

Rob Kapilow — Short Biography

For over 30 years, Rob Kapilow has brought the joy and wonder of music – and unraveled some of its mysteries – to audiences of all ages and backgrounds. Characterized by his unique ability to create an “aha” moment for his audiences and collaborators, whatever their level of musical sophistication or naiveté, Kapilow’s work brings music into people’s lives: opening new ears to musical experiences and helping people to listen actively rather than just hear.

Kapilow’s range of activities is astonishingly broad, including his What Makes It Great?® presentations (now for over 20 seasons in New York and Boston), his family compositions and Family Musik® events, his Citypieces, corporate programs, and residencies with institutions as diverse as the National Gallery of Canada and Stanford University. The reach of his interactive events and activities is wide, from Native American tribal communities in Montana and inner-city high school students in Louisiana to audiences in Kyoto, Istanbul, and Kuala Lumpur, and from tots barely out of diapers to musicologists in Ivy League programs.

Kapilow is an award-winning composer, conductor, author, and commentator. His newest large-scale choral/orchestral composition, *We Came to America*, based on inter-generational immigrant stories premiered in January 2024. A G. Schirmer composer of a wide range of solo, chamber, orchestral, and operatic music; he was the first composer to be granted the rights to set Dr. Seuss’ words to music, and his setting of Green Eggs and Ham has been called “the most successful piece written for families this half-century.”

He is currently working on two new books for Norton/Liveright—the first on the music of the Woodstock Generation, and he is an award-winning author of three previous books including *All You Have to Do is Listen* which won the PSP Prose Award for Best Book in Music and the Performing Arts, *What Makes it Great?* the first book designed for the iPad with embedded musical examples, and *Listening for America: Inside the Great American Songbook from Gershwin to Sondheim* which was a finalist for the prestigious Marfield Prize.

Kapilow has had extensive media experience. He appeared on NBC’s Today Show with Katie Couric; he presented a special What Makes It Great?® for broadcast on PBS’s Live From Lincoln Center; and he was the subject of a full-length PBS documentary as a composer entitled *Summer Sun, Winter Moon*. A frequent guest on the PBS NewsHour, Weekend Edition, and Morning Edition, his What Makes It Great? radio series was broadcast for more than a decade on NPR’s Performance Today.

As a conductor he has led most of North America’s major orchestras as well as new works of musical theater, ranging from the Tony Award-winning *Nine* on Broadway to the premiere of *Frida* for the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s Next Wave Festival. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Yale and the Eastman School of Music and student of the legendary Nadia Boulanger he was an assistant professor and conductor of the Yale Symphony Orchestra for six years at the age of 23. He is a Sensei and third-degree black belt in Shorin-Ryu Karate.