



PROBABILITIES OF INDEPENDENT EVENTS

GRACE ELLEN BARKEY & NEEDCOMPANY



The sun will probably rise, but there is a chance that it won't. How do you plan for chance? How often can you perform an experiment, and does the chance of success increase? In *Probabilities of Independent Events*, Grace Ellen Barkey asks absurd and quirky but vital questions on the probability (or improbability) of things. She seeks out the human significance behind the mathematical notion that independent events are not influenced by previous occurrences.

Where visual art, dance and performance meet, that's where you will find Grace Ellen Barkey's productions. The musical dramaturgy always plays a pivotal part. In *Probabilities of Independent Events*, her choreography starts out from pop and folk

songs by Zappa, Queen and other musical icons. The arrangements are by the composer Rombout Willems, who also is the musical director. Together with the Needcompany orchestra and 14 dancers from Antwerp's Royal Conservatoire, they will make a party out of merry pointlessness, packed with humour and all that's radical. A dazzling encounter between three generations and fourteen nationalities!

In *Probabilities of Independent Events*, Barkey returns to absurdity. Anything is possible. It can't fail.

Probability of an event happening =

Number of ways it can happen

Total number of outcomes



CREDITS

Director & choreographer Grace Ellen Barkey

Musical Director & arrangements Rombout Willems

Needcompany orchestra & performers Sung-Im Her, Jules Beckman, Jan Lauwers, Yonier Camilo Mejia, Simon Lenski, Maarten Seghers, Elke Janssens, George van Dam, Rombout Willems

Dancers Antwerp's Royal Conservatoire Isaac Butler, Martha Gardner, Fyllenia Grigoriou, Marah Haj, Oscar Pascual López, Hanne Van Driessche, Raphael Damasceno Ferreira de Moura, Joshua Pinchon Jones, Meron Verbelen, Agnese Forlani, Valeria Secchi, Arnau Moreno i Grau, Flora Virag, Viljar Irtun Moe

Costumes Lieve Meeussen

Assistance costumes Lot Lemm

Dramaturge Elke Janssens

Choreographic Assistant Sung-Im Her

Technical Director & Lighting Designer Ken Hioco

Sound Pierrick Drochmans

Monitor mix Bart Aga

Stage Manager Tijs Michiels

Production Manager Marjolein Demey

Intern production Merel De Coen

Producer Needcompany

Co-producer Concertgebouw Brugge

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GRACE ELLEN BARKEY

The artist, choreographer and performer Grace Ellen Barkey was born in Surabaya (Indonesia). She lives and works in Brussels and is a co-founder of Needcompany (1986), a house of artists. Since 1992 she has been steadily and successfully building an international career with her own stage creations, whose nature lies where theatre, dance, live art and visual art meet. The musical dramaturgy is central to her work, and includes works by Gustav Mahler as well as Sonic Youth. In 2013 the iconic avant-garde American performance art collective The Residents has written music for her creation MUSH-ROOM. In FOREVER (2016), Grace Ellen Barkey raises the same questions as Mahler: "No one can sustain constant praise of life. Death or, rather, the finiteness of human life deserves a song or a dance too." PIE - Probabilities of Independent Events (2019), her latest production, is built on pop and folk songs by Zappa, Queen and other pop icons. It questions the (im)probability of things. Everything is possible. It cannot fail.

Grace Ellen Barkey is steadily building up a visual

oeuvre of her own. Her most recent installations form a study of the transposition from a space to a narrowness in which the viewer is invited to become part of a sensory work. She has been collecting, photographing and filming flowers, leaves and other flora for many years in her own town garden in Brussels and her immediate surroundings. "A claustrophobic look at the notion that people are mortal while nature is eternal. Beauty is only appealing when it is transient. Only then does it acquire a history."

Her visual work has recently been exhibited at Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art (Rotterdam), Poortersloge (Bruges), CC Strombeek, UZ Jette and Coup de Ville (Sint-Niklaas). Grace Ellen Barkey was one half of the artistic duo Lemm&Barkey, together with Lot Lemm. Their work has been exhibited at several museums including BOZAR (Brussels), Benaki Museum (Athens), Musée des Arts décoratifs (Paris), CC Strombeek, Dr. Guislain museum (Gent), Triennale Hasselt / Superbodies i.a



THE UNPREDICTABILITY OF PIE

Erwin Jans

Probabilities of Independent Events. If you google this phrase, you end up on a site concerned with probabilities and their calculation. For example, what is the chance that you would pick two aces in succession from a pack of cards? There are complex mathematical formulae with which to calculate the odds. However, we think about a great many events not in terms of probability, but in terms of certainty. In other words, we no longer reflect on them. We assume that they happen. For example, what chance is there that the sun will not rise tomorrow? We consider this an unusual and even absurd question, because the rising of the sun is an established part of the laws of nature. No calculation of probability is needed. It is a certainty that the sun will rise again tomorrow. But what if, nevertheless, you consider the possibility that it might not happen? Would you not then view the sun differently when it rises? With greater wonder? With more joy? *Probabilities of Independent Events.* What are the

chances that behind this logical-philosophical title lies a festive, anarchic, moving and comical performance? I have no idea whether any mathematical formula exists to calculate this degree of chance. But in this case it's true. *Probabilities of Independent Events* is the title of the latest production by Grace Ellen Barkey. To the general public she is best known as the co-founder of Needcompany, an artists' company, and as an actress in Jan Lauwers' plays. But since 1992 she has been making her own productions under the aegis of Needcompany, pieces set in the border area between theatre, dance, performance and art.

Probabilities of Independent Events has appeared unexpectedly. As a surprise. Or as a gift. From life. The production might just as easily have never been made. In 2016 Grace Ellen Barkey made *FOREVER* as a farewell production. It was based on Gustav Mahler's song *Der Abscheid*, which he wrote after being diagnosed as having a fatal heart disease, and was



a delicate ode to mortality and the beauty of the transient. After that, Barkey no longer had any need to make another piece. When she was requested to do something for December Dance, she decided it had to be something different. A performance that wasn't a performance. In a short space of time. Simply for the pleasure of it. Her partners in crime were the Needcompany orchestra, led by Rombout Willems, and dancers from the second year of the dance course at Antwerp Conservatoire. *Probabilities of Independent Events* was a new beginning, following which everything was possible once again.

As in all Barkey's productions, music plays a crucial part here too. The 'performance' – which you could actually also call a 'concert', a 'performance' or a 'party' – is a sequence of ten well-known pop songs ranging from Queen's *I Want It All* through Tina Turner and David Bowie's *Tonight* to Frank Zappa's *Dancin' Fool*. The songs are acted and performed with total abandon by the Needcompany musicians and actors.

The advantage of songs, and especially pop songs, is that you can say a lot in them that you can't say anywhere else. They have their own poetry, their own literary logic. You don't have to worry about a bit of

exaggeration and sentimentality. *I want it all*. Why not? *Everything will be alright tonight*. Of course! Pop songs are both simple and poetic. Superficial and profound. Everyone can interpret them in their own way.

The pop songs are packed full of energy. The young dancers are also bursting with vitality. The choreography is based in the first place on their energy. On simple movements. As few phrases as possible. Pure physicality. The students fill the stage like a tsunami with their life force and gaiety. Barkey says "I didn't want to make a piece about men and women and sexuality. I wanted to make one about joy. As free of gender as possible."

Probabilities of Independent Events does not tell any clear story. There are no characters. And if there were, they would be transforming all the time. Each song evokes its own visual world for several minutes at a time. Each song creates its own image. Sometimes exotic, sometimes absurd, hilarious, or hysterical! And all with as few material means as possible. A bicycle, a trolley, a big plastic bag, a little house, rabbits. Barkey finds a lot of these images on the street. For those who know how to look, everyday things are an inexhaustible source of imagination.



Barkey the choreographer describes her method thus: "The Russian film-maker Tarkovsky speaks of a 'poetic logic'. That's what I base my work on. The poetic logic is less concerned with meaning, but is very strict about timing, structure and form. Lots of theatre still consists of telling stories. I want to make performances like poems, with a strict form but full of elusive meanings. I want to convert experiences into forms."

One of the forms Barkey likes to use in her productions is the exaggeration or grotesque. In the same way as, in a pop song, you can exaggerate an emotion or a gesture to make something clear, in *Probabilities of Independent Events* the choreography does the same. Exaggeration and the grotesque make you look at things differently. It's like pretending that the sun may not rise and then enjoying its light when it does. *Probabilities of Independent Events* is an ode to life. To beginning anew. To the moment. The imagination. To thinking in a different way. To the illogical. The high. To being together. *Probabilities of Independent Events* is a stage full of dancing and jumping bodies. In vivid colours. With stirring music. And an energy that spreads to the audi-

ence. Exuberant and generous. With a lust for life!

The abbreviation of *Probabilities of Independent Events* is PIE. A coincidence? What chance was there of that?



NEEDCOMPANY

Needcompany is an artists' company set up by the artists Jan Lauwers and Grace Ellen Barkey in 1986. Maarten Seghers has been a member of Needcompany since 2001. Lauwers, Barkey and Seghers form the core of the company, and it embraces all their artistic work: theatre, dance, performance, visual art, writing, etc. Their creations are shown at the most prominent venues at home and abroad.

Since the very beginning, Needcompany has presented itself as an international, multilingual, innovative and multidisciplinary company. It revolves around the individual artist. Everything is founded on the artistic project, on authenticity, necessity and meaning. The medium itself is continually questioned, and there is constant examination of the quality of the content to be conveyed in relation to the form it takes.

Needcompany believes in quality, cooperation and innovation. Needcompany is a leading voice in the social debate on the urgency and beauty of art at both a domestic and an international level.



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