

DANCE / Jean Battey Lewis

Variations' seemingly without end

Choreographer Haim dances 80-minute solo of masterpiece

The solo occupies a special place in the dance world, calling for a compelling personality to capture the audience's imagination while appearing to fill the stage space.

Great soloists in memorable roles are the stuff of dance legend — Anna Pavlova fluttering to the ground in "The Dying Swan," Martha Graham rocking with grief in "Lamentation," Judith Jamison thrusting her arms to the sky in "Cry."

Nine days from now, Mikhail Baryshnikov will dance a program of solos — including one choreographed for him by a Japanese Kabuki dancer-actor, Tamasaburo Bando — at the intimate St. Marks Church in New York. (All tickets for the AIDS benefit performance are priced at \$1,000.)

Famous though they may be, most solos last only a few minutes: It is unusual when a dance for one runs as long as 20 min-

utes was introduced to the music, he says.

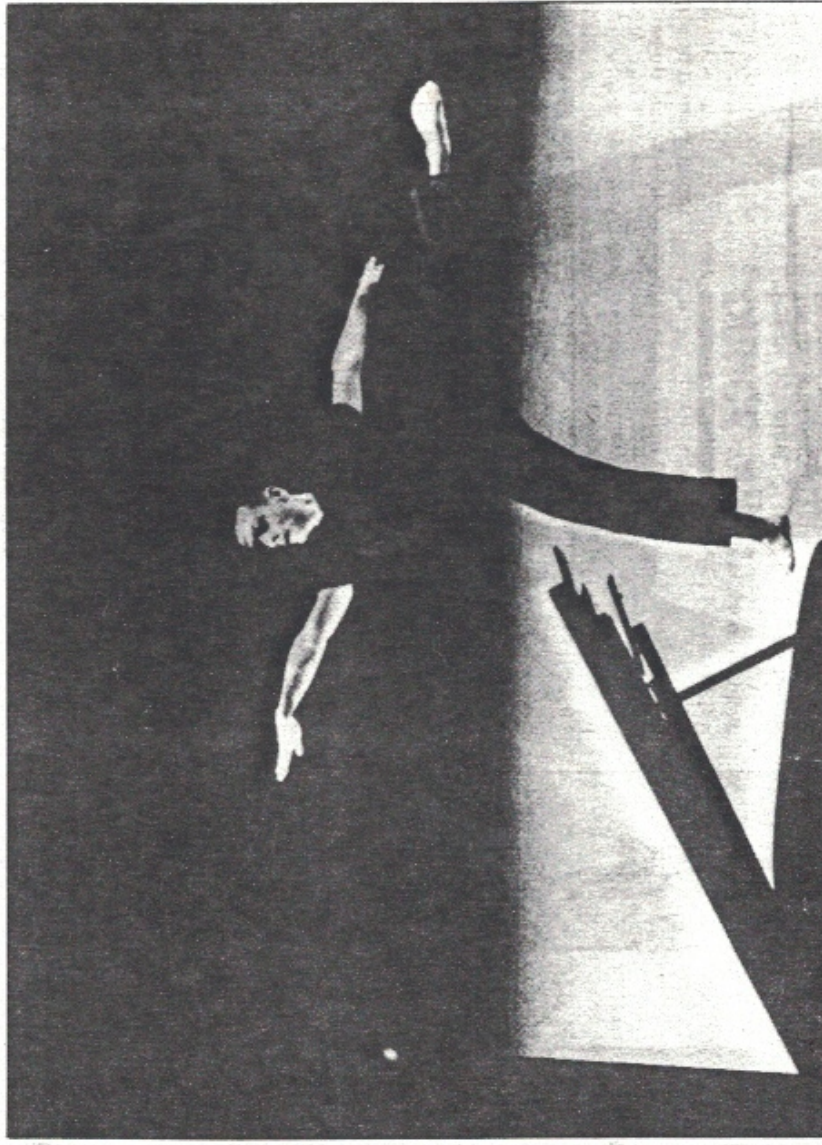
As a piano student at the Manhattan School of Music, he kept hearing about Bach's "Goldberg Variations." When he was a dance student at the Juilliard School, he checked out a recording from the library, by chance happening on one that included all the repeats.

That exhaustive, 80-minute version is the one he favors and will be performing this week with the collaboration of pianist Andre Gribou.

This labor of love has occupied Mr. Haim, 37, for many years. He originally thought of making a group dance, but then his ideas began to coalesce around the piece as a kind of journey.

"I think that idea would be lost if it were a group work," the choreographer-dancer says. "We have so many different sides to ourselves, and I wanted to follow that idea."

The music, with its infinite va-



edy Center, dancing a solo that lasts a staggering 80 minutes. His inspiration — and the title of his dance — is the monumental composition by Johann Sebastian Bach, "The Goldberg Variations."

The score, the first work of such magnitude for the keyboard, was composed for a Russian ambassador suffering from insomnia who had commissioned Bach to write music that would put him to sleep. Mr. Haim jokes that his job is to see that that doesn't happen to the audience at his performance.

The music has had a particular pull for audiences ever since Glenn Gould's masterful 1955 recording catapulted it into the spotlight, breaking records for classical recordings. Mr. Gould eliminated the repeats, making the work 40 minutes long.

Most of the repeats were used in Jerome Robbins' much admired version of "The Goldberg Variations" performed by the New York City Ballet. It is one of the grandest works created by the choreographer, who died this

year.

Mr. Haim also has elected to use the uncut version, the way he

WHAT: Mark Haim with Andre Gribou Theater

WHERE: Kennedy Center, Terrace

WHEN: Wednesday and Thursday at 7:30 p.m.

PRICE: \$20

PHONE: 202/467-4600

when Mr. Haim had an revelation. Six years ago, he was walking down Eighth Street in New York late one evening when a bunch of youngsters (who looked to him like hoodlums) came running down both sides of the street.

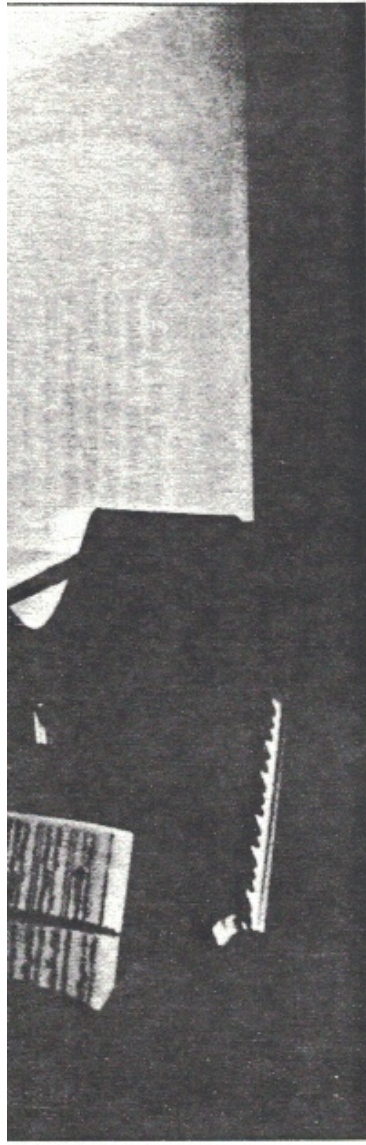
"My fantasy took off," he says, "and I thought, 'They're going to open up some kind of cross fire, and I'm going to get caught in it and be lying in the street dying.' And I wondered what would be my last thought as my spirit left my body. Oddly enough it was, 'I never made that solo to 'The Goldberg Variations.''"

Following through on that epiphany took Mr. Haim 3½ years of creative effort. Although his musical background made him keenly aware of the brilliant technical achievement of the Bach score, his response was keyed more to the emotional range embedded in the music.

"What interests me most is being able somehow to transform a human experience onto the stage," Mr. Haim says. "Nowadays I see two extremes — performers who are dehumanized, just moving their bodies, or dancers who bring their specific life situation to the stage. The extremes of not being anybody or of being only yourself."

"I'm interested in the middle ground — in showing the human condition in a way that many people can identify with."

To do that, the choreographer



Mark Haim dances solo to an uncut, 80-minute rendition of Johann Sebastian Bach's "The Goldberg Variations," a composition that long fascinated him, with accompaniment by Andre Gribou.

says, "I shed more and more skin, like an onion, as the piece progresses. That's probably why I become nude at a certain moment — it's yet another skin to shed. The second part, after the intermission, becomes more and more emotional and theatrical."

Reflecting on the music's variety, Mr. Haim calls on a host of images: At one variation, he enters with his cheeks puffed out like a cherub's and climbs onto a box that starts to revolve and spurts out water, turning himself into a fountain; another time he calls for audience volunteers to turn and manipulate his acquiescent body.

In his dual role of choreographer and dancer, Mr. Haim set himself a daunting pace. He created the first seven variations,

which sped by nonstop. Then he realized that not only would he be exhausted at that point, but the audience would be, too.

"I definitely had to look for ways for both me and the audience to recuperate. I needed to let them rest their eyes. That's one of the reasons I have people come up onstage, so the audience has something else to look at. They're not only seeing me."

"The Goldberg Variations" has proved to be a high point in Mark Haim's career. It has garnered enthusiastic reviews in New York, across the country and abroad, not only for his choreographic conception, but for his own fluid, exuberant dancing.

Mr. Haim is bemused by what he sees as the backward course he has taken in his career. Most

young dancers start out choreographing for themselves or a few friends. In his case, he staged works for established companies early on, creating ballets for his own group and others in this country as well as Germany, the Netherlands, Israel and Portugal. Then he disbanded his company, Mark Haim & Dancers, and began working independently.

His latest project is working with his younger sister, who is a comedian, on "The Mark and Lisa Show," scheduled for the Joyce Soho in New York this spring.

Music remains a first love — Mr. Haim sang in a Bach choir last spring — and he is fluent in five languages. That combination makes him anxious to get involved with opera — first as a choreographer, then as a director.