

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 his 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. 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, and Rolnick's 22nd CD, including *Lockdown Fantasies* and *Journey's End* will be released on the Other Minds label. *En La Frontera*, a large scale work for the Onix Ensemble, will be premiered in Mexico City in 2023.

Neil Rolnick was born in 1947, in Dallas, Texas. He earned a BA in English from Harvard in 1969. He studied composition with Darius Milhaud at the Aspen Music School, and with John Adams at the San Francisco Conservatory. He earned a PhD in musical composition in 1980 from UC Berkeley. He studied computer music at Stanford with John Chowning, and was a researcher at IRCAM in Paris, France, from 1977-79.

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

"... ethereal bell-like tones under beautifully lyrical solos and an ostinato of plucked strings."

– Gail Wein, *Washington Post*, January 20, 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)

"In their final duet [in *The Technophobe and the Madman*] ... their song rang true and clear, but isolated in the framework of their separate worlds, they each seemed utterly, untouchably alone."

– Tresca Weinstein, [Albany, NY] *Times Union* (March 4, 2001)

"Rolnick's 'Calypso,' ... had a freewheeling, slightly circusy character his 'Hush,' by contrast, was built on pianissimo sustained sounds, and his 'Ratchet' combined attractive melodic lines, energetic rhythmic grooves and sustained chordal sections that were backdrops for improvisation."

– Allan Kozinn, *New York Times* (January 14, 1998)

"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)

"His music is state-of-the-art computer stuff, but Rolnick has good senses of humor and showmanship, and he's never cold or inhuman."

-- Kyle Gann, *Village Voice* (June 4, 1991)

"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)

"This ... is what distinguishes Rolnick's music from the majority of today's electronic music. It has an ability to enchant, and to amuse without reducing the power and beauty of the traditional material it emulates."

-- Cliff Furnald, *College Media Journal* (May 15, 1992)

"A cut above, artistically speaking, is Neil B. Rolnick's *Balkanization*, which fades girls' choruses from Bulgaria and Yugoslavia in and out of a synthesized accompaniment."

-- Lesley Valdes, *Philadelphia Inquirer* (September 20, 1990)

"Among the brighter lights on the horizons of contemporary music ... Even listeners with conservative taste will appreciate Rolnick's craftsmanship, and particularly his decision to make non-gimmicky, ultimately musical use of his gear."

-- Bob Doerschuk, *Keyboard Magazine* (April 1988)