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Movement nonstop as dancer tackles 'Goldberg Variations'

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JS. Bach's "Goldberg Variations" is a deliberately structured work of 30 variations on a single theme. Yet dancer/choreographer Mark Haim allows you

to imagine the music as a spontaneous invention in his solo dance of 30 variations set to the famous keyboard piece.

In dress, manner and performance style, Haim and pianist Andre Gribou take a casual approach to Bach's musical Mount Everest. For the 82 minutes they're onstage, the two project an ease that comes from an obvious affection for every note of the piece.

Bach is said to have composed the "Goldberg Variations" around 1741 to bemuse an insomniac nobleman during the midnight hours. Whether or not the story is true, the music with its endless variations suggests a state of emotional unrest.

Haim's choreography is similarly

hyperkinetic. In rare moments of repose, tranquility eludes him. He has even choreographed ongoing motion for his expressive face.

The musical moods of the "Goldberg Variations" range from serious and sublime to playful and silly, and Haim had the audience chuckling throughout with free-spirited contrasts of movement and music, motion and stillness.

In one variation, audience members were invited onstage to manipulate Haim's immobile body, providing the soloist a moment of recuperation. When they were finished modeling him, Haim ordered participants — including an amused baby — to freeze, and he had his fun sculpting them.

A capering dance has Haim twirling around the stage and ending up on a platform. Like a whimsical garden fountain, he gaily spews a mouthful of water while rotating in place.

As if tired from disporting himself, Haim takes off his clothes and lies down on the floor. After he tosses his clothes onstage, an identical set is dropped from the rafters. He nimbly dresses, gives himself a satisfied once-over, and goes about the business of staying in motion.

Although the music is always there, it catches Haim by surprise in one variation. As the sounds slowly penetrate his body, his hips start rocking, then his legs and arms. A microphone drops magically before him and he is transformed into a rock star, belting out an incongruous (for Bach, anyway) "BAAA-BY!"

Pianist and dancer check in with each other throughout the performance, as when Haim leaves the stage to jog around the house, is absent momentarily, and reappears beside the piano in the punch line of an old joke between the two.

David Ferri's lighting design is as varied as the variations themselves. In one dance, Haim is lit by footlights, producing multiple images dancing together on the backdrop.

The last quarter of the program reiterates movements introduced earlier. Occasionally, Haim's two hands, fanning out from their wrists, are silhouetted against the backdrop. They remind you that, like a pianist, Haim has played his body for all its music.

When he leaves the stage, he and the music have fulfilled possibilities, found completion and earned rest.