

Argentinean musician Pablo Embon has spent a majority of his life studying, playing and composing music. His innate abilities and education led him very quickly to being able to play the guitar and piano as his primary instruments. From there, his continued growth as a musician brought him into the world of jazz and jazz fusion in which he also began to compose original, alternative pieces. Between 2004 and 2009, Embon released nine albums worth of his jazz compositions, ranging from smooth and solo piano, to orchestral with classical influences. His latest release is 2012's *Muse Kaleidoscope*; a rich collection of twelve jazz instrumentals that demonstrate Embon's ability to perform and create in entertaining fashion.

Embon begins with "With My Heart On My Sleeve," but it's not indicative of his best work on the album. There are several aspects of the music that become staples of Embon's style though, including the multitude of keyboard sounds he utilizes as well as the forceful drumming that enters in partway through the song. The guitar parts that Embon plays have a distinct Spanish/Classical influence to them, but they don't always mesh with some of the keyboard tones he employs; that's where the song loses a bit of its luster.

"Not The Only One" is considerably stronger. Between the piano and the kicking drum track, this piece gets off to a rollicking start. What really distinguishes the arrangement though is the saxophone. More than just a means to accentuate the song, the sax carries the melody and lends a smooth jazz vibe to an otherwise, completely energetic piece. But even when the saxophone is used to accentuate, it's still done very well; "Running Backwards" has it come in near the song's end, and it helps it to close on a very jazzy note. Up until that point the song still sounds great as is given the exotic sounding percussion and strong blending of sound that the piano and guitar create together.

Embon doesn't feature the guitar nearly as much as he does the piano and keyboards, but the times where he does are usually treats to behold. "Morning Storyteller" is one such track that again, is a stronger piece because of the interaction between the keyboards and guitar. Embon doesn't play with a high degree of finesse or virtuosity on the guitar; he won't be rivaling Pat Metheny that is, but his talent is enough that he's able to create and sustain atmospheres that are textured and varied.

Coming as a bit of an unexpected surprise is Embon's bass playing on "East & West." As opposed to other songs such as "My 2 Cents" and "Same Old Story" which have strong, pronounced, but fairly standard bass lines, "East & West" utilizes a funky, slap bass kind of sound, more akin to someone like Victor Wooten in terms of sound and style. The effect this has on the song is propulsive, and reveals Embon's talents for jazz fusion along with more traditional jazz sounds.

There are a few other songs on which Embon gets fairly adventurous with his arrangements. "Get Over It" begins on a dark and somber note, with the piano being the major instrument at play. In startling fashion, the drums blast their way in after about two minutes and the song lightens up considerably. Embon continues to work his way through different sounds and keyboard lines throughout the rest of the song's entirety, resulting in an engagingly dynamic song. The aforementioned "Same Old Story" does something similar in playing around with different sounds, but this track incorporates the use of the guitar and the flute. The flute in

particular brings an exotic quality to the record and it does a remarkable job in driving the song along in a wistful way. It helps too that the saxophone comes in and adds yet another vibrant layer of sound to an already rich piece of music.

The only real moment of weakness on *Muse Kaleidoscope* is on the album's closing track, "Happy Endings." Similarly to what happened in the opening number, Embon uses a multitude of different keyboard sounds, but not all of them mesh well. Unfortunately, one in particular sounds grating and annoying; far removed from the otherwise serene environment the song tries to convey. But considering how well Embon handles the rest of his material, these missteps could easily be chalked up to valiant attempts at creativity.

Pablo Embon displays a great deal of talent for performance and composition on *Muse Kaleidoscope*. With twelve songs that average out to around five minutes plus, there's no shortage of material to listen to either. Embon strikes a good balance between complexity and accessibility with a record that doesn't take itself to the extremes of long-winded improvisations but instead focuses on tight, structured performances, that don't skimp on taking chances either.

Artist: Pablo Embon

Album: *Muse Kaleidoscope*

Review by: Heath Andrews

Rating: 4.5 Stars (out of 5)