



By Ian Maund SANDY BROWN JAZZ
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The Sirkis / Bialas International Quartet Come To Me

Drummer and bandleader Asaf Sirkis is a busy and much sought after man. He has just finished his latest tour of the UK showcasing his latest album featuring vocalist Sylwia Białas with Frank Harrison on piano and keyboards and Patrick Harrison playing bass and chromatic harmonica.

Born in 1969 in Petah-Tikva, Israel, Asaf came to London in 1999 and has continued to establish a reputation in the UK jazz scene as a respected drummer and composer. A wide variety of collaborations has led to an impressive back catalogue of recordings (which you can sample if you click here), the last being the enjoyable Shepherd's Stories in 2013.

This latest collaboration with Polish singer Sylwia Białas adds to the variety. Sylwia sings in Polish on the album but the English lyrics are supplied in the leaflet insert with the CD. Asaf and Sylwia share the credits for the music and lyrics. Born in Poland, Sylwia first sang with a band when she was just seven. She says: 'My main aim during studying music, was the ability to compose and transcribe my sound-imagination on the paper. I started to analyze the way musicians play their instruments. To think as a drummer, bass player, horn player or another instrumentalist. To hear always the complete band playing a tune. My voice was the nearest and very direct instrument for me to use. That's why I like so much singing without the lyrics. I was always fascinated by the sound-range and rhythmical possibilities of different instruments and tried to learn to project their flexibility on my voice, that means to sing as an instrumentalist would do.'

The title track, Come To Me, is a love song 'Knot of bodies, Heat of the lips ...' starting out slowly with some beautiful piano following Sylwia's vocal, and the gentle pace continues with Dreams Dreams, as dreamy as the title, with solos from bass and piano 'Lost for words you linger Warm and snuggled In the scent of dreams ...'

With Vortex, the tempo picks up a little for a lyric-less vocal by Sylwia and well-integrated playing by the band, Patrick Bettison's bass laying a solid foundation leading to an well-judged fast-paced solo from Frank Harrison and ending with Asaf's drum solo which I recommend you listen to through headphones for full effect. Ismael is another slow track with Sylwia's poetic lyrics 'On the verge of the day Wearing grey shadows An exhausted angel sat Patching his broken dreams ...' As Harrison's piano solo starts you are beginning to appreciate how well this band is working together, and here the

harmonica comes with reminders of how Sting used the instrument in Ten Summoner's Tales.

A Hymn opens with a repeating piano phrase behind the voice. I found this a track with some beautiful touches and a well-structured solo from Harrison and multi-tracking of Sylwia's voice. Mandragora continues the slow pace, this time with a piano and harmonica beginning and a wordless voice that takes us into nice solos from Bettison's bass and Harrison's piano tied together neatly with Asaf Sirkis's drums. The One : 'Jeden świat Jeden cel Jeden myśl I wizja / One World One Goal One Thought And Vision' this time with lyrics and a track where the quality of Sylwia Białas's voice is on show. Magnolia gives us more harmonica and another very effective percussion contribution from Asaf Sirkis. Orbs has music by Asaf and lyrics by Sylwia. 'Love continues Strangled with banality Lacking the right words ..' but words that are savoured as is the piano solo over Asaf's brush strokes. The album closes with Orgon another track where I appreciated the bass playing of Patrick Bettison and on this number, Frank Harrison's keyboard, and the conclusion with Sylwia's strange vocal notes leaves us wondering.

Overall, this is a gentle, sometimes dreamy, poetic album where the empathetic relationship between the players is a critical and a very evident factor in its success. The fact that Sylwia Białas sings in Polish is irrelevant to a non-Polish speaking audience as the essence is the voice; Sirkis and Bettison expressively tie the process together whilst making their own individual contributions and Frank Harrison shows us just how engaging his solos can be.