Beuttler, Bill. ESPERANZA SPALDING. In: *Make It New*. Lever Press; 2019:231-. doi:10.3998/mpub.11469938.12

In his book *Make it New*, Beuttler compiles eight profiles of some of the most compelling and innovative "jazz" musicians working today (one chapter per artist), ending with Esperanza Spalding. Through interviews with Spalding, her colleagues, and her bandmates (including but not limited to Vijay Iyer, Geri Allen, Matt Stevens, and Christian McBride), Beuttler gives the reader a taste of what it might be like to operate in Spalding's musical sphere. He also discusses her upbringing and career in an expository fashion, but the bulk of the chapter is centered around anecdotes told by the author about interactions with Spalding, or from Spalding herself and colleagues.

Blumenfeld, Larry. "An Alter Ego Helps Esperanza Spalding Rediscover Her Passions; Grammy Winner Returns with New Album, 'Emily's D+Evolution'." *The Wall Street Journal*. Eastern Edition. New York, N.Y: Dow Jones & Company Inc, 2016.

In this short interview with the Wall Street Journal, Spalding speaks about *Emily's D+Evolution*, and also shares her apathy towards the way she's classified as a musician in terms of genre.

Cummings, Jozen. "The Root Interview: Esperanza Spalding on Taking a Big Risk." *The Root* 30 August 2010: <https://www.theroot.com/the-root-interview-esperanza-spalding-on-taking-a-big-1790880751>

This article from "The Root" is not really an interview, though it does feature some quotes from Spalding. Written shortly after the release of *Chamber Music Society* (2010), the article discusses jazz's declining commercial success, before naming Spalding as a beacon of hope. However, the author then expresses skepticism about whether Spalding

can deliver on this promise, because of how different *Chamber Music Society* is from her previous work, and seems to discount the album as both too inaccessible for mainstream audiences, and missing “the kind of music Spalding is more than capable of performing”. Finally, Cummings introduces quotes from Spalding recounting both anecdotal experiences and her personal viewpoints that contradict those of the author.

Hobart, Mike. “Esperanza Spalding: Emily’s D + Evolution -- Review.” FT.com (2016).

This is a very short album review in which the author refers to *Emily’s D+Evolution* as Spalding’s venture to “alt-rock” highlighting critics’ attempts to classify her music within conventional marketing labels.

Lena, Jennifer C. “Banding Together : How Communities Create Genres in Popular Music.” Course Book. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

In *Banding Together*, Jennifer Lena examines music genres through the lens of communities, acknowledging that most of music history tends to focus on sole creators, ignoring the complex environments and communities that made their work possible. Critically, Lena differentiates genre from *style*, the latter being a more appropriate term for what most critics tend to mention in discussion of Spalding’s work, whereas genre consists of a larger set of orientations, expectations, and conventions that result in musicians, critics, and audience members agreeing that a distinctive style of music is being performed. By creating a model for sociocultural classification of genre, Lena thoroughly examines what the term means to the general public, the government and the industry executive, and musicians and academics alike; a critical framework within which to examine Spalding’s work.

Lordi, Emily J. “Black Radio: Robert Glasper, Esperanza Spalding, and Janelle Monae.” In *Are You Entertained?*, 44–. Duke University Press, 2020.

In chapter 2 of *Are You Entertained?*, Emily Lordi draws comparisons between Glasper, Spalding and Monae, all of who released radio-themed albums between 2012 and 2013. Lordi discusses everything from the album art and Spalding’s stated intentions for the record to cultural norms about black radio. About Spalding’s work, she notes how through the actual compositions of her tracks, Spalding is arguing that this music should be on the radio: a point that Glasper only communicates rhetorically.

Lutz, Phillip. “Esperanza Spalding: Inviting ‘Emily’ Out To Play.” *Down beat* 83, no. 4 (2016): 28–.

Written the same year as the release of *Emily’s D+Evolution*, this article in *DownBeat* magazine is an in-depth discussion of the persona that is “Emily” (as opposed to Esperanza), the album and its theatrical elements, as well as the conception of the album. Compared to other reviewers, Lutz only lightly raises the question of whether this album and its’ performances constitute jazz, before allowing Spalding (with the help of Wayne Shorter) to offer a definition of jazz that is broad enough for them.

Macnie, Jim. "Songwrights Apothecary Lab." Down Beat. Chicago: Maher Publications Division, 2022.

In this review of *Songwrights Apothecary Lab*, Macnie strives to find appropriate descriptors for the musical styles Spalding calls upon on this record, including "prog motifs with folkie tangents", "non-pop song structures", "pop-adjacent ditties", and names (Steve) Reich as a point of reference for one track. This review serves as a perfect case for why the discussion around genre needs to shift to one based on a sociocultural framework, instead of conventional marketing labels.

Ngangura, Tarisai. "Esperanza Spalding: Songwrights Apothecary Lab." Pitchfork. Pitchfork, September 30, 2021. <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/esperanza-spalding-songwrights-apothecary-lab/>.

This is an album review of Songwrights Apothecary Lab from the notable online music publication *Pitchfork*, in which the author expresses generally favorable opinions of the album (7.5 out of 10), but specifically takes issue with repetitive nature of *Formwela* 8.

Russonello, Giovanni. "Esperanza Spalding: Star Time." *JazzTimes* 3 May 2012: <http://jazztimes.com/articles/29851-esperanza-spalding-star-time>

Russonello briefly introduces the article with mentions of Spalding's commercial success following *Radio Music Society* (2012), and describing Spalding at an interview, before launching in to a very detailed biography of the musician from her early childhood all the way until the release of *Radio Music Society*. He goes on to quote Spalding extensively, describing her personal beliefs and musical heroes. Next, Russonello profiles her current work with bandmates Geri Allen and Terri Lyne Carrington, describing how all three are shining models for young female jazz musicians today. Finally, the author describes how chaotic Spalding's working life has become following her success, as she tries to balance her work as a player in other bands with her own projects.

Spalding, Esperanza. Black Aesthetic/s as divine lover of No End In Sight. *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy*, 21 no. 1 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.15845/voices.v21i1.3271>

This is an artistic response from Spalding herself about her view on Black Aesthetics in the 21st century. For Spalding, Black Aesthetics is a "(r)evolutionary trait" that serves to promote deep-healing in all communities that need it. She espouses the values of Black Aesthetics as those belonging to people who don't "commit genocide...ask what god you pray to...need permission from the crown or bible..." to express their full potential. Here, Spalding makes explicit the sociocultural impact of her music as it relates to being a black person and musician in America.

Spalding, Esperanza. "Songwrights Apothecary Lab". Beverly Hills, CA: Concord Records, 2021.

Released just last year, Grammy-nominated *Songwrights Apothecary Lab* may be Spalding's most genre-fluid album yet. The title (also abbreviated S.A.L.) is also the name of a "lab" Spalding teaches at Harvard University, and each of the "formwelas" are created in collaboration with the members of the lab and a few trusted colleagues; each also has an intended "salutary affect" and a complete guide for the album with comments about each track can be found at the website of the same name as the album.

Spalding, Esperanza. "Emily's D+Evolution". Los Angeles, CA: Concord Records, 2016.

Crafted through the lens of Esperanza's alter-ego named Emily (also Esperanza's middle name), *Emily's D+Evolution* features Spalding on electric bass, creating tracks with much less improvisation than typically associated with jazz, all told and performed with a high degree of theatricality to give life to her alter-ego. As with *Chamber Music Society*, this album lead many in the field to wonder whether this really constituted jazz due to how intertextual in nature the album and accompanying performances are.

Spalding, Esperanza. "Radio Music Society". Beverly Hills, CA: Heads Up International, 2012.

Spalding's conceptual (and chronological) follow-up to *Chamber Music Society* won Best Vocal Jazz at the 2013 GRAMMYS while continuing to show audiences that her artistic output was not going to be predictable. As the name implies, *Radio Music Society* features tracks that Spalding conceived of as being appropriate for radio airplay due to their catchy tunes, instrumentation, and mostly truncated forms.

Spalding, Esperanza. "Chamber Music Society". Beverly Hills, CA: Heads Up International, 2010.

Spalding's third album catapulted her into the consciousness of mainstream audiences as it won her "Best New Artist" at the 2010 GRAMMYS. Following her first two relatively straightforward jazz records, *Chamber Music Society* (named after the classical group she grew up playing in) was the first indication to jazz audiences and critics that Spalding was not beholden to listeners' (and critics') surface level associations with the jazz idiom, as she sets text by William Blake ("Little Fly"), alongside classical string arrangements and jazz improvisation.

Staff, NPR. "Esperanza Spalding: Jazz as 'Radio Music'." NPR. NPR, March 17, 2012. <https://www.npr.org/2012/03/18/148617293/esperanza-spalding-jazz-as-radio-music>.

In this brief interview, Spalding discusses the premise behind *Radio Music Society*, and speaks about her pre-colonial roots, notoriety, and the significance of radio in exposing audiences to new music, including jazz.

Staff, NPR. "On Jazz Day, Jason Moran Makes the Case for Relevance." NPR. NPR, April 30, 2012. <https://www.npr.org/2012/04/30/151700270/on-jazz-day-jason-moran-makes-the-case-for-relevance>.

In a 2012 follow-up article about Moran's Fats Waller project, Moran discusses his motivations further, specifically mentioning the importance of re-contextualization, which would go on to be cited by other sources here, most significantly Baham's article "I Know You Know".

Williams, Janaya. "Jason Moran Takes Fats Waller Back To The Club." NPR. NPR, May 13, 2011. <https://www.npr.org/2011/05/13/136274480/jason-moran-takes-fats-waller-back-to-the-club>.

This is a short interview with Jason Moran about the project he undertook in 2011 of bringing the music of Fats Waller to modern dance venues. For Moran, this process of re-contextualization is important to remind the general public that jazz audiences did not always sit still and serious-faced at concerts.

Zhang, Jason. "'SONGWRIGHTS APOTHECARY LAB' Is Musical Therapy." University Wire. Carlsbad: Uloop, Inc, 2021.

Zhang gives a brief overview about the background of Songwrights Apothecary Lab (the track naming structure, stated intentions of the record, etc.), and describes it as a departure from her last record (a common thread among those who write about Spalding's music, it seems). He then reviews the album track-by-track, noting the incredible variety of sounds present on the record, and the many cultures/genres they bring to mind.