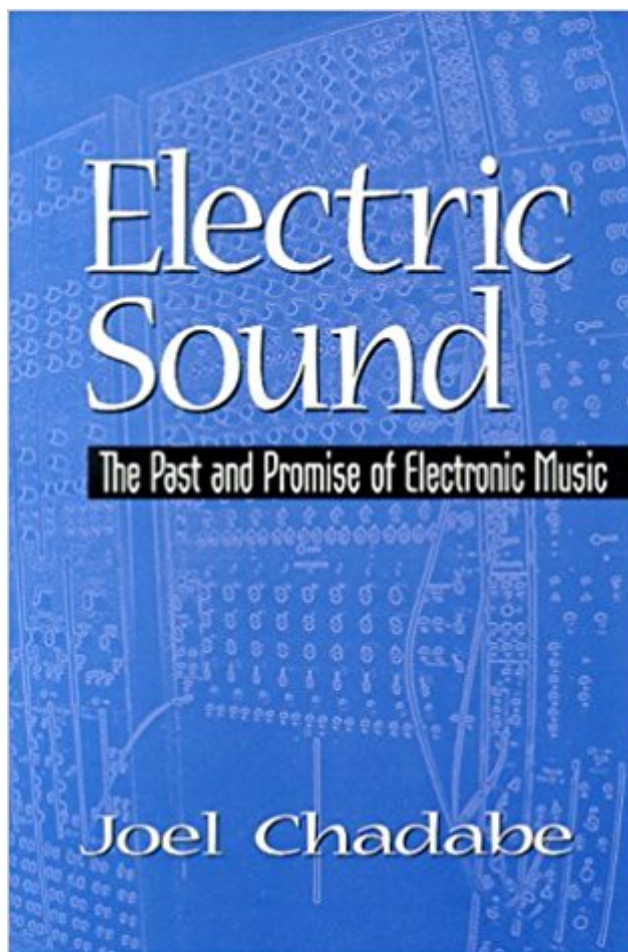


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# Electric Sound: The Past And Promise Of Electronic Music



## Synopsis

With a truly global perspective, this vivid and readable narrative provides a comprehensive overview of the history of electronic music. The author draws upon his combined experience as composer, performer, researcher, entrepreneur, and teacher to provide insight into every aspect of electronic music, including the music itself, the instruments, and the business. Based on more than 150 interviews with leaders in the field, this book allows readers to understand how and why the musicians, engineers and businessmen did what they did to develop the modern synthesizer to its current state.

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## Customer Reviews

With a truly global perspective, this vivid and readable narrative provides a comprehensive overview of the history of electronic music. The author draws upon his combined experience as composer, performer, researcher, entrepreneur, and teacher to provide insight into every aspect of electronic music, including the music itself, the instruments, and the industry. Based on more than 150 interviews with leaders in the field, this book allows students to understand how and why the musicians, engineers and businessmen did what they did to develop the modern synthesizer to its current state.

The goal of this book is to make the history of electronic music clear for any interested person, whether professional, student, nonelectronic musician, or observer. It tells the story behind the music and instruments, showing not just what happened during one of the most exciting periods in

the history of music, but how and why it happened and what it felt like to be there.

After this book went up in price (I paid less than \$20 for it) I decided to re-review it. It's a good book. You get a feel for the excitement people were feeling in the dawn of the information age via first hand interviews. A great read, but in general sometimes the technology takes precedence over the music making. Since electronic and computer music is still in it's infancy, that really didn't bother me. Well written, interesting, often humorous, unapologetically archival, but not worth \$80. If/when the price goes down, snag a copy, if not, go to a library.

It's not the most interesting text for the subject material, but it's required for a lot of Electro-Acoustic classes. It covers a great history and if you're interested in the topic, I'd recommend it. If it's not your cup of tea, I wouldn't pick it up for pleasure.

Outside the academy, the history of electronic music is more or less coextensive with the history of the African diaspora's vernacular music: rock, funk, disco, techno, and hip-hop. This book mentions precisely one black musician, Herbie Hancock, and then in a one-sentence aside. I know this book is concerned more with "art" music than with popular music, but what kind of scholar claims to be writing a comprehensive guide to this area that doesn't mention Jimi Hendrix or Miles Davis at all? Meanwhile, the book devotes enormous amounts of space to John Cage's non-electronic music. The emphasis is shockingly lopsided. I don't know Joel Chadabe well and don't impute any sinister motives to him, and the book is more symptomatic of the academic music world generally.

This reviewer considers "Electric Sound" to be an important text on the history of 'academic', 'art' or 'classical' electronic music. The subtitle: 'The Past and Promise of Electronic Music' does indeed indicate the historical nature of the work, but the 'promise' seems to refer more to a promise fulfilled, rather than what is described in the last chapter: 'Where Are We Going?' ( which consists of less than 20 pages ). To give you an idea of the book's scope, consider the chapter titles: The Early Instruments, The Great Opening Up of Music to All Sounds, Expansion of the Tape Music Idea, Out of the Studios, Computer Music, Synthesizers, The MIDI World, Inputs and Controls, Making Sound, Automata, Interaction, Where Are We Going? Each chapter illustrates its subject by describing the artists and the particular works that were created using that specific approach to sound realization. The style of writing in the book is conversational in tone, rather than academic. If you love electronic music, then "Electric Sound" will become a welcome addition to your personal library.

Yes, this is a steep price. But if you are deeply interested in the history of electronic music this book is essential. It covers the origins of electric music synthesis from the turn of the century experiments to fairly current commentary on the digital state of the art. Chadabe, also a fine composer and musician, writes with authority on the classical aspect of electronic music. If this book has a flaw it is that it fails to look at the influence of pop/rock culture on electronic music. But to be fair that is not his purpose and this material is covered well elsewhere. I hesitated to purchase this book for some time due to the price but when I did get it I must say that I have no regrets. It is an extremely useful reference which I use regularly and it is well written and fun to read. In short, if you are a fanatic, get this book.

Although there was a spate of published historical surveys of electronic music during the early-to-mid 1970's, with the exception of Peter Manning's *\*Electronic & Computer Music\**, there have been almost no synoptic overviews of the subject since then. Now comes Joel Chadabe's *\*Electric Sound\**. One must admit that Chadabe's book does fill a void in the historical consideration of electronic music, and, for that reason alone, I wish that I could be more enthusiastic about it. The focus of this extremely overpriced paperbound book, however, is less on the significant achievements of composers of electronic music than it is on the technological means of creating it. One is hard pressed, indeed, to find references to more than a handful of significant compositions. Such an attitude is typical of the Post-Modern mentality (and, yes, there is such a thing, I'm sorry to say), in which artists of all stripes arrogantly offer over-intellectualized concepts and elaborate compositional and performance processes as justification for whatever results they achieve, no matter how nugatory these results may be. Here, one finds an inadvertent confirmation of that most basic critique of electronic music: That it is ultimately the soundtrack to a futuristic, technocratic nightmare in which the technology itself has become more vibrant and alive than those who create and ostensibly manipulate it. If one were to go by this book, then one would be justified in believing that, with perhaps the exception of Stockhausen's works, there have been no masterpieces of electronic music whatsoever. There has, however, been a lot of interesting hardware and software created for it. Could there be a more damning indictment of any artistic field of endeavor? I should add that this book also suffers from the usual flaws that one might expect when a contemporary artist surveys his own field: in this case, aesthetic bias and cronyism. On the other hand, *\*Electric Sound\** does at least cover the activities of most of the putative major figures in the field from the 1970's to the mid-1990's (although, again, it does this principally in terms of what technology they

happen to be using). For this reason, I give it a provisional recommendation, simply because it is the only book I know, besides Peter Manning's also somewhat flawed, but generally far better effort, that covers this period at all. The definitive history of electronic and computer music, however, remains to be written.

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