

# 'Goldberg Variations' tests dancer's endurance

80 minutes of Bach is labor of love

BY CAROL NORRIS

Enquirer contributor

Dancer Mark Haim calls *The Goldberg Variations* his marathon. That's because he performs the entire Bach work — that's 80 minutes, including repeats.

He'll do the work, with Andre Gribou at the piano, at the Aronoff today and Saturday.

Why would anyone put themselves through this wringer?

He says he has his friends to thank — or to blame. As he worked on this, his first solo, he showed 40 minutes to a few "trusted friends" for their input.

They said basically, "That's pretty good, now finish it. We'd like to see more."

He had already devoted a year and a half to the project. It took another two years to complete. He says half of that time was spent simply mustering the nerve to do it.

## His dance with Andre

In 1994, Mr. Haim, 37, began to perform the work in short installments on college campuses and around Manhattan to a Daniel Barenboim CD of *The Goldberg Variations*.

He says he became known as "the guy who dances the Goldbergs."

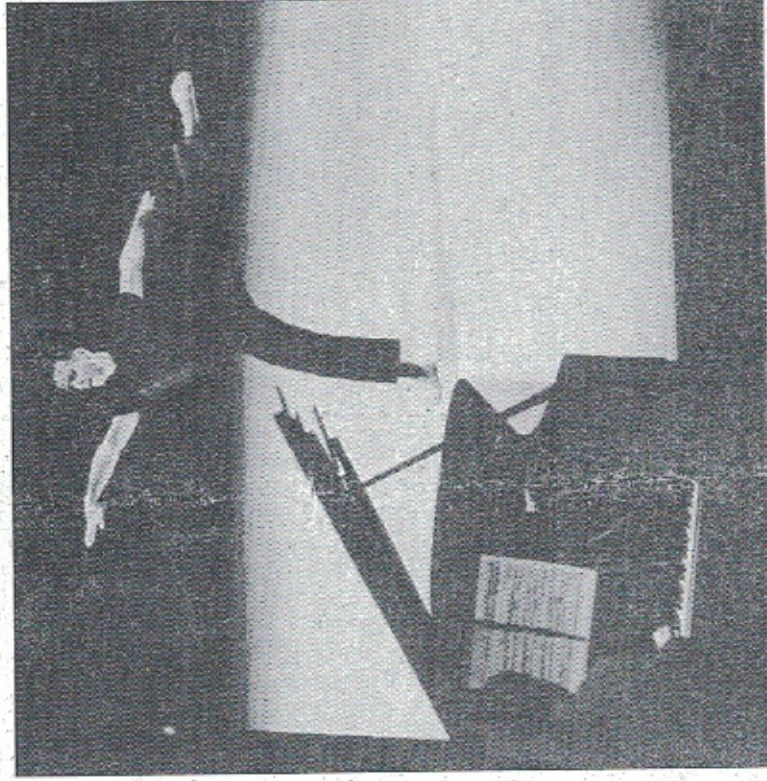
Teaching at Durham, North Carolina's American Dance Festival in the mid-90s, he met Mr. Gribou, introduced as "the guy who plays the Goldbergs."

They talked about their mutual attraction to the music and vowed to keep in touch. For two more years they corresponded — Mr. Haim lives in New York, Mr. Gribou in Athens, Ohio — and finally decided to make it work as a duet, a satisfying decision for both of them.

"I only dance it with Andre now," Mr. Haim says. As a result, he says he's become "a very spoiled performer."

"I know what Andre is going through, and it's not pretty," says Mr. Haim, who trained as a classical pianist before switching to dance as a teen. "It's such a mammoth piece and in many respects I think more mammoth for him than for me. It's such a mainstay of the classical repertoire and is fiendishly difficult and fiendishly long."

The length translates to a physical test for a dancer. Mr. Haim's days are spent in an unrelenting chase to keep in shape. (It took a week to track him down for this interview.) He swims, takes dance classes, does yoga, rehearses.



Dancer Mark Haim and pianist Andrew Gribou collaborate on *The Goldberg Variations*.  
Bruce Feeley

Anything else? He prays, he says. Mr. Haim admits he's going at his career in a backward way. By the late '30s, many dancers are weary of performing, especially solos, where there's no place to hide lapses in technique. It's usually a good time to move on to directing younger dancers.

In his teens, he graduated from Juilliard with an itch to make dances and headed for Europe, where he

## Missed dancing

At 25, he was invited back to the States to make a work for Joffrey Ballet. At 26 he found himself directing a modern troupe in Lisbon, Portugal. In the process of making many, many dances for others, he discovered he

## IF YOU GO

- **What:** Contemporary Dance Theater presents Mark Haim and Andre Gribou in *The Goldberg Variations*.
- **When:** 8:30 p.m. today and Saturday.
- **Where:** Aronoff Center for the Arts, Jarson-Kaplan Theater
- **Tickets:** \$17, \$20, \$9 students and seniors. 241-7469.

wanted the challenge of dancing alone.

As you might guess, he's not dancing full throttle for the entire 80 minutes. In fact, a half hour into the work, he doesn't move at all. He invites the audience to move him around. He says the section can get funky, but there's never any trouble getting people onstage. There's never been the need to kick any lingering hams off-stage either.

Once, an old friend he hadn't seen in a while was in the audience. She used the bit as her chance to run onstage and give him a huge kiss, sending them both toppling to the floor. A startled audience looked on, unsure if they were expected to join in.

Mr. Haim isn't looking for kisses in Cincinnati — just warm bodies in the seats at the Jarson-Kaplan.

"There's no deep message or personal statement," the affable dancer says with an easy laugh, "just a couple guys revealing themselves through the music of Bach."