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CD/LP/Track Review

## Asaf Sirkis Trio: Shepherd's Stories (2013)

By [IAN PATTERSON](#), Published: August 12, 2013

Maybe it's the unfashionably hot weather that's hit the UK in recent summers, but there's something almost cheery about drummer Asaf Sirkis' *Shepherd Stories*. Sirkis' church organ/guitar based Inner Noise recordings wove a jazz-gothic tale, while *The Monk* (SAM Productions, 2008)—with guitarist [Tassos Spiliotopoulos](#) and bassist [Yaron Stavi](#)—balanced tantalizingly between pretty melancholy and a slightly dark aesthetic. That said, a lyrical vein has always permeated Sirkis' music *Letting Go* (Stonebird Productions, 2010) signaled the trio's move toward less introspective and more dynamic music and the trend continues here on a largely up-beat, buoyant set of tunes.



After six years together the trio's well-honed and distinctive sound remains fundamentally intact; skeletal compositional frames—melodic to the core and based around feathery guitar motifs—allow plenty of space for freedom. On previous AS Trio recordings there were notable cameos from drummer [Gary Husband](#) and harmonica player [Patrick Bettison](#), and Sirkis' seems intent on further widening the trio's sonic palette with telling contributions from several guest musicians. Whether or not Sirkis is contemplating expanding the group's sound to quartet dimensions remains to be seen, but for the time being it remains essentially a trio, and a beguiling one at that.

Stavi's singing bass lines ferment quietly beneath Sirkis' propulsive play as "1801" skips breezily along. Spiliotopoulos—fast developing into one of the most immediately recognizable of guitarists—takes the first of two tremendously flowing solos either side of [John Turville's](#) Fender Rhodes excursion. Sirkis enjoys a brief whirl around his kit, whisking his cymbals almost like shakers. The bare bones structure of the slower, more ruminative "Eyes Tell" leaves Spiliotopoulos abundant room to carve out an extended solo, though faced with carte blanche, his almost meditative response conforms admirably to the needs of the music; virtuosity never trumps form and tone in Sirkis' trios.

Singer Sylwia Bialas' wordless vocals bookend the gently paced "Traveller"; Stavi's measured solo contrasts with Spiliotopoulos' greater fluidity, though the common denominator is the continuous melodic emphasis of the narrative. Contrast also defines "Meditation" which grows from a starting point of reverie to groove-based tune, driven by the rhythm section but defined mainly by Spiliotopoulos' imaginative playing.

Throughout, Sirkis' polyrhythms are central, but other than brief flurries, notably at either end of the energized "Dream Sister," his playing is effervescent without ever abandoning the groove. Spiliotopoulos takes another striking solo before Stavi restates the pretty head, crowned by Sirkis' final flourish. There's inner strength aplenty in the collective play and a confidence that negates the need for overtly muscular displays.

The music takes a pastoral turn with flautist [Gareth Lockrane](#)'s intervention on the slower "Together." A lyrical delight, his extended freeform flight is deftly buoyed by the trio's supportive currents. The airy lyricism of title track is an album highlight—a jazzier's summer soundtrack—and "Two Part Melody" closes an absorbing set by balancing understated elegance and controlled passion.

Finely crafted and beautifully performed, Sirkis' trio seems to go from strength to strength. Like the best of stories, these will warrant listening to time and again.

Track Listing: 1801; Eyes Tell; Traveller; Meditation; Dream Sister; Together; Shepherd's Stories; Two Part Melody.

Personnel: Asaf Sirkis; drums; Yaron Stavi: electric bass; Tassos Spiliotopoulos: electric and acoustic guitars; Sylwia Bialas: voice (3); Gareth Lockrane: flute: (6); John Turville: Fender Rhodes (1, 5).

Record Label: Stonebird Productions

Style: [Beyond Jazz](#)

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