

January 14, 2011

Music in Review

by **ALLAN KOZINN**

NEIL ROLNICK

Le Poisson Rouge

Neil Rolnick's new recording, "Extended Family" (Innova), brings together three 2009 works that touch on potentially fraught subjects, including the partial loss of the composer's hearing, his mother's death and meditations on the nature of faith. But though you might reasonably expect this music to register high on the angst meter, it is generally -- occasional introspection aside -- energetic, optimistic, even joyful. And when Mr. Rolnick celebrated the disc's release with a concert at Le Poisson Rouge on Tuesday evening, the mood was upbeat.

Mr. Rolnick and strings from ACME (American Contemporary Music Ensemble) opened the program with "Release," a short, bright-edged movement from "Shadow Quartet" (2005), in which lively string lines are driven by Minimalist repetition and expansion, and the computer (overseen by the composer) works almost as a continuo instrument.

Mr. Rolnick's "MONO Prelude," inspired by his sudden loss of hearing in his left ear, is the seed of a larger work in progress about sensory deprivation. It uses electronic sound both to capture the ringing and noise of tinnitus and to counter the desperation it creates -- described by Mr. Rolnick in a haunting spoken text, a diary of his visits to specialists -- with driven, vital music that conveys his determination to overcome the challenge.

"Faith," a free-spirited concerto for piano and computer, was composed for Bob Gluck, a rabbi who gave up his pulpit and become an accomplished jazz pianist. Mr. Gluck performed it with virtuosic fluidity and maintained a lively give-and-take with Mr. Rolnick's tactile, almost orchestral computer part.

ACME closed the concert with a deeply felt, richly played account of "Extended Family," a colorful evocation of the life cycle and complexities of family relationships.

A version of this article appeared in print on January 14, 2011, on page C5 of the New York edition.

NY Times web site: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/14/arts/music/14round.html>