



Image: Jaap Reedijk

## Curriculum Links

Drama

Music

## Contents

Cast and Creatives

About the Show

Biographies

Production and Techniques

Further Resources

Provocations and Activities

[Download SchoolFest 101 here.](#)

Your guide to make the most of the festival experience.

# Släpstick

## 2020 TEACHERS RESOURCE



**New Zealand**  
**Festival** OF THE ARTS

# CAST AND CREATIVES

Website: [www.slapstick.nl](http://www.slapstick.nl)

Concept, compositions & arrangements: **Släpstick, Ro Krauss, Willem van Baarsen, Rogier Bosman, Sanne van Delft** and **Jon Bittman**

Direction: **Stanley Burleson**

Direction advice: **Karel de Rooij**

Set design and creation: **Jacco van den Dool, Siem van Leeuwen, Ellen Windhorst**

Costumes: **Jan Aarntzen**

Lighting design: **Jacco van den Dool, Wouter Moscou**

Sound design: **Joep van der Velden**

**SLÄPSTICK** was founded in 1997 (originally under the name 'Wereldband'). Ro Krauss, Willem van Baarsen, Rogier Bosman and Sanne van Delft met at music school, and decided to start a band. The core of the Släpstick was born and is still intact to this day. Jon Bittman joined the group in 2012.

Budding friendships combined with the communal quest for new and strange musical instruments and a shared need for laughter led to fresh and interesting ideas. Although they happily plundered music from the many genres, they began writing more and more of their own compositions. From 1997 onwards Släpstick performed at various music venues and festivals, while at the same time developing ludicrous theatrical scenes to accompany their tunes. In 2005 they made the inevitable leap from being a band to the theatre stage. The guys deftly switched between trumpets, violins and musical saws the way a juggler might play catch with a bowling ball, a flaming torch, and, well... a musical saw. A Släpstick show is a carousel of instruments, always ready to spin off its axis and into a humorous situation, a musical delight, or a touching scene.

## ABOUT THE SHOW

Flying violins! Speed skating ballerinos! Släpstick is an ode to the timeless comedy of Charlie Chaplin, Marx Brothers, Spike Jones and Laurel & Hardy. A spectacular collection of musical and humorous acts rooted in the slapstick tradition, but with a very modern twist.

Släpstick is five world-class performers who have mastered over 100 instruments between them. With a flair for eccentricity and a hint of melancholy, Släpstick has left audiences and critics breathless.

The Show toured throughout the Netherlands for many years until, in 2017, the company presented internationally for the first time, at the Edinburgh Fringe. There they wowed the crowds and picked up a Spirit of the Fringe award. A perfect blend of virtuosic musicianship, lung-bursting physical comedy and heartfelt nostalgia in the true 'slapstick' tradition.

They are making an ode to an almost forgotten art form:  
slapstick. And they do it magnificently.

A deep bow for the craftsmanship of Släpstick.

★★★★★Trouw

# BIOGRAPHIES

**Willem van Baarsen** studied violin at the Royal Conservatory of the Hague. In the past he has performed with, a.o. ZAPP! String quartet, the Ricciotti Ensemble, Spinvis, het Residentie Orkest, het Gelders Orkest, with Emmy Verhey in Camerata Antonio Lucio and with Carel Kraaijenhof in Sexteto Canyengue, touring throughout the Americas, Europe and the Middle East. To this day he is the first and only conservatory student to have ridden a bicycle while playing trombone at his final exam ... for violin performance.

**Rogier Bosman** began studying at The Royal Conservatory of the Hague at the age of 12, as well as studying at the Rotterdam Conservatory. Aside from Släpstick, Rogier performs with Wende Snijders, Brigitte Kaandorp and Cystine Carreon, and has composed for the Residentie Orchestra, het Gelders Orkest, RO-theater, Theatre group Oostpool, and the Metropole Orchestra. Rogier has composed and arranged music for the Liberation Day ceremonies, as well as many various TV shows, documentaries and international circus acts. He is also the world record holder for "most notes articulated on an occarina in a two-minute span while wearing a swan tutu".

**Sanne van Delft** studied contra-bass at the Conservatory of Amsterdam. He was a long time member of the Sexteto Canyengue tango orchestra, and has worked with artists such as Jeroen Zijlstra, Wende Snijders, Juan Jose Mosalini sr. (Argentina) and Dulce Pontes (Portugal). He has toured all throughout North America, Scotland, Switzerland, Spain, Bosnia, Alaska, Portugal, South Africa, Italy, Turkey, Norway, Argentina, Ireland and China. He is the only member of Släpstick to have successfully ice skated the 330 kilometer long loop around the Dutch inland sea, although not quite as fast as his older brother.

**Ro Krauss** studied violin and viola under the tutelage of Ron Ephrat, Vladimir Mendelssohn and Prunella Pacey, eventually graduating with the highest distinction from the Utrecht Conservatory. He has played with various chamber music ensembles, and has performed with a.o. Mathilde Santing, Yo Yo Ma, Brigitte Kaandorp, Carel Kraaijenhof, Wende Snijders, Guus Meeuwis, Hadewych Minis and Willy Caron. Ro specialises in music from the Balkans. So much so, that he was rewarded an honorary Romanian citizenship, only to have it revoked months later when they learned of his prowess at impersonating various historical and modern dictators.

Originally born in the U.S.A, **Jon Bittman** graduated with the highest distinction from the Utrecht Conservatory, and received his MA in jazz saxophone from the Rotterdam Conservatory. Jon has performed in various Dutch jazz venues and festivals such as the BIMhuis and Jazz in Duketown. With balkan-pop group Amariszi he's toured throughout Europe and Turkey, and has done studio work for various commercials, movies, and T.V. shows. He recorded clarinet solos on Caro Emerald's multi-platinum first album. Jon is also the world authority on the Zanzithophone: an electronic sax-like toy (or toy-like sax?) from the 1980s that seemingly only he knows (and cares) about.



From top left, clockwise: Sanne van Delft, Ro Krauss, Rogier Bosman, Jon Bittman, Willem van Baarsen

# GENRE

Slapstick is when you use physical humour as comedy, and appearing the fool - falling over, dropping something, bumping into someone, committing acts of outrageous violence over the top. The roots of slapstick can be found in Ancient Greece and Rome. But its most obvious ancestor is the 16th century Italian tradition of Commedia dell'Arte. Commedia character Arlecchino used a stick to beat others in the performance - two sticks were tied together at one end designed to make a loud noise, accentuating the sound and impact of getting hit.

The performance of *Slapstick* follows the style of a vaudeville and music hall show, a form of entertainment that consists of a series of short individual acts featuring performances such as magicians, acrobats, comedians, singers, dancers and musicians. This style was popular in the late 1800s early 1900s and influenced the Marx Brothers and Charlie Chaplin when they took to film.

Modern slapstick continues the tradition of violence, tripping on banana peels, accidentally walking into unseen objects and banging heads together. Some of the most famous performers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Marx Brothers, The Three Stooges and Charlie Chaplin were masters of slapstick and their films are full of physical gags. Modern examples of slapstick include Rowan Atkinson as Mr Bean, Jim Carrey movies, America's Funniest Home Videos ... can you think of any more?

# PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES

## SOUND / MUSIC

The cast of *Slapstick* are amazing musicians playing over 100 instruments between them. Musicianship is the core integral part of the performance, all the performers are professionally trained, originally performing together in the band 'Wereldband'. In a performance which focuses on physicality and movement rather than the strength of a script, instrumentation and song are important in communicating emotion and tone. Sound effects are used to enhance movements e.g. when an instrument's string breaks, a resounding 'boing' rings out across the theatre.

## MOVEMENT

In slapstick, physical comedy movements are over accentuated. What makes *Slapstick* so exciting is how skilled in both physical comedy and musicianship the performers are. Gestures are large, facial expressions are animated and energy is high. This style of comedy requires great timing working together to the millisecond to make sure that movements - especially violent ones - are safe and give the right effect.

## SET

The set invokes a 1920s fairground with old fashioned lightbulbs framing the space, faded banners advertising 'one night only' and mismatched furniture. The instruments are integral parts of the performance but also set pieces, props and weapons. Grainy black and white video in the form of silent movies is projected in the space to evoke performers from throughout the history of slapstick.

## COSTUME

The costumes are an eclectic combination of 1920s, 30s and 40s clothing, embodying the masters of slapstick, Charlie Chaplin, Groucho Marx and Buster Keaton. Make-up which accentuates eyebrows, eyes and facial hair brings focus to the facial expressions - helping wordlessly communicate each character's emotion.

# FURTHER RESOURCES AND READINGS

## INTERVIEWS

“You have to be precise to the millisecond. We call it controlled chaos” Watch an interview on BBC Breakfast: [youtu.be/FliVXUbGLqM](https://youtu.be/FliVXUbGLqM)

How many instruments do you play? Find out more about the virtuoso talents of Släpsticks’ Rogier and Willem: [youtu.be/DRnmNZ4jaFk](https://youtu.be/DRnmNZ4jaFk)

“How do you become a slapstick comic? If you’re like us, then you were always the one at the music school trying to balance a trombone on his chin while your peers were diligently studying their etudes. I suppose it’s a natural progression. If you have that innate silliness, the diligence to work on your craft in great detail, and the willingness to fling your body around the stage, you’re well on your way.” Read an interview with John Bitten from Släpstick: [quayslife.com/people/slapstick/](https://quayslife.com/people/slapstick/)

## WATCH

Watch the performance trailer for Släpstick: [youtu.be/JpylSDZsaFY](https://youtu.be/JpylSDZsaFY)

Check out the Släpstick YouTube channel for a cacophony of wild and wonderful videos, interviews and performances: [youtube.com/user/wereldband2009/featured](https://youtube.com/user/wereldband2009/featured)

Explore the work of [The Marx Brothers](#), [Charlie Chaplin](#), [Spike Jones](#) and [Laurel and Hardy](#) on YouTube

## GO FURTHER...

Find out about the women of slapstick and physical comedy – Mae West, Lucille Ball, Amy Schumer...they all have utilised slapstick techniques in their performances.

Read a brief article about the history of women in slapstick, with lots of links to Youtube videos, from Lucille Ball to Melissa McCarthy: [theestablishment.co/a-brief-history-of-women-in-slapstick-comedy-eced4cc59456/index.html](https://theestablishment.co/a-brief-history-of-women-in-slapstick-comedy-eced4cc59456/index.html)

Academic Maggie Hennefeld has written a book called *Specters of Slapstick and Silent Film Comediennes* focussing on a feminist reading of women in slapstick. This short article and podcast episode will get you started!

5 Questions with Maggie Hennefeld: <https://medium.com/renew-theaters/5-questions-with-assistant-professor-of-cultural-studies-and-comparative-literature-maggie-739cf2876d5a>

Maggie Hennefeld on the early days of feminist slapstick film comedies (podcast): [newbooksnetwork.com/margaret-hennefeld-specters-of-slapstick-and-silent-film-comediennes-columbia-up-2018/](https://newbooksnetwork.com/margaret-hennefeld-specters-of-slapstick-and-silent-film-comediennes-columbia-up-2018/)

Explore the extended slapstick genre – cartoons such as Looney Tunes ([youtu.be/xfsGlrvgIO8](https://youtu.be/xfsGlrvgIO8)) movies like Home Alone and TV shows like MTV’s Jackass.



# PROVOCATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

These questions are a guide designed to provoke further discussion. You might answer together as a class, in groups or individually.

## BEFORE THE FESTIVAL

Discuss the genre of slapstick. What do you know about it? Where did it come from? What examples – historical and contemporary can you think of? Are there any examples from New Zealand you can think of?

Brainstorm tropes in slapstick comedy e.g. Pie in the face, slipping on a banana skin. How about contemporary phenomenon like the Ice Bucket Challenge or MTV's Jackass?

Watch the performance trailer and/or read about the performance in the brochure. What are you expecting to see? What are you excited to see?

## AFTER THE FESTIVAL

How did the performance live up to your expectations? Did you find it...Stimulating? Intriguing? Challenging? Memorable? Confusing? Evocative? Unique? Delightful? Meaningful? Explain your reactions.

How did you feel while watching the performance? What did the performers do to create this feeling? What production techniques were used to create this feeling?

What was a memorable moment in the performance? How would you describe this to a friend?

How successful were the performers in keeping the audience engaged throughout the performance? What techniques did they use to do this?

How did the performers use drama techniques (voice, body, movement and space) to create their characters?

How did the performers interact with each other and the audience throughout the performance? Did you want to participate? Why / Why not?

What did you notice about staging, lighting, sound, music, costume and other production elements?

In what ways did the production elements reveal and enhance the themes of the performance? Explain your responses.

How were the conventions of slapstick and physical theatre incorporated in the performance? How does this compare to 'traditional' slapstick performance e.g. Charlie Chaplin, The Marx Brothers, The Three Stooges. What makes the performance a 'modern interpretation'?

Did you see any instruments you haven't seen before? Which ones?

Music is integral to *Släpstick*. How did the pieces performed reflect and heighten the performance?

How did the performers integrate performing their instruments into their physical movements?

**Need something more? Contact your SchoolFest team with any questions about the performance.**