

Credits

Erik Peterson, recording engineer

Sheldon Steiger, post-production and
mastering engineer

Deal With The Devil was recorded Nov 20, 2018 at
Metropolitan State University, Denver, CO.

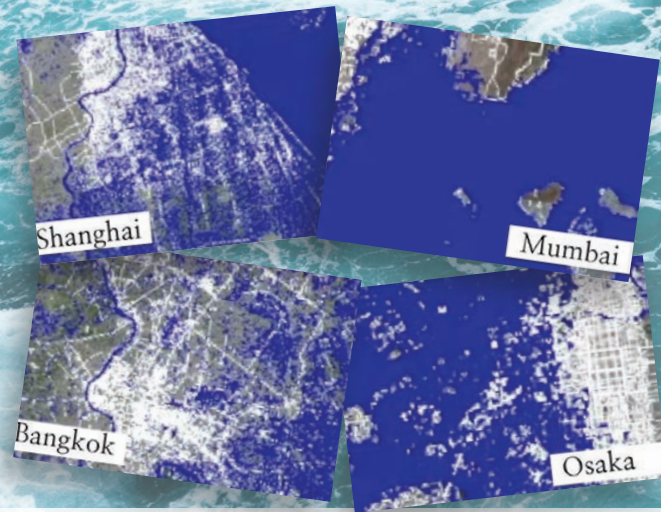
Oceans Eat Cities and *Mirages* were recorded
July 14 & 17, 2019 at Western Colorado University,
Gunnison, CO.

Cover image: Luke DuBois and
Emilio Hernandez Cortes

Photo credit: Chloe Bland

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NEIL ROLNICK Oceans Eat Cities



Jennifer Choi, violin | Kathleen Supové, piano | VOXARE String Quartet

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The Composer



Composer Neil Rolnick pioneered the use of computers in musical performance, beginning in the late 1970s. Based in New York City since 2002, his music has been performed worldwide, including recent performances in Cuba, China, Korea, Mexico and across the US and Europe. His music has appeared on 21 LPs, CDs and digital releases. His string quartet *Oceans Eat Cities* was performed at the UN Global Climate Summit in Paris in Dec. 2015. In 2016 and

2017 he was awarded an ArtsLink residency in Belgrade, Serbia, a New Music USA Project Grant and an artist residency at the Bogliasco Foundation near Genoa, Italy. In 2019 he received an Individual Artist Grant from the New York State Council on the Arts, for a new work for pianist Geoffrey Burseson. In 2020 he was featured at the Primavera en la Habana festival in Cuba, just before the city was closed by COVID-19. In 2021 a new work for streaming media has been commissioned by New Music USA for Ensemble Échappé.

Rolnick's music often explores combinations of digital sampling, interactive multimedia, and acoustic vocal, chamber and orchestral ensembles. 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. Rolnick's innovation as an educator was to bring together the commonality of artistic creation across many disciplines, and this 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, 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."

Rolnick was sidelined for most of 2018, caring for his wife of 45 years who passed away that summer. In early 2019 he commemorated her memory with a solo laptop piece, *Messages*, which repurposes her phone messages from before and during her illness.

Between 2014 and 2018 Rolnick completed *Declaration*, *Deal With The Devil*, *Mirages*, *Oceans Eat Cities*, *Cello Ex Machina*, *Silicon Breath*, *Dynamic RAM & Concert Grand*, and two solo laptop performance pieces, *O Brother!* and *WakeUp*.

From 2010 to 2015 Rolnick received the Hoefer Prize from the San Francisco Conservatory, a NY Foundation for the Arts Fellowship, a Fromm Foundation Commission, and a NY State Council on the Arts Commission, and held residencies at the MacDowell Colony, Ucross, Djerassi and Virginia Center for Creative Arts.

Neil Rolnick was born in 1947, in Dallas, Texas. He earned a BA in English from Harvard College in 1969. He studied 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 1977-79. From 1981-2013 he was a Professor of Music at Rensselaer.

For more information & links to music and videos: <http://www.neilrolnick.com>

The Music

Oceans Eat Cities (2015)

for string quartet and laptop computer

Oceans Eat Cities is a musical sonification of data which projects the likely impact rising sea levels will have on cities globally. It is also a musical representation of why we need to address the issue of climate change now.

The data used in the piece was supplied by Climate Central, of Princeton, NJ. It details how rising sea levels will inundate individual cities. It considers various possible scenarios based on the degree to which we mitigate the release of carbon emissions in the atmosphere. For each city, under each scenario, there is data which shows the percentage of the population which will be displaced. I have used the two most extreme scenarios. In the scientific literature they're described according to the Representative Concentration Pathways (RCP), which track carbon emissions over time.

The first movement uses data from the scenario in which carbon emissions continue as they were in 2015, or RCP 8.5. The second movement uses data from the scenario in which we are successful in cutting most carbon emissions, or RCP 2.6. The first movement uses data from Shanghai (China), Mumbai (India), Bangkok (Thailand), and Osaka (Japan). The second movement uses data from Miami (USA), Sidoarjo (Indonesia), and Tianjin (China).

The basic data mapping of the piece is very simple: After an initial statement of a one-minute musical idea, the idea is repeated, but with the percentage of population which will be impacted by sea level rise in the particular scenario reflected by subtracting that percentage of the notes from the music. The data changes every 5 years, and that time frame is reflected with a musical change every 20 seconds or so, ranging from the year 2015 to 2100. The years from which data is taken are marked in the score as boxed text. As you might expect,

the first movement nearly disappears, since it reflects the scenario of "business as usual" in terms of carbon emissions. The second movement changes, but not nearly as drastically.

There is a video which accompanies the piece, created by R. Luke DuBois and Emilio Hernandez Cortes, and available at <https://youtu.be/veEHLTaBxwQ>. The video shows street maps of the cities whose data is being used in each movement, and the year. As the score moves through the years of the 21st century, each map is overlaid with blue, representing the encroachment of the ocean as projected in Climate Central's data.

A second level of data mapping involves the processing of the acoustic sounds of the quartet, and it is more or less the inverse of the process described above. Using the same data sets as are used to subtract notes from the musical materials, the volume of the processing is increased to reflect the percentage of population in the city which will be displaced by the rising sea level. The processing covers portions of the music, just as the ocean will cover portions of the cities.

Mirages (2017)

or piano and laptop computer

When you travel, you see lots of things. Sometimes you see things which aren't there. Shimmering images of boats or cars or distant mountains may hover above the sea or the desert or the empty road stretching out ahead of you. When I write music for instruments and computers, I often feel like I'm striving to create those ghostly scenarios which are somehow superimposed on the very real landscape of performers and instruments, enabled by the heat and energy of the musical moment.

Mostly I do this by writing music for other people to play, and I devise the digital environment which creates the sonic mirages. In 2017 I found myself

thinking that this is really unfair. That I ought to put myself in the same position I put other instrumentalists in. So that's what I've done.

I perform *Mirages* alone, playing both the piano and laptop computer simultaneously, as a single hybrid instrument. Like all mirages, the floating images may vary from performance to performance ... but they're part of the journey.

***Deal With The Devil* (2017)**

for violin, piano and laptop computer

I began writing *Deal With The Devil* during a residency in 2017 at the Bogliasco Foundation, near Genoa, Italy. I was particularly interested in the music of Genoa's most famous composer and violinist, Nicolo Paganini (1782-1840), who was the first internationally renowned violin virtuoso. His technique was so astounding that it was rumored that he had made a Faustian deal with the devil, trading his soul for his superhuman violin chops.

Paganini was a major inspiration for the famous piano virtuoso and composer Franz Liszt (1811-1886). When Liszt was 20, he heard the 50 year old violinist play in Paris — an event he credited with changing the course of his musical life. Because my piece was to be for violin, piano and computer, I initially planned to use the virtuoso technique which underlies Paganini's and Liszt's music, and to enhance it with real time digital processing.

However, as I studied their music, the piece started to move in a different direction. There is definitely something magical and awe-inspiring about fingers zipping across a keyboard or up and down the fingerboard, about notes which fly at superhuman speed or reach stratospheric heights. But the more I immersed myself in the works of Paganini and Liszt, the more I also felt that the extraordinary technique was being used primarily to show off, to impress the

audience. Rather than saying "listen to the music," it often is saying "look at me!"

That wasn't the kind of piece I wanted to write. Flashy playing may be awe-inspiring, but there can be something equally magical about a beautiful melody, played with directness and simplicity. And while digital processing may be able to produce sonic effects that even Paganini or Liszt wouldn't have been able to create, it only really adds to the music if it supports the narrative, the shape and the emotional impact.

So while *Deal With The Devil* makes use of many of the virtuoso techniques I picked up from studying Paganini and Liszt, it avoids using them simply for the purpose of showing off. And I try to use the digital processing with restraint and purpose. I hope that the half-hour long piece brings you on a musical journey exploring and developing themes, gestures and emotions. Rather than impressing you with dexterity and speed, the goal is to give you a musical experience which can enrich and delight.

In the end, you can decide whether or not virtuosity is necessarily a deal with the devil.

The Performers

Information about the performers can be found at the following links:

VOXARE String Quartet (<http://www.voxarequartet.com/>)

Jennifer Choi (<http://www.jenniferchoi.com>)

Kathleen Sunové (<http://www.supove.com>)

NEIL ROLNICK

Oceans Eat Cities

Oceans Eat Cities (2015)

- | | | |
|---|--|--------|
| 1 | No Change in Carbon Emissions, RCP 8.5 | [8:19] |
| 2 | Maximum Change in Carbon Emissions,
RCP 2.6 | [7:48] |
| | VOXARE String Quartet with
Neil Rolnick, computer
Emily Ondracek-Peterson, violin
Galina Zhdanova, violin
Erik Peterson, viola
Wendy Law, cello | |

Mirages (2017)

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|--------|
| 3 | In the Desert | [3:30] |
| 4 | On the Water | [3:14] |
| 5 | On the Highway | [5:49] |
| | Neil Rolnick, piano & computer | |

Deal With The Devil (2017)

- | | | |
|----|---|--------|
| 6 | Section 1 | [2:31] |
| 7 | Section 2 | [5:07] |
| 8 | Transition 1 | [1:37] |
| 9 | Section 3 | [5:09] |
| 10 | Transition 2 | [1:34] |
| 11 | Section 4 | [5:01] |
| 12 | Transition 3 | [1:36] |
| 13 | Section 5 | [4:43] |
| | Jennifer Choi, violin
Kathleen Supové, piano
Neil Rolnick, computer | |

Total Time = 56:21



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