

Local Angle

SUSAN VANDONGEN

His art's a synthesis.

Adam Berenson

“Just please tell me I’m not going to look like a member of A Flock of Seagulls,” says Adam Berenson, as he poses with a vintage synthesizer. Heaven forbid he should be mistaken for a throwback to an ’80s “hair band.”

In fact, Berenson doesn’t want to be labeled at all. “As soon as you try to call me one thing, I freak out, I change,” he says.

So what do we call him? Pianist? Screenwriter? Composer? Soloist?

Arranger? Ensemble performer? Teacher? All of the above?

Berenson, 29, just finished recording his fourth CD, to be released on his own Dream Play label. It’s not a snap to characterize his music, either. It’s jazz with a strong infusion from the modern classical tradition. Critics have called it abstract, tuneful and “unpredictable.” Downbeat liked his “quirkiness” and “unshackled spontaneity.”

He teaches classical and jazz piano and theory at the Settlement School and plays at venues including Chris’ Cafe and Ortlieb’s.

But that’s Berenson’s “musician” side. A graduate of New England Conservatory and NYU’s film school, Berenson combined his twin passions for film and music to script a tale of a fictitious prodigy named Julian Frolotaninni.

“It’s like a classical music version of *This Is Spinal Tap*,” he says. “I picture Julian on the *Charlie Rose Show*, just being totally obnoxious and irritating. Julian is extremely talented, but he’s still just a kid. He listens to Webern but he eats Boo Berry.”

Could there be just a hint of Adam in Julian? “He’s sort of like my inner child,” says Berenson, who grew up in Penn Valley and now lives in Conshohocken. The script was turned down by Sundance and HBO, but Berenson isn’t fazed. “I’ve learned to love rejection,” he says.

OK, so maybe there is a label for Adam Berenson: a comic?

“No, no. Not quite,” he says. “I’m actually quite serious about being absurd.” □

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