Playing around with Dingbats and The Gimp

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About the author:

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Abstract:

In this article I give some examples how you can easily create nice pictures using dingbats and The Gimp. The version of Gimp that was used for this article is Gimp-1.2.2.

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What are Dingbats?

Probably you have already come across dingbats when you used the text tool of Gimp. Dingbats are fonts. When you were trying out several fonts you probably came across some fonts called e.g. dingbats, davysdingbats or davysotherdingbats that weren't normal letters but small sketches of flowers, a piano, animals etc. Perhaps you have wondered then what you could do with them. But usually when you are using the text tool you want to include some text and later when you are looking for cool motives you have already forgotten about them. But think again. They can really help you create very nice looking pictures in a short time and you also don't need to be very talented in drawing for this.

Where do I get them?

In this article I will mainly use dingbats that are included in the sharefonts package (davysdingbats, davysotherdingbats..) as I think that many of you will already have them installed on their computer but I will also show you a few icons of other dingbats that I found exciting. There are really tons of cool and exciting dingbats out there that you might want to install.
You can download the sharefonts from http://ibiblio.org/pub/Linux/X11/fonts/ and you find a collection
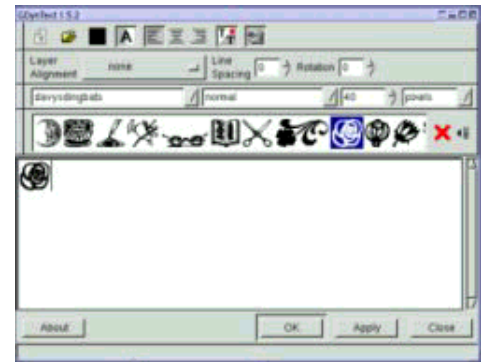
of other dingbats at http://www.fontguy.com.
Read André Pascual's article on Freefont, TrueType and patterns with The Gimp to find out how to install them.

How can I use them?

Of course you can use the normal text tool but there is a special tool called GDyntext which is preferrable here. You will find GDyntext when you right click in an image
Filter --> Render --> DynamicText
By using it you can preview the icons and then select the one(s) you want with the mouse (in the same way as you copy & paste something) or if you know the key you can also type it in directly. In the default setting the tool already shows you the letters of the alphabet with small as well as with capital letters. But sometimes there are a few more icons available that you e.g. get if you press some special characters.
Another way to insert your icons (and the one I prefer when I am looking for new icons) is to use the CharMap window which you get by pressing on the button that is the most right in the top row in the GDyntext window. In the charmap you can see all available characters of a font and can insert them in your image. Left at the bottom there is also a small field where you can see which key it is.
With GDyntext you can also scale the size of the icon which can be much bigger here than the available size in the text tool. So you may also want to use GDyntext if you need some text in a very big size.
You can also set the color you want your dingbats to have as well as rotate it or determine where in the image it shall be positioned. At first the color is the same as the foreground color in the main menu of The Gimp but when you change it afterwards it doesn't have any effect and you can also choose a color in the tool itself.
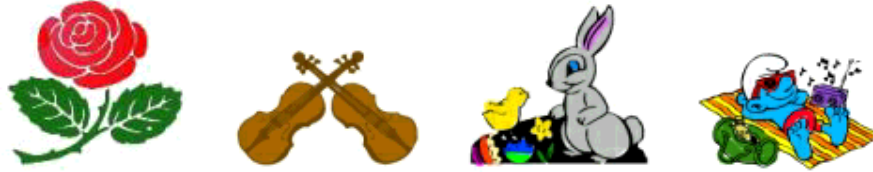The only disadvantage that you have with this tool is - at least at my computer (I am using Gimp1.2.2 on a Mandrake8.0) - that it sometimes manages to crash Gimp when I have loaded all the tons of special fonts.

What can I do with them?

Perhaps you have taken a look at the dingbats by now. Of course there are a few icons like e.g. the grand piano you may want to use just as they are without any changes:

grandpiano = davysotherdingbats: D, dolphin = critters by darrian: v, penguin = critters by darrian: u

or for some like e.g. the rose you just want to add some color:

rose = davysdingbats: k, violins = davysotherdingbats:5 ,easter = critters by darrian:Q, smurf = Smurf:c

But perhaps you are not really convinced yet that you could easily create some very nice looking pictures out of them. But it really is very easy! Already with a few simple mouse clicks you can create very nice little pictures:

Using Gradients

Often an icon will already look very good if you fill it with a gradient or if you use a gradient as background.
To use gradients in Gimp is very easy. To get a gradient with just two colors choose the two colors that you want as background and foreground colors. Now doubleclick on the gradient button (in the main window, see screenshot on the right). The option under Blend should say: FG to BG (RGB). Now draw a line with the mouse from the right to the left side of your picture and the image is filled with a gradient. The options under "gradient" determine how the colors of the gradient will run (e.g. linear). By varying the direction or the length of the line you draw with the mouse you also influence how the gradient will look on your image. Of course you can also use gradients with more than two colors. Click on File (in the main menu of Gimp)-->Dialogs-->Gradients and you can see a big selection of gradients. If you want to use one of them just click on it to select it. Then go back to the gradient button and again double click on it. The Blend option must now be "Custom Gradient". Then do as before and draw a line with your mouse over the image and it is filled with the gradient.

Creating your own gradients

Of course you can also define your own gradients. To do so click again on File-->Dialogs-->Gradients and choose a gradient that comes closest to the one you want to design. Then click "Edit". A new window opens. Click here "Copy Gradient" and name it as you like. Now you can see it in the list of gradients but it still looks identical to the other one. We are now going to edit it. Remain in the window "Gradient Editor". At the bottom you see a big band with the colors of the gradient. Below is a line where you can see some triangles. Between two black triangles is a section and you will always change one section in one go. To make a section bigger you can just drag the triangles to the point where you

want them to be. The colors of the area that has a darker gray can be changed. Click in the band with a right mouse click and hold it. There are several options you can choose now: You can see "Left endpoint's color" and "Right endpoints' color". If you go to them with the mouse you will get a color circle and can choose a new color. The endpoint of one section should have the same color as the starting point of the adjacent section if you want a smooth picture. Of course this is not true if you want to have clear borders of color changes. By clicking on "Blending function for section" you can say whether the color should run linear, in a circle etc. By clicking "Split segments at midpoint" you can split the section into smaller parts.

Let's have a look at some nice pictures now:

The trompet is from davysotherdingbats, character r. I gave it a gradient of a yellow and orange tone. (Make sure that the trompet is selected because otherwise the whole image is filled with the gradient.)

The rabbit on a hat is from the font critters by darrian, character b, and I gave it a gray color. On a new layer I chose a violet and a gray tone as my gradient (gray=foreground color and violet=background color. In the middle of the picture I drew a diagonal line from a higher to a lower point (vertical to the line that you can see) of the length of the darker violet tone.

The sunflower consists of two icons, both from davysdingbats, characters j and e. I gave the stalk a green colour. For the blossom I used a gradient of a yellow and an orange tone.

Let's now look at a picture with a gradient I made myself:

First I created the text in a circle. For it I went to the main menu and clicked Xtns (right to File)--> Script Fu --> Logo --> Text in a circle. Here I typed the text "Come and join the fun" but let a space as a first sign. Otherwise the first and last word are very close to each other. I chose a radius of 80, start Angle 0 and Fill Angle 360. For the Font Size I chose 25 and as Font Jayne Print. The text color is the foreground color from the menu. You get a separate picture now. I deleted the background, opened a new layer and pasted the penguins inside. The penguins are from critters by darrian,I. Then I opened again a new layer, moved it to the bottom and filled it with my created gradient.

How about a button ?

I chose a light and a dark blue as my foreground and background colors. Then I opened a new image with a white background. In a new layer I selected a big circle with the selection tool and filled it with this blue gradient by drawing a line with the mouse from left to right. I copied this layer and scaled the size of the circle in the new layer down a bit. Then I filled it again with the gradient but this time I drew a line from right to left. I did the same for a third layer on top of the two. I pasted the circle inside and scaled it down and then filled it with the gradient, this time again drawing a line from left to right. Now in another layer on top of them I pasted the icon with the mouse and the flowers (from critters by darrian,A). Then right click in the layer Script Fu-->Shadow-->Drop-Shadow.

Script-Fu

Script Fus are scripts so that you can get an effect in one click for which you usually would need several steps. You can get the Script Fus either by right clicking in an image or a click on Xtns (next to File on top in the main window of the Gimp). It is said that you should use the right click in the image to work with already created images while by clicking on Script-fu over Xtns you can create a new image and determine which text font and color to use and which text to write.
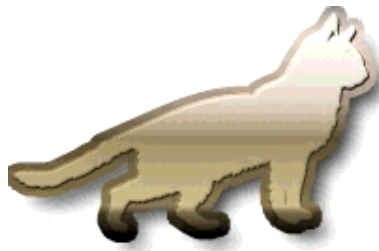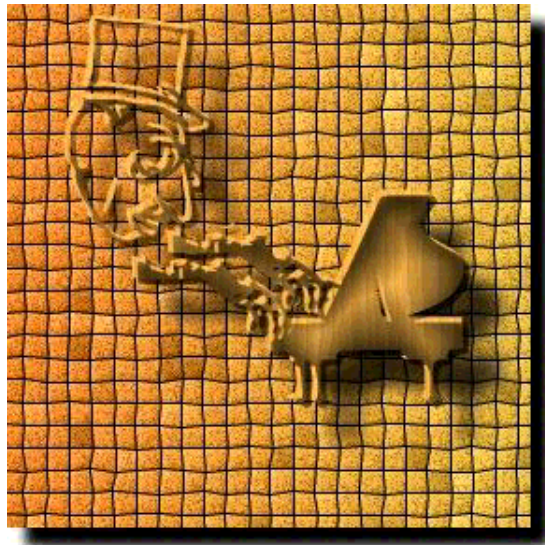
Let's look at some pictures:

Choose the rose from davysdingbats, character k, and then right click Script fu --> Alpha to Logo--> Chrome.

Choose the grandpiano from davysotherdingbats, character D. I used a size of 140 here. Then right click in the image Script-Fu-->AlphatoLogo--> gradient bevel.

Choose the cat from davysotherdingbats, character 0 (zero), and then right click Script-Fu-->AlphatoLogo-->Glossy.

I took the grand piano from davysotherdingbats, D, the second (right) hand from davysotherdingbats, 2, (You take both hands and then just erase the first (the left one) and take the right hand twice) and the head from davysotherdingbats, 3 as well and then placed them as you can see in the image. I flipped (mirrored) the hands horizontally and erased the upper fingers. Then right click

Script-Fu-->AlphatoLogo--> Textured.
Here I used the following settings:
Border Size (pixels):20
Pattern: here I used a wood pattern
Mosaic Tile Type: Squares
Background Color: white (Hue: -1, Saturation:0, Value, Red, Green and Blue = 1)
Starting Blend: orange: here the color that is set as foregound color in Gimp is used, here it is: H=29, S=73, V=91, R=234, G=147, B=61, HexTriplet:#ea933d
Ending Blend: yellow: Hue: 43.76, Saturation: 0.77, Value: 0.92, Red: 0.92, Green: 0.73, Blue: 0.21)

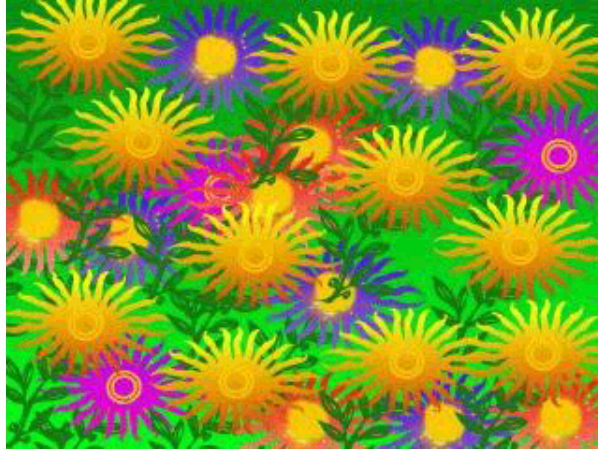# Adding some other effects...

I placed everything as you can see in the picture. The dancers and the piano player are from davysdingbats, L. I erased the flag from the head and gave them their color, making their hands white. For their eyes I took a big brush and drew two points. The stars are both the same (dingbats, U) just having different sizes. I pasted the star on a layer and gave it its color. Then I opened a new layer, copied & pasted it, flipped it horizontally and filled it with the second color. The grand piano is from davysotherdingbats,D. The text font is amaze. The piano keyboard is from davysotherdingbats, e. On a layer below the keyboard I filled the space in between the keyboard with a white color. I then merged this two layers. You can do this by making the eyes in the layers box of the other non-piano layers invisible (by clicking on them). Now only the piano keyboard is visible. Right click in the image Layers-->Merge visible layers and the piano is merged. Then right mouse click Filters-->Distorts-->IWarp. Here I deformed it with the options move and grow. I just went over the keyboard and deformed it until I was satisfied. Now make the other layers visible again and right click Layer-->Merge visible layers. Then right click Script Fu-->Alpha to Logo-->Blended (with the default values).

I took an empty image and then right click ScriptFu-->Decor-->Add Border (default values). Then again right click in the image ScriptFu-->Alpha to Logo-->Glossy. Then I just added the group of penguins from critters by darrian, z.

I pasted the piano keyboard (davysotherdingbats, e) and filled the space with white in a new layer and merged the two as described above. Then right click in the layer with the piano keyboard Filters-->Distorts-->CurveBend. Here you can "design" a curve along which the piano keyboard should bend. Then I took a new layer and plasted two cats (davysotherdingbats, 0) in it, rotated them so that they look as in the picture, choose a green tone and added the eyes. I took a new layer and filled it with many of the already above described sunflowers in the way you can see in the image. As background I chose a gradient of blue and green.

I filled a layer with sunflowers as in the previous picture. Then I added another layer below and filled it with sunflowers where the blossoms were filled with a red gradient. Again a new layer below and filled with sunflowers of a violet gradient and once again this time with sunflowers of a blue gradient. For the yellow/orange and violet sunflowers I filled the middle of the blossom with yellow. The sunflowers have this form so just add a new layer below and fill the space below the blossom with yellow and you will get that effect. For the blue and red sunflowers I just filled the whole middle of the blossom with yellow (I painted over the other color). As background I took a green gradient fill.

This picture is similar to the previous one. So take the previous picture and just replace the background gradient fill with a pattern background choosing the pattern with the leaves. Then click on the layer with

the blue sunflowers. Right click on the layer Filter-->Map-->Fractal Trace (Warp and default settings). Finally I erased some of the stalks that I found disturbing. That's all.

I guess you already have lots of ideas now to create far greater pictures than mine.
Have fun and enjoy! :-)

References

- The website of Gimp:http://www.gimp.org
- A site with a lot of cool ideas for 2D graphics: http://www.webreference.com/graphics