

Los Angeles Times CALENDAR weekend

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WITH THE KIDS

Michel Lauzière gets comedic bounce from everyday objects

The Canadian entertainer will bring his inventive antics to Caltech's Beckman Auditorium.

By Brenda Rees
Special to The Times

Water guns, a bicycle horn suit, assorted cymbals, cigar box guitars, outsized balloons — Canadian entertainer Michel Lauzière will come *equipped* to his performance Saturday at Caltech's Beckman Auditorium.

It's all in fun, of course, but Lauzière and his steady stream of sight gags are much more about the wow than the guffaw.

"I'm not on stage to be funny.... I'm very serious about what I do," the bespectacled performer says in a phone interview. "I don't walk out with a red nose like a clown — I'm not the funny one. But what happens on stage becomes funny. It's all about surprise."

Lauzière is difficult to categorize — he juggles, does magic, plays music (on some of the most bizarre instruments ever concocted) and is absurdly acrobatic. His inventions are marvels of simplicity, recycled everyday objects that transform form and function into an entertaining enterprise.

One of Lauzière's standard bits for the last 10 years has been to squeeze his body into a huge inflated balloon and, with only his head protruding, bounce about the stage like a human beach ball. "It just works so well and it's always worth doing," he says with a proud laugh.

So, those good ideas — playing classical music on bicycle pumps, juggling children's swimming pools — where do they come from?

"I do have a workshop back home that's filled with lots of toys and props, but things can trigger an idea at any time," Lauzière explains. "Sometimes it's browsing around a hardware store, or riding on a plane. That's where I recently came up with a new way of doing the traditional one-man-band act. I like taking the cliché and seeing how I can make it original, make it new again."

Lauzière was born in Drummondville, Canada (he still lives in the area, which is in Quebec), and grew up with a yen for performing. He started out as a magician and juggler, teaming up with his teacher to become the duo Les Foubracs. But he left his partner, as well as a budding career as an editorial cartoonist, to pursue a solo act in 1988. "I wanted to travel, I felt that my act would work well on an international scene," he says, adding that he wanted to concentrate more on inventions and music.

That combination of tunes and MacGyver-esque creations has brought Lauzière critical success at home and abroad. He's performed in 45 countries on five continents and counts David Letterman as one of his biggest fans — he's Rollerbladed on Letterman's show, tapping 284 bottles lined up on a city street to play an excerpt from Mozart's 40th Symphony. Stay tuned: A new stunt is in the works.

Overall, Lauzière hopes his shows can inspire audiences to "think up new ways to do something and not rely on the tried-and-true methods," he says. "There are new angles to everything and every situation. Just look and see."

Michel Lauzière

Where: Caltech, Beckman Auditorium, 332 S. Michigan Ave., Pasadena

When: 2 p.m. Saturday

Cost: \$15 adults, \$10 children

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