



The 15th First Annual Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony

by Stephen Drew, AIR staff

NOTE: To see video of the entire ceremony, see the Improbable Research web site: www.improbable.com.

The 2005 Ig Nobel Prizes, honoring achievements that first make people LAUGH, and then make them THINK, were awarded at Harvard University's historic Sanders Theatre on October 6, before 1,200 spectators in a ceremony filled with seemingly infinite quantities of lab coats, singers, paper airplanes, and ephemera. This was the 15th First Annual Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony.

Seven of the ten new winners journeyed to Harvard -- at their own expense -- to accept their Prizes. They came from slightly more than four continents. The winners of the Medicine Prize and of the Fluid Dynamics Prizes were unable to travel, and so delivered their speeches via video. (The Fluid Dynamics winners were unable to obtain visas to visit the



United States.)

The Ig Nobel Prizes were physically handed to the winners by Nobel Laureates Dudley Herschbach (Chemistry '86), William Lipscomb (Chemistry '76), and Robert Wilson (Physics '78), and Sheldon Glashow (Physics '79). Wilson was the prize in the annual Win-a-Date-With-a-Nobel-Laureate Contest.

Frank Wilczek, a 2004 Nobel Physics Laureate, was unable to attend the ceremony due to a scheduling conflict. He and his wife, Betsy, watched the live webcast from a mountaintop in Germany. Their daughters, Amity and Mira, attended the ceremony in the company of a life-size dummy version of their father. The dummy, who quickly gained the name "Frank Junior," sat on stage and was cavorted with by the other Nobel Laureates.

Harvard physics professor Roy Glauber, who usually sweeps paper airplanes from the stage, was unable to attend this year

The 2005 Ig Nobel Prize Winners, joined by the Nobel Laureates and the 24/7 Lecturers, pose for a pointless photo opportunity on the stage of Sanders Theater, at the conclusion of the ceremony. Photo: John Bradley.

due to a previously scheduled 90th birthday party for a colleague. Two days before the Ig Nobel Ceremony, Glauber received a telephone call from Stockholm, informing him that he has been awarded a Nobel Prize in physics. Professor Glauber is expected to resume his traditional duties at next year's Ig Nobel Ceremony.

The event was produced by the *Annals of Improbable Research*, and co-sponsored by the Harvard-Radcliffe Science Fiction Association and the Harvard-Radcliffe Society of Physics Students.

A Small Infinity of Occurrences

The evening began with a pre-ceremony musical event -- the premiere of Nicholas Carstou's "Infinite Chopsticks," performed by the composer using a grand piano and a pair of chopsticks. The piece was fifteen minutes long. It included several hundred variations on the traditional tune "chopsticks."

Kees Moeliker, the 2003 Ig Nobel Biology Prize winner, gave the keynote address, briefly referring to the work that on him his prize (the world's first scientific account of homosexual necrophilia in the mallard duck), and then showing a one-minute video of some new, very different, arrestingly puzzling bird activity.

Don Featherstone, the 1996 Ig Nobel Art Prize winner (for creating the now-ubiquitous plastic pink flamingo) and his wife, Nancy, and their little dog returned to Sanders Theatre to take a bow. They were greeted with rapturous applause.

The evening also featured numerous tributes to the evening's theme of "INFINITY." Foremost were the 24/7-Lectures -- in which famous thinkers explained their field of research, first in twenty-four (24) seconds, and then in seven (7) words.

Herschbach, Wilson and Glashow each delivered an Infinite Lecture, presenting one or another aspect of infinity within the prescribed time limit of infinity.

The night also featured the premiere of a new mini-opera called "The Count of Infinity," which starred opera singers Margot Button and Simon Chausse and pianist Greg Neil. They were joined in the rousing conclusion by all of the scientists on stage.

Each new winner was permitted a maximum of sixty (60) seconds to deliver an acceptance speech; the time limit was enforced by a cute, and determined, nine-year-old girl. The winners tried to explain themselves at greater length (five minutes each) in free public lectures two days later, in the Ig Informal Lectures at MIT.



Following tradition, just prior to the ceremony Dudley Herschbach and Robert Wilson and the other Nobel Laureates (not shown in this photo) sign the certificates they will present, a half hour later, to the winners at the 2005 Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony. Photo: Kees Moeliker.



The performing chemists -- Daniel Rosenberg (left) and Joost Bensen -- with their one-minute-long wordless physico-chemical spectaculars, are a much-anticipated aspect of every year's ceremony. Photo: Kees Moeliker



Silver-body-painted Human Spotlight Jim Bredt reads a copy of *Heavy Metal* magazine while awaiting the start of the ceremony. Photo: David Holzman



An unidentified audience member collects Nobel Laureate Robert Wilson as her prize in the Win-a-Date-with-a-Nobel-Laureate Contest. Photo: John Bradley.



Nobel Laureate Frank Wilczek -- unable to attend due to a scheduling conflict -- sent a dummy version of himself constructed by his family. Here Nobel Laureate Sheldon Glashow helps "Frank Junior" stand and wave to the crowd. Nobel Laureate William Lipscomb (left) and Ig Nobel Chemistry Prize co-winner Brian Gettlefinger (honored for demonstrating that humans swim just as fast in syrup as they do in water) look on. Photo: Robin Abrahams.



Left to right: Minordomo Bailes Brown, minordomo Naomi Stephen, property master Eric Workman - the man who builds the Ig Nobel Prizes themselves -- and minordomo Julia Lunetta at the 2005 Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony. The minordomos are in a sense the most important people in the ceremony -- they know who is supposed to move where when and how, and make sure that everyone does. Photo: Robin Abrahams.



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