

## Dance

# For Haim, It's Bach To Nature

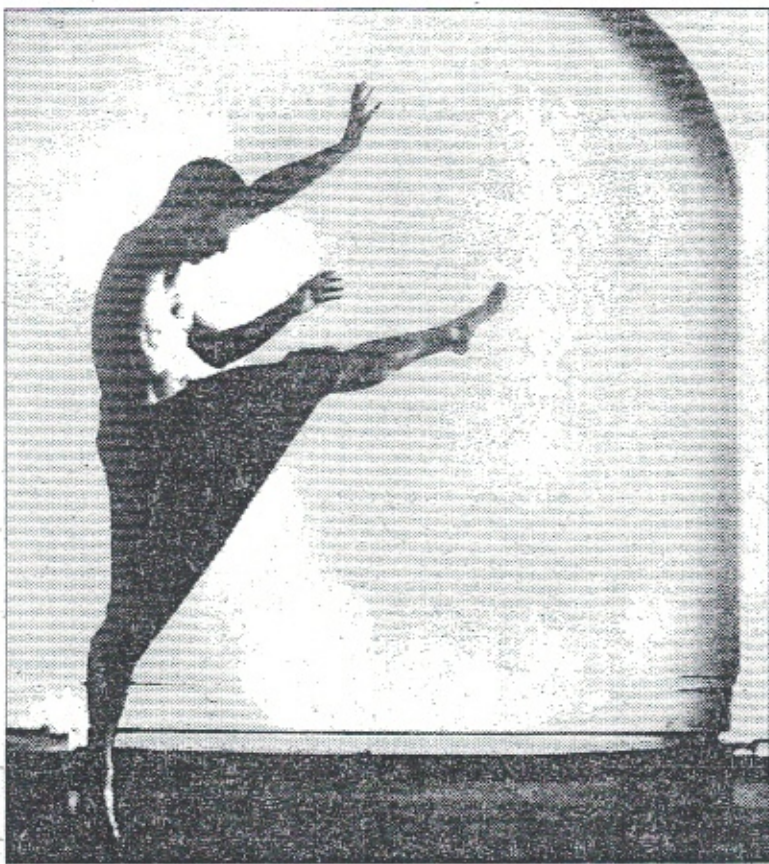
By SARAH KAUFMAN  
Washington Post Staff Writer

"There's something I need to tell you," says a voice in the darkness, before the dance program begins. "There's a variation in which I don't move at all—you have to come up onstage and move me around." This announcement assures us that Mark Haim's evening of solos to Bach's *Aria With 30 Variations* (the "Goldberg Variations") is not going to be a dry, pedantic meditation on the classical score.

Sure enough, toward the end of the first half of Haim's performance at the Kennedy Center Terrace Theater Wednesday night, the house lights went up and a dozen of the more adventurous members of the audience streamed onstage to tug, topple and manipulate the unusually trusting dancer. All the while, onstage pianist Andre Gribou was rippling through one of the 30 Bach variations. The half-serious, half-silly result, with Haim grinning broadly and occasionally shaking with laughter as strangers took his limbs in their hands, typified the mood of the program.

It's been said—accurately—that George Balanchine's choreography enhances one's appreciation of Igor Stravinsky's music; that watching the dancing allows one to hear and understand the music better. Did Haim's dancing add to an appreciation of Bach's majestic compositions? Not really. It did, however, add to an appreciation of Mark Haim, an affable, antic fellow, a sort of Everyman in his loose black shirt and trousers—not exactly in the bloom of youth, nor an exquisite physical specimen, but pleasing in his ordinariness.

The music was there as a backdrop to Haim's free-spirited maneuvers, sometimes grand—bold leaps, percussive jumps—but more often small-scale doodling, quirky gestures and isolated joint movements. And, most importantly, there was his sense of humor—when he spurted a fountain of



BY PAUL H. TAYLOR

**Mark Haim offers up free-spirited takes on Bach's "Goldberg Variations," including an interactive piece that requires unusual trust in his audience.**

water from his mouth or jogged up one aisle and down another to arrive at the pianist's side in mock astonishment.

Haim first started putting his ambitious "Goldberg Variations" together five years ago, completing it in 1997. Before this, he choreographed for other companies, including the Netherlands Dance Theatre and various student groups, and had his own company, Mark Haim & Dancers, at one time. He's been on the teaching faculty of the American Dance Festival in Durham, N.C., for the past five years, which is evidently how he came to the attention of Kennedy Center dance programmers Charles and Stephanie Reinhart, who are the festival directors. As Wednesday's performance proved, he is an entertaining presence, and good company for a blustery evening.

A handout notes that "The Goldberg Variations" "redefines virtuosity in modern dance today," but much of Haim's work was firmly rooted in the past. Many of the sections reminded me of a wedding I went to in the '60s where a woman in a purple leotard bounded—galumphed—around the couple's living room to a selection of classical music. There was a galumphing, pedestrian quality to much of Haim's dancing, in con-

trast to Bach's stately formality. Indeed, there was little about the dancing that could be called virtuosic, except for the total length, which at nearly two hours, with an intermission, was considerable for a solo performer (though he did choreograph breaks for himself). At one point, Haim took his clothes off, tossed them into the wings and rolled around the stage naked, which didn't have anything remotely to do with the work as a whole or with the Bach but brought to mind the era a few years back when nudity was the norm in modern dance.

Pianist Gribou was an equally essential element to the performance, and arguably had a harder job. Where Haim could take a bit of a rest—for example, following a more energetic segment with one in which he basically stood in place, moving only his arms—the pianist had no respite from Bach's insistent, rhythmically complex score. He was not flawless, hitting wrong notes here and there, and hummed audibly to himself in some parts, as Glenn Gould was known to do. But his bright, accessible musicianship was the perfect match for Haim's easy approachability.

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