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**Sirkis/Bialas International Quartet: *Come To Me***  
Stonedbird Productions

Typically, a jazz quartet featuring a vocalist, pianist, bassist, and drummer is presented as a vocalist accompanied by a rhythm section, with the spotlight largely on the singer. The Sirkis/Bialas International Quartet upends that convention by granting equal importance to all four elements, Polish vocalist Sylwia Bialas in this case but one critical cog in a four-person machine. The very fact that the group's co-led by Bialas and Israel-born drummer Asaf Sirkis says much about the balance within the band, and the two share composing credits throughout, with some pieces authored by the drummer and others credited to the singer (all lyrics are Bialas's).

The drummer also leads the Asaf Sirkis Trio (which formed in 2007 and features guitarist Tassos Spiiotopoulos and bassist Yaron Stavi), is working with guitarists Larry Coryell and Nicolas Meier in separate band projects, and recently appeared in the company of guitarist Mark Wingfield on his *Proof of Light* album. On the guitar-less *Come To Me*, however, Sirkis and Bialas are joined by electric bassist Patrick Bettison and pianist Frank Harrison for an hour-long set of contemporary chamber jazz. The latter musician plays with sophistication throughout, his playing at times reminiscent of Keith Jarrett's, while Bettison gives the album a distinctive twist in adding chromatic harmonica to four of the ten tracks, a move that ostensibly lends the music a Toots Thielemans character (and even hints of Stevie Wonder during "Magnolia").

Admittedly, describing *Come To Me* as contemporary chamber jazz is a tad delimiting, given the range of styles covered by the quartet. In addition to traditional jazz, the music reflects the influences of Polish folk, contemporary classical, and even, on the closing track, a hint of '70s electric jazz. The folk-styled title setting inaugurates the album on a restrained, dream-like note with Bialas's controlled vocal delivery (sung in Polish) sensitively shadowed by Harrison's soulful piano playing, which evidences subtle gospel and R&B flavour. Here and elsewhere, Sirkis brings a delicate touch to his playing, and there are moments when his colouristic, cymbals-heavy approach recalls Jack DeJohnette. Drum solos by Sirkis are rare, though he does end "Vortex" with a fiery spotlight that, accompanied by Bettison, neither loses momentum nor sacrifices musicality.

Stepping away on a number of tracks from singing formal lyrics, Bialas scats on the breezy "Vortex," whose high-energy sprint showcases an uptempo side of the band, and "Mandragora," whose wordless vocalizing and melodic progressions exemplify a rather Pat Metheny-esque quality. In contrast to the subdued tone of the album's folk-jazz ballads ("Ismael," "Orbs"), the album concludes with the oft-tumultuous "Orgon," which Harrison modernizes by playing electric piano instead of acoustic.

In a lot of ways, *Come To Me* strikes me as a quintessential ECM recording—even if it's not released on Manfred Eicher's label. The tasteful photo-based cover is very much in line with ECM style conventions, and the playing of the Sirkis/Bialas International Quartet is as sophisticated and high-calibre a musical outfit as we've come to associate with the label, too.

May 2015