

MOJO

The Music Magazine

Matthew Stevens

★★★★★

Preverbal

ROPEADOPE. CD/DL

Superb second from rising Canadian jazz-rock guitarist.



A striking feature of Esperanza Spalding's *Emily's D+Evolution*

album and tour last year was Matthew Stevens's gnarled guitar lines, which imbued the music with a visceral intensity. The 35-year-old Toronto musician now steps into the spotlight for this Ropeadope debut. There aren't many guitar players who can avoid musical clichés, but Stevens is undoubtedly one of them. His singular style, combining dark, grungy chords with soaring, angular melodies and ingenious improv, dissolves the demarcation lines separating jazz, rock and ambient music. On

Preverbal, Stevens leads a power trio that can deftly blend brutal, granite riffs with a meditative, gossamer-like lyricism. Spalding adds her ethereal vocals to the haunting epilogue, *Our Reunion*, but elsewhere, Stevens' craggy guitar reigns supreme.

Charles Waring