

Neil Rolnick

## MONO

Project Description 09-09-10

*MONO* is a series of musical meditations on the fragility of perception: its appreciation, its loss, and our ability to adjust to changes in our perceptual abilities. The piece is an evening length consideration of how our perceptions shape us.

On March 31, 2008 between 9:30 and 11:00 a.m. I lost all hearing in my left ear. The loss is permanent and is accompanied by a loud white noise tinnitus where the left ear should be. With only one ear, I now hear the world monophonically. There is no stereo or surround sound in my world.

Beginning with a description of my hearing loss and the changes in how I hear the world, *MONO* expands its scope to consider perception more generally in a narrative drawn from stories of how various people have dealt with significant losses or changes in their 5 senses: hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch.

*MONO* is a series of twelve pieces which explore the loss of perceptual ability and the subsequent changes in how we relate to the world in response to that loss. It is scored for 6 instruments, 4 voices, live digital sound and audio processing, dancers, and video projection with live recording and processing. The performance includes segments for solo computer, which I perform, as well as for combinations of instrumental and vocal ensembles, dancers and video.

While spoken text ties the performance together, it is not a linear theatrical narrative. I think of it as a musical work, more a chamber oratorio than a musical play. Still, it needs to tell a number of stories clearly enough to bring the audience along and engage them with my ideas about how our perceptions shape us. It also needs to integrate the multiple media in service of the narrative, and not present itself as a 3-ring circus of media overload.

I began the project by using the web and social networking technology to collect stories which were worked into a narrative for the full length performance. In 2009 and early 2010 I completed two segments of the piece, totaling about 30 minutes of music. They include *MONO Prelude*, for solo laptop and speaker, and *Numb*, for soprano voice, string trio, computer, dancers and video. The *MONO Prelude* was performed numerous times in the US and on tour in China, and *Numb* was performed twice in New York City in April and May 2010. I completed the full text in June 2010 while in residence at the MacDowell Colony. I expect to have the music for the entire work written and to plan the theatrical and media aspects of the production 2011, and to mount a full performance in 2012.

My collaborators on the project so far include playwright Barbara Blatner, video artist R. Luke DuBois, and choreographer Sasha Soreff.

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Sound and video samples: [http://www.neilrolnick.com/MONO\\_samples.html](http://www.neilrolnick.com/MONO_samples.html)

Background: [http://www.neilrolnick.com/hearingblog/?page\\_id=91](http://www.neilrolnick.com/hearingblog/?page_id=91)