

Neil B. Rolnick

<http://www.neilrolnick.com>

Since he moved to New York City in 2002, Neil Rolnick's music has been receiving increasingly wide recognition and numerous performances both in the US and abroad. A pioneer in the use of computers in performance, beginning in the late 1970s, Rolnick has often included unexpected and unusual combinations of materials and media in his music. He has performed his music around the world, exploring forms as diverse as digital sampling, interactive multimedia, and traditional musical theater. Throughout the 1980s and '90s he was also responsible for the development of the first integrated electronic arts graduate and undergraduate programs in the US, at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's iEAR Studios, in Troy, NY. Rolnick's innovation as an educator has been to bring together the commonality of artistic creation across many disciplines, and this has led to his varied work with filmmakers, writers, and video and media artists.

Though much of Rolnick's 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, improvisation, or multimedia, his music has been characterized by critics as "sophisticated," "hummable and engaging," and as having "good senses of showmanship and humor."

Commissions under way in 2008 include: *The Economic Engine* for the Chinese Central Conservatory of Music, to be premiered in Beijing in 2008; *Extended Family* for the string quartet Ethel, 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 13th 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 since 2003, 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 thirteen records and CDs, on the Innova, Deep Listening, Albany, Cuneiform, Bridge, O.O. Discs, Nonesuch, Centaur, CRI and 1750 Arch labels. He has received fellowships and grants from the Asian Cultural Council, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Fulbright Commission, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, 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 MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, the University of California, and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

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. He currently is Professor of Music in the Arts Department and iEAR Studios at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, in Troy, NY. At Rensselaer he led the development of unique undergraduate and graduate programs in Electronic Arts which focus on a truly integrated approach to time-based art and performance with the electronic media.

REVIEWS

"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)

"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)