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Asaf Sirkis Trio

Shepherd's Stories cd



The Asaf Sirkis Trio – drummer Asaf with Greek guitarist Tassos Spiliotopoulos and Israeli bassist Yaron Stavi – have just finished their third album, *Shepherd's Stories*, to be released July 17.

It is a distinct pleasure to see Asaf's Trio stay together as a unit, develop rapport and continue to find their own unique direction. I say this because after coming to prominence with Gilad Atzmon's Orient House Ensemble, Asaf became one of the most sought after drummers in London and has played in a myriad of contexts.

Here, one of Asaf's goals, not always seen in jazz, was to make a beautiful and melodic album and he has succeeded – without compromising any jazz aesthetic. Asaf sees music in a spiritual light and is intrigued by our relationship to it, especially in this case, to melody.

The trio is a very egalitarian one. If anything, Asaf's complex and perfect drumming steps back, with guitar and bass filling out the foreground. Tassos Spiliotopoulos' electric guitar generally alternates between chorus-effected, sometimes reverb-drenched, loveliness for the melodic statements and accompaniment parts. When it comes to soloing, he adopts a fluid, sustained, creamy sound that is a bit more direct. His playing is lovely roller coaster ride, full of rapid runs and interesting melodic takes on the harmonic structures. He has the facility of McLaughlin without the harshness; with a big debt, too, going to Alan Holdsworth.

Bassist Yaron Stavi plays a huge part. Prominent in the mix, playing electric bass, he defines much of the music and plays well-considered, melodic solos, sometimes reminding me of Steve Swallow with an upper register, guitar-like sound.

The last piece, *Two Part Melody*, is a good example of the style of the band on *Shepherd's Stories*. The guitar plays a simple shimmering pattern while the bass states the melody, all very deliberate. In the middle section, the guitar solos, with restraint but upping the emotional level considerably before returning to the pattern with the bass now improvising, but in the same relationship to the guitar as in the first part. Throughout, Asaf's drumming accentuates the rises and falls, augments the rhythms, mostly through deft use of cymbals.

There are a few guests. The opening tune, a burner, features a Fender Rhodes solo by John Turville; Gareth Lockrane contributes a terrific flute solo in *Together* that has all the fluidity of Spiliotopoulos' guitar. On the third song, *Traveller*, Sylwia Bialas sings wordless ensemble vocals that give the song a beautiful Europop burnish; very lovely indeed.

Though not at all ambient music, *Shepherd's Stories* has the appeal of much ambient music: consistency of sound, lots of space in the music and, of course, its overriding sense of beauty – with the added attraction of great soloing.

Charley Dunlap

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