

Argentine jazz musician Pablo Embon has over twelve albums to his credit and countless frequent flier miles. Extremely versatile on the piano and guitar, the “wicked strings” referred to in his latest album may allude to the cacophonous supernatural synthesized string sounds he utilizes in many of the songs.

“Learning From the Past” opens with hand percussion and is then joined by an uninteresting melody played on the keyboard. The song fails to improve despite the layering and all of the patches with the exception of the electric guitar are irksome. The andante “Sense of Jazz” features a pleasant, amiable melody that is passed between the tenor saxophone, piano and guitar making up for the dull drum solo; however the piece takes a turn for the worse when the dated keyboard returns. Harkening a chase sequence from a 1980’s B movie, “If I Had Known” starts with a great hook. Unfortunately that energy is lost when the vocal patch plays a long, slow line. The main melodic idea of the song is too cumbersome to be played on the various obtrusive keyboard patches Embon chooses.

A softer tone and touch of vibrato would emote more feeling in the saxophone opening of “Esperanza”. The guitar work is pleasant but then the song deteriorates between the return of that garish keyboard patch and a surplus of piano notes. Thankfully, the extended coda is relaxing, washing away the unease. Embon occasionally suffers from trying to cram too much into a small space. It is not until the midpoint of the title track when the piano has the lead that all of the instruments settle into each other and the tempo. The guitar adds an air of sultry intrigue and an occasional Middle Eastern ornamental snippet can be heard between the long tones.

Despite the title *Wicked Strings* Embon performs his best on piano. “Love Behind the Scenes” is an easygoing toe-tapper that is light and bouncy. The drums play appropriate jazz tag lines and the saxophone and string bass are given short solos. There is no excessive spewing of notes in this lackadaisical number. The guitar lead in “Rolling On” is played with poise and confidence blending well with the Rhodes piano patch. Embon should be wary that the syncopated passages following a quick run do not sound like a mistake or timing miscalculation. Small instances of these slight hiccups interrupt the chillness of the piece. In the allegro “Bread & Butter” the piano and drums are locked into each other creating an enjoyable jazzy listen. None of the instruments are overplaying or attempting to be *avant garde*.

“When They Return” has a dramatic expectant opening with a hushed rhythmic guitar motif that continues on beneath the minimalist piano work. A nice echo effect adds a slightly dreamy quality to the peace. Embon plays a neat mixture of sounds in “Side By Side” lead by the piano and drums in common time followed by ethereal flute tones. A slow sweeping cello joins the mix in the second half of the piece. Despite a superfluous onslaught of notes, the instruments keep within the parameters of listen-ability. More inventive sounds are heard in “Legend of Duduk”. A duduk is a double reed Armenian wind instrument and Embon utilizes a fascinating patch that captures the Eastern spirit. Accompanied by strings and finger cymbals the mysterious piece grows lush before a flute lead executes a captivating quick run.

With all of the instrument choices whether they were quality or not, Embon is best and most appreciated on the solo piano heard in “Save a Dream”. He showcases an excellent inner

metronome and sense of self in this purposeful musing. It is a satisfying close to the ironically named *Wicked Strings* and is a brilliant display of his talent.

Artist: Pablo Embon  
Album Title: *Wicked Strings* (independent)  
Reviewers Name: Kelly O'Neil  
Rating: 3 stars