

**The Jewish music agenda of John Zorn's Tzadik label takes a gentle left turn with the albums of acoustic fingerstyle guitarist Tim Sparks. As heard on his pleasing new collection, *At the Rebbe's Table* (Tzadik), the familiar twang of the steel-string instrument gives an unexpected musical spin to material from the klezmer songbook (including the title song), tunes by guitarist Flory Jagoda and other corners of the Jewish musical universe. On a tune like "Todos Si Hueron," Cyro Baptista's undulant percussion and Greg Cohen's coolly seductive bass put us in mind mainly of Brazil. As noted in Sparks' notes about the project, one historical link is to the Judeo-Arabic culture in Spain, the guitar's ancestral homeland. When Sparks and Marc Ribot (on both steel string and classical guitar) delicately interweave and swap licks, the Spanish interpretation rings true. On Zorn's own tender tune "Mahshav," from the radical's soft side, Sparks' sensitive solo reading begs a more universal appreciation. Whatever the heritage or cultural pedigree, it's simply touching music.**

**Josef Woodard-Jazz Times**

**Tim Sparks has built an impressive track record of fingerstyle excellence since winning the Winfield Championships. Noted for his outstanding explorations into ethnic musical forms transcribed for guitar, Spark's last 3 recordings have narrowed the focus to Jewish music, drawing deeply from the wells of Jewish cultures both oriental and occidental, especially the music which flowed from European Jews. This latest effort, "At The Rebbe's Table", may be Sparks' best yet in capturing the life and cross-pollination richly textured in these 11 selections from the diaspora Jewish communities around the world. All of the tunes on the disc are based on traditional Jewish forms, and for the Goyim among us, Sparks' liner notes help us sense some of the flavor he has tried to create with his 6 strings. Sparks is not alone on this disc, but ably joined by Marc Ribot on nylon stringed guitar, Erik Friedlander on cello, Greg Cohen on bass, and Cyro Baptista on percussion. The songs contain allusions to Greek, Persian, Spanish, and Arab music. Of course, in the title cut and "Sadagora Dance" we can almost hear the wailing of the Klezmer violin. "The Keys from Spain" take us jaunting through Andalucia, while the traditional Yemenite tune "Beautiful City" sends us to Jerusalem. Mixed in with all this culture is the quiet, solo "Mashav" written by John Zorn, who produced the CD, and whose vision these days is driving Tim Sparks to bring us some wonderful guitar music.**

**Kirk Albrecht-The Minor 7th**