

The celebrated Japanese storyteller Haruki Murakami wrote: “The pure joy of listening to good music transcends questions of genre.”

Adam Berenson—across over twenty recordings—offers incontrovertible evidence that savvy surpasses any confederacy for categorization. The term is egregiously overused but Berenson is a bona fide Renaissance man; a screenplay writer, educator, scholar, and composer/musician of limitless possibilities. He is equally at home in the Court of the Crimson King, or with Chopin, or Coltrane.

My first exposure to the music of Adam Berenson came with the release of his double-album *Lumen* (Dream Play Records) in 2015. That expansive compilation of jazz, electronica, blues, and string quartet pieces, seemed a risky proposition, but Berenson’s multi-genre fluency elegantly, and understatedly, effected a cohesive collection. The Berenson catalog is awash in albums that refuse to home in on a particular style. 2017’s *Penumbra* is another case in point; the duo release with bassist Scott Barnum has Berenson on Korg Triton Extreme, Yamaha SK20 Symphonic Ensemble, Roland SH101, Casio CDP-120, and piano. There are traces of baroque, sonic experimentation, and trance-like melodies. On *Introverted Cultures* (2017) and *Fatidic Dreams* (2018) the stylistic palette is similarly broad. But Berenson is not predictable; he offers no stick-and-carrot formulas. His fully-acoustic *Stringent and Sempiternal* (2019) includes works of Miles Davis, Bud Powell, Wayne Shorter, Thelonious Monk, and Pat Metheny.

Berenson spent the summer of 2019 holed up in a borrowed basement recording studio, again with his Korg Triton Extreme and Roland SH101 synthesizer, adding a Prophet Rev2 analog synthesizer and a Fender Rhodes. When he emerged, it was with the material for this box-set solo album, *Every Beginning Is A Sequel*. Across eighty-three pieces clocking in at more than seven hours of recorded music, Berenson required multiple takes on only two tracks. Almost all of the compositions are original; the exceptions being Carla Bley’s “Jesus Maria” and “Dreams So Real,” “Mevlevia”, by jazz guitarist Mick Goodrick, Ornette Coleman’s “Lonely Woman”, Coltrane’s “Giant Steps” and the “Adagio for Glass Harmonica” by Mozart. That handful of assorted covers exemplify an epic-sized collection embracing unambiguously varied music.

The distinctiveness of content on *Every Beginning Is A Sequel* is worth a deeper dive, as is the composer’s creative approach. In a recent interview for *All About Jazz* Berenson explained his method—or more precisely—his lack of a preconceived mechanism: “I go into the studio with only my instruments. Sometimes there are discussions with the other musicians, and at times there may be no conversation at all as related to the material. These albums are characterized by pieces whose premises may be construed as 'textures' or 'atmospheres.’” This approach makes it all the more fascinating that Berenson’s prolific output here is so consistently engaging with momentum and pace that belies the collection's massive scope.

The substantial presence of electronic instruments dictates neither the design or texture of this compilation. Berenson does give us an assortment of cathodic pieces such as “A White Spectrum,” and “Noise Pollution” but also noise and melody hybrids: “Amor Fati,” “Reality Is Always Multiple,” and “The Mirror Stage,” straddle soundscapes. Mechanized compositions are the exception rather than the rule. *Every Beginning Is A Sequel* gives listeners trance-like orchestrations like “Dreaming Philosophy,” “Denude Oneself Before the Ghosts,” and “The Logic of Poetics,” the more ambient “Don’t Ever Leave Me” and the percussive pieces “Mind Control,” and “The Constitution of the Id”. It’s safe to say the Berenson’s reading of the often-recorded “Lonely Woman” is unlike any other version. It *is* jazz, but it’s otherworldly jazz. His take on “Giant Steps” is closer to the original but enhanced with ingenious configurations that push the piece to the breaking point.

In a different vein we hear Berenson’s affinity for alternative music: the funk flavored “Strange Dramaturgy,” heavy metal influences on “The Problem of Evil,” reflections of early Pink Floyd in “The Thing Outside of Itself,” and Berenson seems to channel Rick Wakeman on “Queen Isabella the Catholic”. In contrast, there are moments of cinematic beauty such as the stunning “This Doesn’t Communicate Anything,” the gentle take on Bley’s “Dreams So Real,” and the literal interpretation of Mozart’s “Adagio for Glass Harmonica”.

If a six-disc solo set seems an indulgent act, let the wealth of disparate but acquiescent compositions dispel that notion. *Every Beginning Is A Sequel* is an eclectic document of self-discovery; plangent, diffusive or rhapsodic in varying degrees. Berenson doesn’t consider himself an experimentalist, though his experimental attitude is always on display. This collection is the confluence of Berenson’s influences – pieces deeply informed but not overtly predisposed by his mentoring from Paul Bley or his penchant for the music of György Ligeti, Helmut Lachenmann, Klaus Lang, Beat Furrer, Alberto Posadas, Ramon Lazkano, Ornette Coleman, Eberhard Weber, Thom Yorke (and Radiohead), Keith Jarrett, and Beethoven. The written word is a meager substitute for experiencing this music. Let it spill over you and listen with open ears.

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