

Pablo Embon

*The World Within*

Review by Alex Henderson

4 stars out of 5

To fully appreciate the array of influences that jazz guitarist/pianist and composer Pablo Embon brings to *The World Within*, it helps to have some knowledge of South American music. Embon now lives in Israel, but he grew up in Argentina. And on *The World Within*, Embon brings a variety of South American influences to the table.

There is no shortage of diversity in South America, either musically or culturally. Argentina is famous for the tango and, like its neighbor Uruguay, has a strong Italian influence. Brazil, Argentina's Portuguese speaking neighbor, has a major African influence and is known for samba, choro and many other musical styles. And Bolivia, Argentina's neighbor to the north, has a large indigenous population that has greatly influenced its musical climate. Listening to *The World Within*, it is evident that Embon appreciates the wide range of music that South America has to offer and is willing to incorporate different styles.

Embon is not a purist when it comes to jazz. His music is fusion, drawing on direct on indirect influences that include Pat Metheny, Azymuth (a great band from Brazil that emerged in the 1970s), the late bassist Jaco Pastorius and Chick Corea's *Return to Forever* (especially the early edition with Airto Moreira and Joe Farrell). The fusion that Embon offers on "The Moon Is You," "Amor Latino" (which means "Latin Love" in Spanish), "Distinctive" or "Leave the Lights Out" is not a really hard or forceful type of fusion. From "Peeling Off" to "The Real Thing" to "Last Falling Angel," *The World Within* is quite melodic and is definitely on the ethereal side. Nonetheless, Embon's performances aren't really smooth jazz: "More for Less," "The Ride Home" and other selections have the mentality of improvisation, and Embon is not offering lightweight fluff or elevator music. The performances on this album have substance and creativity as well as charm.

Brazilian music is an influence on "Amor Latino" and "The Real Thing" as well as "Distinctive," "Peeling Off" and "Fly Away." However, Embon is mindful of Argentinean tango on "Last Falling Angel," which sounds a bit like something that the late bandoneón player Astor Piazzolla would have recorded. For those who are unfamiliar with his work, Piazzolla was one of the most influential and innovative musicians in the history of tango. Piazzolla's distinctive material incorporated jazz elements, and it was a big departure from the earlier tango of artists like Carlos Gardel and Libertad Lamarque.

Meanwhile, "The Ride Home," "What I've Heard" and "Coming Back" underscore Embon's appreciation of Andean music. Anyone who is familiar with the great traditional music that comes from Bolivia and Peru should be able to appreciate the perspective that Embon brings to "The Ride Home," "What I've Heard" and "Coming

Back.” Those selections aren’t Andean music in the traditional sense, but they do combine an Andean influence with electric jazz-rock fusion.

Embon’s lack of predictability is a good thing. The album is consistently melodic and maintains an ethereal outlook, but Embon is not afraid to have some diversity. Nor is he afraid to challenge preconceived notions of what it means to play “Latin jazz.”

The term “Latin jazz” is usually used in connection with Afro-Cuban jazz: for example, greats like Tito Puente, Poncho Sanchez, Ray Barretto, Mongo Santamaría, Cal Tjader, Chano Pozo, Dizzy Gillespie and Machito. In other words, jazz with a salsa influence. But there is a lot more to Latin music than Afro-Cuban music and salsa, and instead of going the Afro-Cuban route, *The World Within* favors a pan-South American style of instrumental jazz. Technically, this album is Latin jazz because it is jazz with Latin influences, but the heavily South American outlook that Embon brings to *The World Within* is quite different from what Poncho Sanchez does.

*The World Within* is a consistently engaging effort from this Israel resident/South America native.

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