

Neil Rolnick

870 West 181st St., Apt 63
New York, NY 10033 USA

email: neil@neilrolnick.com
cell: (917)848-3008

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 Kathleen 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, on commission from 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.

2016 saw the release of Rolnick's 20th CD, *Ex Machina*, on the Innova label, as well as the digital re-release of his *iFiddle Concerto* by the American Composers Orchestra..

In 2014 and 2015 Rolnick completed *Oceans Eat Cities* (2015), commissioned by the Tribeca New Music Festival, *Cello Ex Machina* (2015), *Silicon Breath* (2014), commissioned by the New York State Council on the Arts, and *Dynamic RAM & Concert Grand* (2014), commissioned by the Fromm Foundation. During this period Rolnick also completed the first two of a series of new

solo laptop performance pieces, *O Brother!* and *WakeUp*, deconstructing recordings by Rolnick's younger brother and by the Everly Brothers, respectively.

2014 also saw the second release of Rolnick's *The iFiddle Concerto*, available digitally from the American Composers Orchestra, featuring violinist Todd Reynolds.

In 2012 and 2013 Rolnick wrote, recorded and released *Gardening At Gropius House*, on Innova. The title piece is a concerto for violin, computer and ensemble, commissioned by the Juilliard School in New York. The CD also includes *Anosmia*, commissioned by the San Francisco Conservatory, for 3 singers, large ensemble and computer.

In 2010 and 2011 Rolnick worked primarily on writing *MONO*, an evening long meditation on the senses. In 2010 Rolnick was awarded the Hoefler Prize from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, which included a commission for large ensemble, and an artist residency at the Conservatory in 2012. *Anosmia*, the work written for this commission, is also a part of *MONO*, and was premiered and recorded in March 2012 in San Francisco. Rolnick also received a 2010 NY Foundation for the Arts Fellowship, a 2011 Fromm Foundation Commission, and a 2013 NY State Council on the Arts Music Commission. From 2010 to 2012 Rolnick was awarded two residencies at the MacDowell Colony, and residencies the Ucross Foundation and the Djerassi Foundation.

In 2009 he completed *Extended Family* for the string quartet ETHEL and *MONO Prelude*. His CD *The Economic Engine*, on the Innova label, was cited as among the outstanding classical CDs of 2009 by the *New York Times*. He ended the year with a 3 week tour of China, in which he played *Faith* and *MONO Prelude* in Shanghai, Beijing and Hong Kong, and recorded material for a new CD of improvised music, to be released in China in 2011.

In 2008 Rolnick completed *The Economic Engine* for the Chinese Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and *Faith* for pianist Bob Gluck with interactive computer. Works completed in 2007 include *Hammer & Hair* for violinist Todd Reynolds and pianist Kathleen Supové; *Love Songs* for the Albany Symphony, with soloists Theo Bleckmann and Todd Reynolds; and *The Bridge* for the Albany Symphony's Dogs of Desire ensemble. In 2006 Rolnick completed the *iFiddle Concerto* for the American Composers Orchestra, with soloist Todd Reynolds, which was premiered in Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall in New York. In 2006 he also wrote *Uptown Jump* for the trio MAYA, and *Segal's Billboard* for harpist Jacqueline Kerrod, and Innova Recordings released his 1 CD, *Digits*, which received enthusiastic reviews in the *New York Times* and in *Time Out New York*.

Rolnick appeared in both the 2005 and 2006 *MusicAcoustica* Festivals in Beijing, and at the 2005 *International Conference on Applied and Creative Arts* in Sarawak, Malaysia. Other pieces completed from 2003-2005, all with interactive computer processing, include *The Shadow Quartet*, for Ethel, *Fiddle Faddle*, for Todd Reynolds, *Body Work* for Joan La Barbara, *Ambos Mundos* for the Quintet of the Americas, *Plays Well With Others* for the Paul Drescher Ensemble, *The Real Thief of Baghdad*, for Tyrone Henderson, *Digits* for Kathleen Supové (with video by R. Luke Dubois), and *Making Light of It* (on texts by Philip Levine) for baritone Thomas Buckner.

From 1996-2002 Rolnick's improvising band, FISH LOVE THAT, presented monthly concerts in New York City, and was featured in the American Composers Orchestra's 2004 *Improvise! Festival*. In 2001 Rolnick and Robert Rowe co-directed a collaboration with six other artists in the development of *The Technophobe & The Mad Man*, the first musical theater performance work for Internet2. In April 2001 he premiered a video performance piece, *Good Night, Sweet Elks*, at the Boston CyberArts Festival.

From 1997-2001 Rolnick worked on *The Rise & Fall of Isabella Rico*, a musical theater work with Larry Beinhart, which underwent extensive development with The Director's Company in New York.. From September 1995 through February 1996, Rolnick spent five months in Japan on a fellowship from the Asian Cultural Council. During 1994-95 Neil Rolnick created and premiered *HomeGame*, a full evening length performance work for actors, instruments, interactive video, and computer mediated story generation. In 1994, along with Albany Symphony Orchestra music director David Alan Miller, Rolnick was co-founder of the new "multimedia orchestra of the future," Dogs of Desire.

In the fall of 1994 Rolnick was in residence at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center in northern Italy. In the fall of 1989 he was composer-in-residence at the Music Academy, University of the Arts, in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, on a Fulbright Grant. As part of his residency, he performed concerts of his music throughout Yugoslavia. Mr. Rolnick has toured extensively, with performances in New York City, Tokyo, London, Beijing, San Francisco, Amsterdam, Sao Paulo, Washington, Havana, Reykjavik, Zurich, Los Angeles, Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, Banff (Canada) and numerous other venues. His music was included in the 1994 Barber Festival in England; in the 1990 Aspen Music Festival; in the 1985, 1986 and 1990 New Music America Festivals; and in the 1985 Whitney Biennial Exhibition.

Mr. Rolnick's music appears on twenty-two records, CDs, and digital releases on the Other Minds, Innova, Deep Listening, Albany, Cuneiform, Bridge, O.O. Discs, Nonesuch, Centaur, CRI and 1750 Arch labels. He has received fellowships and grants from the Fromm Foundation, the Asian Cultural Council, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Fulbright Commission, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the New York Foundation for the Arts, New Music USA, the Marion Foundation, Meet The Composer, New York State CAPS, the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, the Alice M. Ditson Fund, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance, the Argosy Foundation, the University of California, and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He has had artist residencies at Bellagio, Bogliasco, the MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, Millay Arts, Ucross, Djerassi, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and the Wurlitzer Foundation.

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. In 2013 Rolnick left his position as Professor of Music in the Arts Department and iEAR Studios at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, in Troy, NY. In his 32-year career on the faculty at Rensselaer, he led the development of unique undergraduate and graduate programs in Electronic Arts which focused on a truly integrated approach to time-based art and performance with the electronic media.

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)

"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)