

Neil Rolnick

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Composer Neil Rolnick pioneered in the use of computers in musical performance, beginning in the late 1970s. Based in New York City since 2002, his music has been performed world wide, including recent performances in Cuba, China, Mexico and across the US and Europe. His string quartet *Oceans Eat Cities* was performed at COP21, the UN Global Climate Summit in Paris in Dec. 2015.

Rolnick's music often explores combinations of digital sampling, interactive multimedia, and acoustic vocal, chamber and orchestral works. In the 1980s and '90s he developed the first integrated electronic arts graduate and undergraduate programs in the US, at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's iEAR Studios, in Troy, NY.

Though much of work has been in areas which connect music and technology, and is therefore considered in the realm of "experimental" music, his music has always been highly melodic and accessible. Whether working with electronic sounds, acoustic ensembles, or combinations of the two, his music has been characterized by critics as "sophisticated," "hummable and engaging," and as having "good senses of showmanship and humor."

In the fall of 2022 *One For The Ages*, a 30 minute streaming event for 10 instruments and 4 dancers, will be premiered the Ensemble Échappé. Rolnick's 22nd CD, including *Lockdown Fantasies* and *Journey's End* is scheduled for an early 2023 release on Other Minds Recordings. *En La Frontera*, a large scale work for the Ónix Ensemble, will be premiered in Mexico City in 2023.

Rolnick's *Lockdown Fantasies* for piano and computer was premiered by Geoffrey Bursleson at the Tribeca New Music Festival in December 2021, and Rolnick spent January-April 2022 at the Wurlitzer Foundation in Taos, NM. His CD "*Oceans Eat Cities*," was released in March 2021 on the Albany Records label.

In 2020 he received a New Music USA Project Grant, and his work was featured at the Primavera en la Habana festival in Cuba, and at the Higher Ground Festival in New York City. In 2019 he received an Individual Artist Grant from the New York State Council on the Arts and performed his work in New York, San Francisco, Portland OR, Seattle, Austin TX, Crested Butte CO, and Seoul S. Korea.

Rolnick was sidelined for most of 2018, caring for his wife of 45 years who passed away that summer. In 2019 he commemorated her memory with two pieces: *Messages*, for solo laptop and 2 dancers, which repurposes phone messages from before and during her illness; and *Journey's End* for pianist Kahtleen Supové, focusing on his wife's battle with cancer, and her grace in accepting her mortality.

In 2018 he wrote *Declaration*, a setting of the Declaration of Independence, for the School of Visual Arts in NYC. In 2017 Rolnick completed *Deal With The Devil* for pianist Kathleen Supové and violinist Jennifer Choi, and *Mirages* for solo pianist and computer.

Neil Rolnick was born in 1947, in Dallas, Texas. He earned a BA in English literature from Harvard College in 1969. He studied musical composition with Darius Milhaud at the Aspen Music School, with John Adams and Andrew Imbrie at the San Francisco Conservatory, and with Richard Felciano and Olly Wilson at UC Berkeley, where he earned a PhD in musical composition in 1980. He studied computer music at Stanford with John Chowning and James A. Moorer, and worked as a researcher at IRCAM in Paris, France, from 1977 to 1979. From 1981-2013 he was a Professor of Music at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

REVIEWS

[*Oceans Eat Cities* is] "musically gripping: the use of mathematics, computers, and acoustic instruments is magisterially managed. ... A whole new world of sounds is present here, beautifully realized ... Rolnick is a fabulous musician and his own best advocate. A very rewarding disc indeed."

– Colin Clarke's review of *Oceans Eat Cities* CD, *Fanfare Magazine* (September/October 2021)

"The composer Neil Rolnick has a knack for endowing his electronic and electroacoustic works with genuine humanity."

– Steve Smith, *The New Yorker* (November 11, 2019)

"... a terrific concert. Rolnick plays with the lines between computer and acoustic music. ... The laptop pieces ... were entirely as engaging as the acoustic ones. ... *WakeUp* involved samples from two Everly Brothers songs ... merging and melding into each other and in and out of various shadings of dreamlike states as the sound paced back and forth across the stage."

– Anne Midgette, *Washington Post* (January 31, 2016)

"For over 30 years [Rolnick] has helped to create a much changed musical landscape in the United States in terms of musical aesthetics and the application of technology in concert performance."

– Frank J Oteri, *NewMusicBox.org* feature interview (April 2013)

[*MONO Prelude* has] "a haunting spoken text ... with driven, vital music"

– Allan Kozinn, *NY Times* (January 14, 2011)

"Neil Rolnick ... [is] a prolific and inventive composer of electronic music ... revisiting the joys of acoustic instruments."

– Allan Kozinn, *NY Times Sunday Arts & Leisure Section* (May 15, 2009)

"Sonic tourism at its most insightful."

– Molly Sheridan, *NewMusicBox* (March 9, 2009)

"I was ... riveted by Mr. Rolnick's teeming piece [*Digits*] and Ms. Chow's brilliant playing. ... It all made for an exhilarating interactive piece."

– Anthony Tommasini, *New York Times* (April 13, 2007)

"Rolnick's computer echoes and multiplies certain notes and phrases, producing an ivory current that whips and swirls around the performer ... *Digits* is one of the most effective items in [Kathleen Supové's] repertoire."

– Steve Smith, *Time Out New York* (November 9, 2006)

"Visceral, sophisticated, electro-acoustic collection with a sense of humor"

– Ken Smith, *Gramophone* (June 2005)

"Wit, fun and the most delightful virtuosity ... [Rolnick] is a wonderfully sly musician, laid back, easy, but sharply rhythmic, with an ear for just the right sound at just the right time."

– Greg Sandow, *The American Music Center's NewMusicBox* www.newmusicbox.org (April 1, 2003)

"Although 'Rico Songs & Interludes' is compositionally sophisticated and boasts equally smart lyrics, the work captivates mostly because of how much fun it is. Hummable and engaging, the hourlong piece leaves you wanting more."

– Steve Barnes, [Albany, NY] *Times Union* (September 15, 1997)

"Rolnick's *Heat: The Rise and Fall of Isabella Rico* took the group into salsa over film noir-ish video images. Odd meters enlivened the pop texture ... accompanied by a sentimental childlike violin solo, to chilling effect."

-- Kyle Gann, *Village Voice* (June 28, 1994)

"The best work came from Neil B. Rolnick, whose vernacularly flavored electronic music is already known and admired. Mr. Rolnick's pieces *Macedonian AirDrumming*, *Vocal Chords* and *I Like It* -- all had pop elements but were really serious works of art. But *fun* serious works of art."

-- John Rockwell, *New York Times* (June 1, 1991)

"[*ElectriCity*] is a magnificent work of pastoral beauty and sinister industry ... essential listening for anyone interested in where 'classical' music is going in the next century."

-- Cliff Furnald, *College Media Journal* (July 3, 1992)