

## Review for “Perennial Sounds” by Alice Neiley

*As a stream; lasting indefinitely; perpetual; recurrent; persisting with new growth; renewal;* are some of the ways Merriam Webster’s Dictionary defines “perennial”, and Pablo Embon’s most recent album, *Perennial Sounds*, does indeed feel everlasting.

Frankly, I’m not a fan of the electronic fusion species, especially when associated with jazz, but a contemporary musical attention to both song and album structure is rare, and Embon’s got it nailed. So, I paid attention. His Argentinian roots, proficiency on piano and guitar, and exposure to Middle Eastern, Hebrew, and classical music turns his albums into adventures. *Perennial Sounds* is no exception. With flavors of rock, bebop, and tinges of other experimental artists—Miles Davis, Carlos Santana, and believe it or not, Madonna jump to mind—*Perennial Sounds* defines the eclectic of electronic fusion jazz. Within each track, as well as the arrangement of the album as a whole, a layered instrumentation persists, and each composition seems to burst through the soil of the one before. From his one-man-band studio, Pablo Embon and his mixing tools, including Sonar 8 production edition, provides for us a seemingly endless, or, “perennial” journey; his creative, unexpected blend of styles a constant wake up call.

“Drizzle,” which opens *Perennial Sounds* with a powerful fist punch of guitar, drums, and synthesizer, begs for Madonna’s voice, for better or worse. Instead, clean piano lines—a high range, right handed, bounce of single notes (few chords)—float above thick instrumentation, and soon erases my disappointment about the lack of pop-star vocals that often redeem the use of synthesizers. Harmony arrives with what sounds like a *Neh*, the end blown flute used primarily in Middle Eastern music. Though all the instruments other than piano are likely electronic imitations, there’s a remarkable realness to the wooden instrument sounds and a variety of drums. “Drizzle” eventually moves from one handed piano riffs to two handed chords, laying down a thicker background for a more defined flute solo. The flute soon fades into the chord progression as well, passing its melodic loop to guitar. The handoff of this solo continues throughout the track as the piano departs from its showy fingerings to take a turn at the phrase. The synthesizer then returns again like all my least favorite 80s bands crashing a summer patio performance, but only stays a few bars before the piece returns to simplicity: full piano chords, long tones of flute, light synth; ending with a quieting Spanish guitar.

Pablo Embon’s Latin roots become increasingly obvious in “My Friend Adam,” and “Brainwashed,” which both begin similar drum rhythms as “Drizzle,” but soon layer on a calypso syncopation with what sounds like timbales and bongos. This is where we begin to hear the “perennial” concepts of repetition and persistence, not only within a single composition, but the album structure as a whole.

“Old Fashioned,” and “One Step Closer,” also begin with drums, continuing the timbre of the first three tracks; however, instead of calypso, the rhythm resembles classic swing. The swing beat bleeds into next piece, “Fire in My Hands,” but rather than drums, piano and guitar are in charge of that particular rhythm. The instrumentation also becomes more eclectic: solo violin in “Old Fashioned,” orchestral synthesizer in “One Step Closer,” and both solo violin and strong synth chords in “Fire in My Hands.” Embon organizes the tracks so they double back on each other, but he always adds a little something new, a refresher—calypso, guitar, strings. The unique fusion of styles pushes boundaries, while both the song and album structure reiterate themes of persistence and repetition—relentless, *as a stream*.

That emerging solo violin in “Old Fashioned” introduces Merriam Webster’s other definition of “perennial” into the fabric of the album: *a renewal; reawakening*. In the first half of Embon’s collection, the subtlety of each transition seems to create endless drumbeats, endless melodic loops, practically one endless song—even when shifting between so many musical traditions. No matter how unexpected the instrument, each solo moves so seamlessly in and out of complex instrumental conversation, that when the echoed sound of bells opens the title track, “Perennial Sounds,” and a new expression of endlessness takes over the second half of the album, it feels completely natural.

Every remaining track on the album has a strong and/or slow beginning, then builds up, sometimes wildly, toward Embon’s trademark cross-genre fullness. Unlike the thick sound forest of the first half, the later tracks relate to each other in a more individual way. “Time Wise,” for example, begins with urgency, a repeated string phrase on top of light, persistent drums. When the violin solos and fast paced flute arrive in layers, I immediately feel like I’m about to save the world, running along a busy street at night, followed by a film crew. By the end of the track, the string loop is on its own again, bookending the track. “The Finish Line,” has a similar rise in energy, but begins with a piano riff mirrored by saxophone at the end of the piece. The travel from simplicity to complexity and back again in these tracks gives each one its own specific set of moods. When we reach “The Finish Line,” individuality is the new expression of *Perennial Sounds*’ perpetual adventure.

“Enchanted Master,” the final track, begins with a piano alone, gradually reaches its height with flute and a synthesized xylophone, and ends with a variation on the same lighthearted piano melody. It also ends on a major chord, as if a destination has finally been reached, but an increase in tempo and light landing at the resolution splashes my face with fresh water again. These whimsical choices lead me to be absolutely positive something more is going to happen.

Up to the very last moment, *Perennial Sounds* convinces me it will continue as long as Embon’s fingers dance on those keys and Sonar buttons. For those people with a fondness for this genre, it’s a journey not to be missed. From “Drizzle,” to “Enchanted,” and, for all we know, beyond—don’t pack light. The weather will be mixed.

Artist Pablo Embon

Album: *Perennial Sounds*

