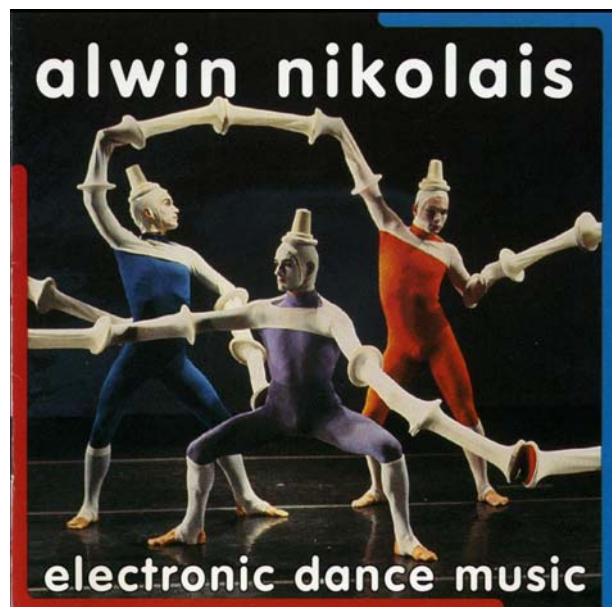


The Electronic Dance Music of Alwin Nikolais

Tensile Involvement



1. Revels: Dance 3 (1986)	(6:24)
2. Ten Legs: Dance 1 (1989)	(3:22)
3. Mechanical Organ: Dance 2 (1980)	(2:25)
4. Mechanical Organ: Dance 4 (1980)	(5:08)
5. Frail Demons: Dance 1 (1984)	(2:50)
6. Tribe: Dance 2 (1975)	(2:57)
7. Pierrot: Dance 2 (1986)	(2:00)
8. Blank on Blank: Excerpt (1987)	(1:55)
9. Pierrot: Dance 3 (1986)	(2:53)
10. Aviary: Dance 1 (1978)	(2:49)
11. Aviary: Dance 2 (1978)	(2:06)
12. Graph: Overture (1984)	(1:04)
13. Chimera: Dance 1 (1966)	(2:52)
14. Styx: Excerpt (1976)	(2:48)
15. Gallery: Overture (1978)	(1:23)
16. Frail Demons: Dance 2 (1984)	(3:38)
17. Aviary: Dance 3 (1978)	(2:51)
18. Graph: Dance 3 (1984)	(3:01)
19. Contact: Excerpt (1985)	(2:40)
20. Blank on Blank: Excerpt (1987)	(5:59)
21. Crucible: Excerpt (1985)	(9:44)

Total Playing Time: 71:42

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Notes

Alwin Nikolais was a unique artist. As the father of mixed media, his skill and artistry abounded in all the theater art forms. Primarily he was a choreographer, but he called his works “dance theater.” In the early 1950s, he programmed his pieces as “The Theater of Light-Sound-Color-Motion.”

Born in Southington, Connecticut in 1910, Nikolais’s early years and early career were in acting, music and puppetry. It was not until the late 1930s that he began his work as dancer-choreographer in Hartford, Connecticut, where he was commissioned by the Avery Memorial Theater, a part of the Wadsworth Atheneum, to create an evening length work to the also commissioned music of Ernst Krenek.

Previously his work and study as a pianist-organist found him accompanying silent films. This sort of accompanying required from the musician not only a playing skill but also a versatility in improvisation, matching movement to sound, and evoking mood to situation.

Nik was drawn initially to dance by his involvement with the percussion scores used by the illustrious early twentieth-century German dancer Mary Wigman. In trying to learn more about percussion, he was lured into dance class and thus his career began. His development of music and dance occurred simultaneously.

His introduction to the twelve-tone technique opened his mind to the expanding areas of atonal music, and his dealing with music as sound per se. In 1948, after being appointed director of the Henry Street Playhouse in New York, Nikolais formed the Playhouse Dance Company, later known as the Nikolais Dance Theater, and began his aesthetic orientation toward dance as a study of motion. By the 1950s, he had ceased

creating literal dances and began his explorations and eventual milieu as an abstractionist.

Sound became an important part of his abstract theater.

For his first dances, which involved his new thinking of dance as both a visual and kinetic art, he used live percussion scores in which he directed his dancers to play instruments of all nature. There was a combination of children’s toy instruments as well as harsh and resonant automobile brake drums, and other pitched auto parts which he also used to accompany classes.

Once he installed his own tape recording machines, he quickly used the limited range these instruments provided in a new way, slowing and increasing speed and reversing sound. He also made the sounds adhere to the choreographic structure (not the other way around), thereby giving the dance its independence from the musical phrasing. But the real need remained: the search for new sound. Nik made a sound library, recording noises and percussion and vocal sounds, which the French aptly called *musique concrète*. Needless to say, he became a master at splicing bits and pieces.

From 1956 to 1962 Nikolais composed eleven major scores for his theater pieces using such techniques. These included *Kaleidoscope* (1956), *Allegory* (1959), and *Totem* (1960). In 1963, James Seawright, who at the time was assisting Nik in his productions and also working at the Columbia-Princeton Center for Electronic Music, recorded a sound bank for the production *Imago* (1963). With this material, Nikolais created his first synthesizer score. *Imago* won the Paris Grand Prix in 1968 and launched the Nikolais Dance Theater towards its national and primarily international acclaim.

During the same period, Seawright came to Nik and told him of a young man who had invented and constructed a simplified synthesizer and insisted that Nik visit the electronic fair currently being held in New York. Nik did so and met Robert Moog. He was completely taken by the new machine and after making some suggestions to Moog, (which Moog made), Nik bought the inventor's first machine, through aid of a Guggenheim Fellowship. All of the Nikolais's scores from 1963 to 1975 found their sources primarily from that synthesizer.

The Luscious Tent (1968), *Haunting Echo* (1969), the wild and hysterical *Scenario* (1971), and the lighting masterpiece *Crossfade* (1974) all were derived from the Moog. Moog himself was astonished by what his machine could produce for Nik. This machine was later acquired by the Museum of Musical Instruments at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor as the first Moog synthesizer.

The Synclavier was Nik's next source of sound and since the mid-1970s has remained the major instrument in the Nikolais soundroom. *Guignol* (1977), *Arporisms* (1977), *Gallery*

(1978), *Pond* (1982), *Crucible* (1985), *Blank on Blank* (1987), all were created using the Synclavier.

Alwin Nikolais has been honored and awarded throughout the world. He has received the French Legion of Honor, the Kennedy Center Honors, National Medal of the Arts, two Guggenheim Fellowships, as well as Mellon, Ford, and Rockefeller grants. He has been a recipient of NEA grants since 1966, been awarded five honorary doctorates, all for his remarkable achievements in Dance Theater. His genius has influenced several generations of artists.

—Murray Louis

New York City, February, 1993

“Any aspiring innovator who experiments with slide projections, light play on dancer's bodies and fabric as an extension of the human form will find that Alwin Nikolais has been there before.”

—Anna Kisselgoff
The New York Times, 1987

Production Notes

The electronic dance scores of master choreographer/composer Alwin Nikolais. Masterpieces from the 1960s to the 1980s including *Revels*, *Frail Demons*, *Blank on Blank*, *Aviary*, and *Chimera*. Original liner notes by Murray Louis.

Produced by Murray Louis

Executive Producer: Joseph R. Dalton

Digitally remastered from the original analog tapes by Murray Louis and Ellen Fitton, engineer at Sony Classical Productions, Inc., NYC, 1992.

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