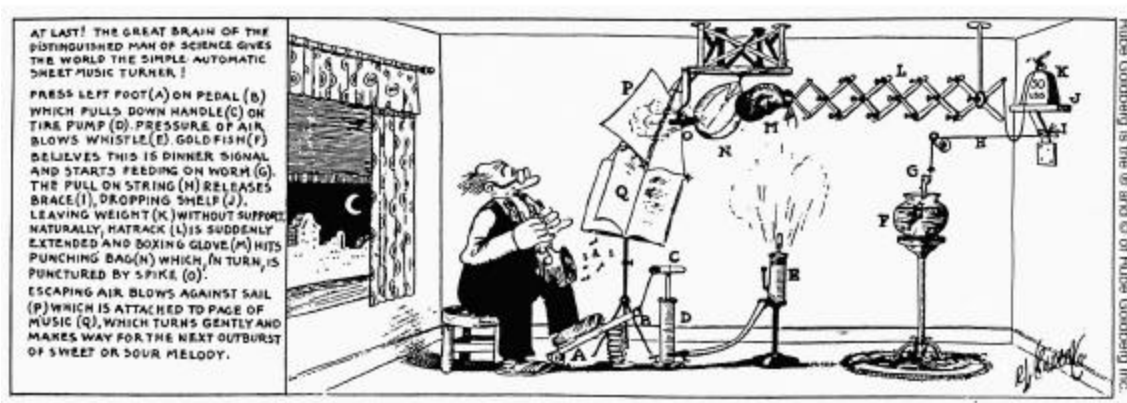


Goldberg's Variations

"Fun, fun, fun!" $\frac{3}{4}$ The Village Voice



Goldberg's Variations is a suite of twelve classic Rube Goldberg inventions, brought to life with new video animations and original music.

"It's hard to find gentle humor in jazz but clarinetist Andy Biskin has perfect radar for it." **The New York Times**

Goldberg's Variations was composed and animated by clarinetist and filmmaker **Andy Biskin**. Biskin and his music have been featured twice on NPR's **Fresh Air with Terry Gross**, and his recent debut CD, **Dogmental**, on Gunther Schuller's GM Recordings was named **Album of the Week** by The New York Times.

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 uncontrollable urge to overcomplicate, unpredictably juxtaposing 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.

In the tradition of the silent film era, **Goldberg's Variations** is performed live in a darkened theater. The animations are projected on the silver screen as the band provides live musical accompaniment and instrumental interludes. The production has minimal technical requirements (video projector, DVD player, basic sound system, etc.), and can easily be adapted for children and family audiences.

- "Composer and clarinetist Andy Biskin takes cartoon music to a new level." $\frac{3}{4}$ **Time Out New York**
- "Mr. Biskin's jazz score seems to emanate from the inventions. But he has also written themes and interludes that capture the wheels turning in Goldberg's mind as well as in his devices." $\frac{3}{4}$ **The New York Times**
- "The cartoon accompaniments are punchy with trombone bellows, clarinet bleats, and drum thumps anthropomorphizing into sound effects; the "Interludes" travel from Ellington élan to Rite of Spring dissonance. There's humor in Biskin's music, but also something smoky and dark: the insouciant collisions within urban culture that gave rise to modernity." $\frac{3}{4}$ **The Village Voice**

THE PROGRAM

- Overture
1. A Self-Scrubbing Bath Brush
2. How to Button Your Collar in a Hurry
3. Handy Self-Working Sunshade
4. Simple Way to Light a Cigar in an Automobile
Traveling Fifty Miles an Hour
5. How to Signal Your Bridge Partner
6. Self-Operating Napkin
7. Solution for Growing Hair on Balding Men
8. A Modest Mosquito Bite Scratcher
9. Outboard Motor That Requires No Fuel
10. A Simple Way to Locate Your Rubbers on a
Rainy Day
11. A Sure Way to Keep Your Head Down
During a Golf Shot
12. Automatic Sheet Music Turner

For more information, contact Andy Biskin at 212-662-4039, andy@bproductions.com, AndyBiskin.com

Swinging Machines

Andy's Biskin's 'Goldberg's Variations'

The Boston Phoenix (December 5, 2003)

BY JON GARELICK

No, clarinetist Andy Biskin doesn't play Bach — his Goldberg is Rube, the newspaper cartoonist from the first half of the 20th century who became a household name for, among other things, his drawings of complicated, comic inventions like "Self-Operating Napkin" and "Solution for Growing Hair on Balding Men." This Friday, Biskin brings his sextet to the ICA to play live accompaniment to a series of animated cartoons of Goldberg's drawings.

How Biskin completed this project is almost as complicated as one of Goldberg's own inventions. "It was one of those things," he says now, "that if you knew what you were getting into you would have never done it." Biskin, whose day job in New York is in film production, was looking to write cartoon music. The poise, humor, and episodic nature of his 2000 CD, *Dogmental* (it was released on Gunther Schuller's GM label), would seem to make him a natural for the genre. For a while, he was talking to Zippy the Pinhead creator Bill Griffin about a possible collaboration, but it never happened. Then there was Goldberg. "I can write music that sounds like these machines," Biskin thought. "It's kind of what I do anyway."

At first, he had no intention of animating the drawings. "I was going to have these pieces that were inspired by drawings but you wouldn't actually see the drawing — we'd just perform it and we'd say, 'This is the Self-Operating Napkin,' but you'd have to guess what that meant." But, as with Goldberg's inventions, one thing led to another. He first wrote the music by looking at the drawings and improvising. Once the pieces were sketched out, however, he saw there was a problem. Each single-panel drawing came with a written description of how the invention worked. "I thought we'd do it like a Ken Burns treatment — panning and scanning and zooming. But as I got deeper into it, it didn't seem to really work. Because you'd see, 'The cat climbs the tree,' but when you panned to the tree, there'd be no cat up there. So we had to put the cat up the tree." Not an animator himself, Biskin had to learn how to use a complicated software program to manipulate the camera-ready digital images generously provided by the executors of the Rube Goldberg Foundation.

There were other problems he hadn't foreseen in his original compositions. "I knew that the pool ball hits the

seesaw, the seesaw catapults the measles germ, the measles germ infects the doll. But what was tricky was to figure out how long each of these things should take and get the timing right. You want them to take long enough so that you have some time to put the music out there, but you don't want people to get bored looking at it. There always has to be something happening visually *and* musically." Then there was the matter of what to do with the text. At first, Biskin considered breaking up Goldberg's hand-lettered text into subtitles. "And then it seemed like it was too much to have to read and listen and look, so I came up with the idea of putting the words first. But then I had to write more music."

As animator *and* composer, Biskin was constantly shuttling back and forth — revising the animation, then revising the music to fit the new visual material, all the while struggling with the software. "At one point I found a new computer and then discovered that the music on my old computer was playing a little bit slower than on the new computer."

Goldberg, Biskin points out, wanted from an early age to be an artist, but his father insisted that Rube go to engineering school because, according to Biskin, "Leonardo knew science, so you have to learn science." Biskin, the son of two musicians in San Antonio, was likewise encouraged "to do something other than music." He went to Yale, studied anthropology, and got a post-graduate job working for ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax, who documented much of his work on film. Film eventually became his means of earning a living (for a while, he made documentaries for the Texas attorney general's office). He played music on the side. When he moved back to New York, he formed a band, played more and more, and wrote music for the band.

A fateful encounter with Gunther Schuller led to *Dogmental*, which for all its antic polkas, marches, and waltzes is full of airy lyricism, true swing, and Biskin's gorgeous clarinet tone. "There was a period where I wanted to be a great bebop player, like everybody else does. And then suddenly I realized that by writing my own pieces, I could sort of write to my own strengths and obscure my weaknesses. And I felt more fulfilled playing my own music." ■

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