Goldberg’s Variations

MUSIC AND ANIMATION BY
ANDY BISKIN

CARTOONS BY
RUBE GOLDBERG

DATES: Oct 17—19 at 7:30pm

LOCATION: BAM FISHER
(Fishman Space)

RUN TIME: 65min, no intermission

Brooklyn Academy of Music

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#GoldbergsVariations
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Featuring:

ANDY BISKIN
Clarinet and Bass Clarinet

MICHAEL MCGINNIS
Clarinet and Alto Saxophone

DAVE BALLOU
Trumpet

BRIAN DRYE
Trombone

DAVID PHILLIPS
Bass

JOHN HOLLENBECK
Percussion

STAGE DIRECTOR
Alicia Dhyana House

SET AND LIGHTING DESIGNER
Jiyoun Chang

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Emily Krell

ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGNER
Marie Yokoyama

MACHINE DESIGNER
John McCullough

PROGRAM

Overture

A Self-Scrubbing Bath Brush

Invention 1: Organ Grinder

How to Button Your Collar in a Hurry

Invention 2: Wheel

Handy Self-Working Sunshade

Simple Way to Light a Cigar in an Automobile Traveling Fifty Miles an Hour

Invention 3: Peacock

How to Signal Your Bridge Partner

Invention 4: Mirror

Self-Operating Napkin

Invention 5: Clock

Solution for Growing Hair on Balding Men

Invention 6: Tree

A Modest Mosquito Bite Scratcher

Outboard Motor That Requires No Fuel

Invention 7: Page Turner

A Simple Way to Locate Your Rubbers on a Rainy Day

Invention 8: Barodik

A Sure Way to Keep Your Head Down During a Golf Shot

Finale: Automatic Sheet Music Turner
Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Rube Goldberg (1883—1970) created his famous inventions between 1915 and 1935. They reflect the popular fascination with technology and gadgetry that began with the Machine Age and is still very much with us today. They also sharply comment on our urge to overcomplicate, juxtaposing a goofy hodgepodge of causes and effects from physics, engineering, botany, and human and animal psychology.

But most of all, Rube Goldberg's inventions delight us with their unforgettable characters, absurd logic, and brilliant cartoonery.

Where did the inventions come from? In his illustrated autobiography, Rube Goldberg vs. The Machine Age, Rube credits Professor Frederick Slate, his instructor in analytic mechanics and physics at the College of Mining at UC Berkeley, where Rube grudgingly pursued a degree in engineering to placate his father. Rube's account (somewhat condensed here) is delightfully convoluted, like the inventions themselves, and it reminds us that his way with words could be every bit as funny as his cartoons:

Professor Slate had devised a machine by which the weight of the earth could be determined. It was a system of tubes, retorts, hoses, and what appeared to be odds and ends. What knocked me over completely was the name he had given to the crazy-looking contraption. He called it a Barodik.

Think of anybody calling anything a Barodik! You could spend years juggling the letters of the alphabet without getting a name as beautiful as the one Professor Slate had snatched out of thin air for his invention....

In the course of years thousands of letters have reached me asking how I ever happened to get started on my line of drawing strange-looking inventions designed to perform common-place but annoying tasks, such as catching a mouse or getting an olive out of a long-necked bottle. Well, the inspiration was Freddy Slate's Barodik. He was so serious about it, which had a gorgeous name and was never scientifically wrong—though never actually right, as far as I could see—that I just simply never recovered from the exposure....

But I didn't start to invent my Barodiks until about a decade after I left the university. I merely broadened the scope of the Barodik by adding mice, rising yeast, toy windmills, midgets and other elements working in a chain reaction to accomplish something trivial.

All that remained was for Rube to invent an alter ego to whom he could credit these miraculous discoveries. The inventor of the inventions is none other than Professor Lucifer Gorgonzola Butts, A.K., a character presumed to be based on Professor Slate himself. Rube prefaced many of his explanations of the workings of a particular invention with a fantastic description of how Professor Butts received his inspiration. These eureka moments were usually
2013 Next Wave Festival

the results of minor catastrophes, such as Butts stepping into an open elevator shaft, getting his whiskers caught in a laundry wringer, or knocking himself out while boxing.

Examine a selection of Rube’s inventions and you will quickly notice familiar patterns, motifs, and themes. The room with the window on the left, the jack-in-the-box, dissolving rocks, explosives, animals obeying their instincts. At first glance, the machines might seem repetitive, but like J.S. Bach’s monumental Goldberg Variations, freedom and creativity flourish within a prescribed form. The actual problem at hand becomes a MacGuffin. The delight is not so much in the successful tooth extraction or gravy spot removal (or in Bach’s case, a successful inverted canon at the fourth in three-quarter time), but in the machine’s playful journey, the deft execution of small details, and the discovery of something brand new with each variation.

The creative process becomes its own self-renewing muse. The inventions are more like structured improvisations, similar to Bach’s formal yet free-flowing process. Seen in this light, the grim travails and resulting hard-earned inspiration of Professor Butts seem all the more ridiculous.

Like Rube Goldberg’s reimagined Barodiks, Goldberg’s Variations started with a simple idea that quickly escalated into something considerably more complicated. My original goal was to take a dozen of the Goldberg machines and explore what they might sound and look like if they could move. For over a year I spent many a long night in the lab alone with Professor Butts and my wheezing Mac G4, dangling blocks of ice in front of false teeth to make them chatter, catapulting measles germs toward unsuspecting dolls, dissolving gold nuggets with strong acid, and trying to devise a soundtrack that would do justice to it all.

As the work unfolded, I could not resist trying my own humble hand at inventing. Between the animations you will hear short musical interludes that have been inspired by the incredible Inventions of both J.S. Bach and R.L. Goldberg.

—Andy Biskin, 2013

Goldberg’s Variations was commissioned by Thalia Music at Symphony Space in New York City.

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Andy Biskin
Composer-Animator
Clarinet/Bass Clarinet

Andy Biskin is a clarinetist, composer, and filmmaker recognized for his omnivorous musical imagination and 20/20 vision for irony. Taking inspiration equally from Raymond Scott, Charles Ives, Igor Stravinsky, and Lawrence Welk, Biskin leads several ensembles and has composed scores for film, dance, and theater. His debut album *Dogmental* was named Album of the Week by Ben Ratliff in *The New York Times* who wrote, “it’s hard to find gentle humor in jazz, but the clarinetist Andy Biskin has perfect radar for it.” His subsequent CD releases include *Early American: The Melodies of Stephen Foster*, which made several “Best of 2006” lists and received a four-star review in *Downbeat*, the chamber jazz recording *Trio Tragico* with Drew Gress and Dave Ballou, and *The Spokes: Not So Fast*, featuring a cooperatively led wind trio with Phillip Johnston (soprano sax) and Curtis Hasselbring (trombone). He is currently completing a recording with his new group, IBID, with Kirk Knuffke (cornet), Brian Drye (trombone), and Jeff Davis (drums). Biskin has produced and edited documentaries as well as video pieces that combine music and imagery. *Goldberg’s Variations* marks his first (and probably last) foray into video animation.

Michael McGinnis
Clarinet/Saxophone

Michael McGinnis places himself firmly within a long tradition of anti-traditionalists. He has worked with Anthony Braxton, Alice and Ravi Coltrane, Steve Coleman, Lonnie Plaxico, Yo La Tengo, Stew & The Negro Problem, and as soloist for the Tony-winning Broadway hit *Fela!*. He co-leads the inventive ensembles DDYGG and The Four Bags. His two latest releases, *Road* *Trip* and *The Ängsudden Song Cycle*, feature extended compositions that showcase McGinnis’ skills as both composer and improviser.
Dave Ballou
Trumpet

Dave Ballou has released nine CDs as a bandleader or co-leader. He has performed or recorded with ensembles led by Rabih Abou Kahlil, Steely Dan, Michael Formanek, Woody Herman, Andrew Hill, John Hollenbeck’s Large Ensemble, Sheila Jordan, Oliver Lake, Dave Liebman, Joe Lovano, Dewey Redman, Maria Schneider, and an extensive list of jazz personalities. His compositions have been performed and recorded by the Meridian Arts Ensemble, trumpeter Jon Nelson, french hornist Adam Unsworth, and the TILT Brass ensemble. Ballou is an associate professor of music and coordinator of the jazz/commercial music program at Towson University.

Brian Drye
Trombone

Brian Drye has toured Japan, Europe, and throughout the US. Ben Ratliff of The New York Times called his record Bizingas “one of the best introductions to a new band that I’ve heard lately.” He has lent his unique trombone voice to groups as diverse as the Brooklyn Qawwali Party, Slavic Soul Party, the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, the Four Tops, Dianne Schuur, and Joan Baez. Drye created the performance space Ibeam Brooklyn, which presents improvisers from New York City and beyond.

Dave Phillips
Bass

Dave Phillips has released three CDs as a leader, most recently Freedance Live, and toured North America and Europe with his group Freedance. He began learning bass from his father, Barre Phillips, then studied with Homer Mensch at the Mannes College of Music and earned a graduate degree from Juilliard under Eugene Levinson. While active as a session player in New York, he is currently a member of the Syrian group Hewar, Bruce Arnold’s Spooky Actions, and performs regularly with Indian singer Kiran Ahluwali.

John Hollenbeck
Percussion

John Hollenbeck has worked with many of the world’s leading musicians in jazz (Bob Brookmeyer, Fred Hersch, Tony Malaby) and new music (Meredith Monk). As a bandleader and composer, John has gained widespread recognition for his Claudia Quintet and John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble. His Large Ensemble’s releases, A Blessing and eternal interlude, both received Grammy nominations, as did his composition Falling Men, commissioned by Orchestre National de Jazz. In 2007 he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and in 2012 the Doris Duke Performing Artist Award. Since 2005, he has been a professor of jazz drums and improvisation at Jazz Institute Berlin.
Alicia Dhyana House
Stage Direction

Alicia Dhyana House specializes in re-imagined classics, devised and multimedia work, and new plays. Directing credits include: *Medea* (Official Selection Prague Quadrennial 2011), *The Seagull*, Marivaux’s *The Game of Love and Chance*, Caryl Churchill’s *Top Girls*, Sarah Ruhl’s *Eurydice* and *In The Next Room*, Mary Zimmerman’s *Metamorphoses*, and Tom Stoppard’s *The Real Thing*. Since 2010 House has been a guest director at Atlantic Theater Acting School and a directing mentor at Fordham University.

Jiyoun Chang
Set and Lighting Design

Jiyoun Chang’s credits include *The Unfortunates*, *Troilus and Cressida* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), *The Dance and the Railroad* (Signature Theatre, Wuzhen Theatre Festival, China), *T. 1912*, *Peter and the Wolf* (Guggenheim Museum), *Light Within* (Carnegie Hall), *Olives and Blood* (HERE Art), *Tennessee Playboy*, *A Doll’s House* (Triad Stage), *Crane Story* (Playwrights Realm), *Shanghai Lil’s*, *Stella Rising* (Pan Asian Repertory), *Stairs to the Roof* (A.R.T. Institute), *Love Song* (59E59), *I Fioretti in Musica* (La MaMa), *La Voix Humaine* (Yale), and *La Finta Giardiniera* (Juilliard).

John McCullouch
Machine Design

John McCullough has been building things for plays since he worked for his class company in eighth grade. Now he is the Technical Director at New York City College of Technology where he teaches scenery construction and stage machinery. McCullough is also the technical director for New York Stage and Film’s Powerhouse Summer Season. Other work includes freelance technical direction and event production with companies such as Ars Nova, Yale Repertory Theatre, and Viva Creative.

Marie Yokoyama
Assistant Lighting Designer

Marie Yokoyama is a lighting and set designer based in New York City. Her lighting design credits include *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson* (Red House), *The Turn of the Screw* and *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* (Opera Moderne), *Faust* (Curtis Institute of Music), *Three Trees* and *Baudelaire: La Mort* (Pan Asian Rep), *Billy Witch* (APAC), *We in Silence Hear a Whisper* (Red Fern Theatre), *(M)asking Questions* (California Repertory Theater), and *Compulsion* (Yale Repertory Theatre).
Emily Krell, a classically-trained violinist turned independent producer, focuses on creating good audience experiences, building community around new work, and supporting the vision of performing artists. Aside from her work on this show, she is currently Sō Percussion’s managing director and the artistic administrator and concert producer at Merkin Concert Hall. Krell has also worked for and with the Whitney Museum of American Art, BAM, S.E.M. Ensemble, WNYC, Performa, and Zs, among others.
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A Self-Scrubbing Bath Brush

At last! The great brain of the distinguished man of science gives the world the simple-automatic sheet music turner!

Press left foot (A) on pedal (B) which pulls down handle (C) on tire pump (D). Pressure of air blows whistle (E). Goldfish (F) believes this is dinner signal and starts feeding on worm (G). The pull on string (H) releases brace (I), dropping shelf (J), leaving weight (K) without support. Naturally, hatrack (L) is suddenly extended and boxing glove (M) hits punching bag (N) which, in turn, is punctured by spike (O). Escaping air blows against sail (P) which is attached to page of music (Q) which turns gently and makes way for the next outburst of sweet or sour melody.

Automatic Sheet Music Turner

Professor Butts jumps from a plane in a moth-eaten parachute, lands on his head and lives to invent a self-scrubbing bath brush.

Soap slips from bather's hands. Monkey outfielder (A) tries to catch it and fumbles. Soap (B) hits bottle (C) which falls on handle of hair brush (D) causing brush to fly up and smash mirror (E). Flying fragments of glass cut cord (F) allowing weight (G) to drop and pull string (H) which opens hook (I) releasing jack-in-the-box (J), which jumps up and hits handle (K) turning on water in shower (L). As water runs down trough (M) it falls on mill-wheel (N) causing it to revolve and work brush (O) up and down on bather's back.

You can rent an organ and keep the monkey busy when you are not taking a bath.
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