

All Music

(Major Music Guide)

[Review of **Shadow Quartet**](#) (Innova 631) by Blair Sanderson

Because his music shows of minimalism, electronic music, alternative pop, fusion jazz, and avant-garde performance art, the versatile composer **Neil Rolnick** can't be squeezed into easy categories. However, one can't help noting the punchy, punctuated rhythmic style that runs through almost all of his works on this 2005 Innova release; this mannered pointillism will either annoy one to distraction or have a nearly hypnotic effect. Rolnick's fondness for open textures, short melodic fragments, and staccato attacks may be linked to his work in computer technology — the similarity of his acoustic effects to electronically produced sounds is more than coincidental. But there is more to Rolnick's work than just manipulations of sounds. **Shadow Quartet**, crisply played by the New York-based string quartet [Ethel](#), is the most personal statement of the album, written in memory of the composer's father and celebrating his love of Texas swing. Also worthy of mention are **The Real Thief of Baghdad**, humorously declaimed by Tyrone Henderson, and **Body Work**, dryly recited by [Joan la Barbara](#); both pieces make their witty points through clever arrangements of spoken words over Rolnick's free-form accompaniments. The sound quality is exceptional, though on the loud side.