

Alva Noto/Ryuichi Sakamoto: Glass

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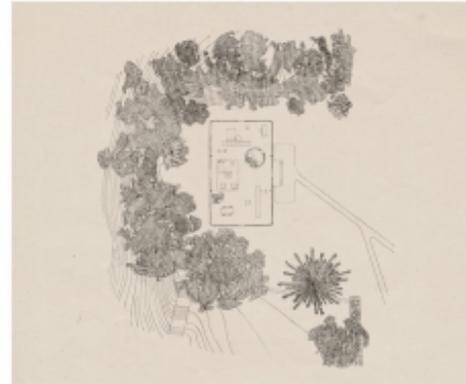
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Alva Noto and Ryuichi Sakamoto's *Glass* is unique among the duo's collaborations in that it's holistic, blending the artists' personalities instead of exploiting their differences.

Alva Noto, born Carsten Nicolai, lent his name to the Noton label, a name synonymous with some of the most extreme and austere electronic music of the last two decades. Just last month, Noton released *Live 2002*, a collaboration between Noto and fellow fringe electronic musicians Ryoji Ikeda and Mika Vainio that felt too austere to be live.

GLASS

Alva Noto & Ryuichi Sakamoto



Ryuichi Sakamoto is a happy-go-lucky figure by comparison, known for his placid movie scores and his crucial role in the influential and aggressively goofy Yellow Magic Orchestra. The duo have recorded a series of five good-to-great albums together, the first two of which—2002's *Vrioon* and 2005's *Insen*—remain classics of the clicks-and-cuts genre. Interestingly, they're also responsible for the score for *The Revenant*.

Typically, a Noto/Sakamoto album consists of Sakamoto ruminating on a piano as Noto's electronics burble in the background. *Glass*, for the first time, finds a midway point between the two, and it suggests this pairing still contains untapped potential.

We can guess which sounds were contributed by which artist. The digital wind in the background is most likely Noto, the jewel tones in the foreground are probably Sakamoto. But it's ultimately a brilliant synthesis of the extremes the two artists represent: beautiful but potentially dangerous, a work of art to admire but not to touch.

The single-track, 37-minute piece is a recording of a site-specific performance at architect Philip Johnson's Glass House, and many of these sounds were made with the actual walls and window panes of the house. In live footage, we can discover how many of these noises were made; Noto rubbing a mallet across one of the windows, for instance. Those curious about how the individual sounds are made may find those videos enlightening. Others will prefer to process this music through their imagination.

One of the remarkable things about *Glass* is how it inhabits all our associations with glass: it can be pure and gorgeous but also brittle and sharp. One of the most prominent sounds in the mix, which grows gradually louder as the piece progresses, sounds like a rain of glass shards. It feels like it might cut us if we weren't protected by our speakers.

Glass doesn't build so much as deepen. When new elements arrive, they're not to push the music towards a breaking point but to add color and texture. Towards the end of the piece, a synth choir similar to something on *Music for Airports* makes itself known, and though it's the first melodic element we hear, it never rises above a murmur.

The piece's fluidity helps mitigate an unfortunate fact: it's short, perhaps too much so to really create an immersive environment. This piece would have been wonderful tacked onto the end of Sakamoto's *async* from last year as a double-disc bonus. But as it stands, it's a promising development in a 15-year musical dialogue that's far from over.

- Label:
- Release Date: