

After the recording of traditional Jewish music arranged for solo guitar on Neshamah, producer John Zorn combined Sparks with Masada alumni Greg Cohen and Brazilian percussionist Cyro Baptista. Music critic Ben Kettlewell called the combination of Sparks, Cohen and Baptista “a wonderful adventure into the myriad of styles of music of the Jewish Diaspora.”[1] Cohen and Baptista would reunite with Sparks for two more releases on the Tzadik label. Tanz includes four arrangements of songs by Klezmer clarinetist Naftule Brandwein. Sparks would later record Little Princess, an entire album of Brandwein arrangements. Writing for Allmusic, critic Sean Westergaard wrote, “Sparks comes from a classical guitar background more than a fingerpicking folky background, and his virtuosic technique is incredible, but always in service to the music, not merely technique... Anyone with a passing interest in either Jewish music or fingerpicked guitar should seek out this recording; it’s beautiful.”[2] Critic Gary Joyner of Acoustic Guitar commented on the music’s influences from Brazil, Mexico, Yemen, the Balkans, Africa, and Spain and Sparks’ “mastery of these difficult musical forms.” Commenting on the blend of styles used by Sparks, JazzTimes critic Jim Ferguson wrote, “... this beautiful recording isn’t jazz per se, but it does have a spontaneity, depth and improvisational aspect that will appeal to anyone willing to step outside their everyday listening experience.”[3] Down Beat critic John Hadley echoed the blending of styles, writing “With impeccable control, he imparts quiet depth to his close study of the melodies, harmonies and unusual rhythms... No small achievement, Sparks conveys the pathos of the Diaspora in his music.”[4] as did Dirty Linen critic Paul Emile Comeau: “Not only is the idea of playing such music on acoustic guitar a novel idea but, in the nimble hands of Sparks, it succeeds admirably... The mix of a traditional approach with the jazz nuances that the trio brings to the arrangements makes for compelling and original music which should impress both guitar aficionados and those with a keen interest in the diversity of Jewish music.”