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YOUNG & ROLLINS "Esperanza" Bolero Records

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The title cut on the new release by guitarists Dan Young and Lawson Rollins was inspired by a trip Down Under, but tone-wise Andalusia trumps Australia from start to finish. Then again, the Washington-bred duo's flamenco and Spanish guitars are always the focus here, juxtaposing sparkling melodies and sharply percussive runs with romantic themes and salsa beats.

The duo's dovetailing virtuosity is plain to hear, particularly on the flamenco-accented "Sandstorm," but the emphasis is on melodies rather than six-string fireworks. "Nowhere to Be Found" and "Spanish Nights" rank among the pair's most soulful and evocative ballads, while the album's title track sustains a blues-tinted slow burn. The duo gets a big assist from percussionist and singer- songwriter Alfredo Mojica and other kindred spirits who help bring a contemporary (and disarmingly tuneful) Latin music spin to "Esperanza," as well as some old-school vitality and drama.

-- Mike Joyce