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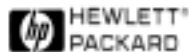
DIAVOLO DANCE THEATER

Friday, April 12, 2002
Main Theatre, UC Davis, 11:00am

Dear Teachers:

We hope you will find this Teacher's Guide helpful in preparing your students for what they will see and hear at the **Diavolo Dance Theater** performance matinee. The Guide provides background information on the performance company and repertoire as well as a review of theater conventions and audience protocol. The Diavolo Dance Theater matinee, which is specially designed for student audiences, will present a revolutionary vision for modern dance performance.

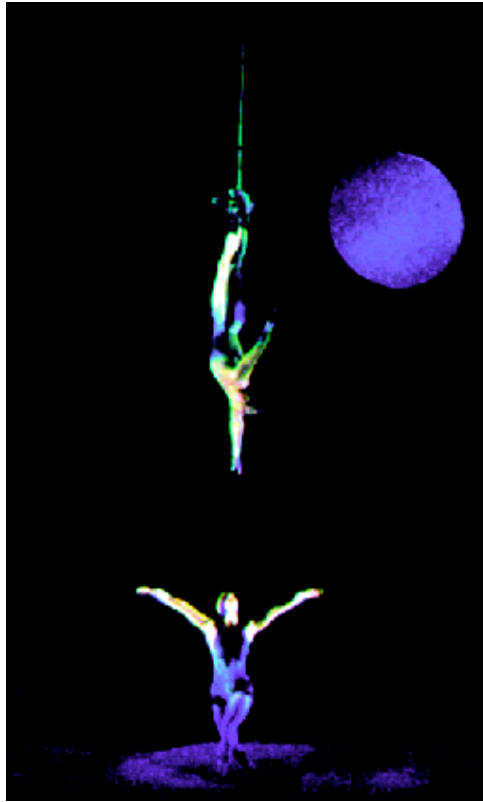
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DIAVOLO DANCE THEATER

DIABOLO (Di-a'-vo-lo) "Dia": Spanish for "day"; Greek for "through, across, from point to point"; "Volo": Latin for "I will fly."



Bodies perch precariously on leaning towers of ladders. A dancer slithers through the bars of a massive steel cube. A woman dives from the top of a tilted, rope-slung wall into a waiting quartet of arms. All these images are included in the majestic repertoire of Diavolo, the innovative dance company acclaimed by the *Los Angeles Times* for its “sharply defined creative goals, unstinting energy and the ability to dance on any surface, whether horizontal, vertical, tilted or tubular.” Revolutionizing dance performance under the direction of Jacques Heim, the Los Angeles-based troupe presents frenetic and acrobatic movements among gigantic symbolic structures, elevating their dances from gee-whizzery to thought-provoking theater.

“We perform for people who are longing for a different kind of movement,” explained Heim, a Parisian-born choreographer who created the company in 1992 after graduating from the California Institute of the Arts. “Our work is not modern dance. It’s not jazz. It’s not ballet. It’s a mixture of gymnastics, acrobatics, stunts and everyday movement. Nothing is narrated. There’s no story. It’s abstract, visceral and organic. I leave a lot of room for the audience to use their imagination and create a story.”

Refusing to accept the limitations of gravity and embracing physically punishing maneuvers, Diavolo—whose name was chosen for its combined root words: Spanish for “day,” Latin for “I

will fly”—has risen from cramped alternative spaces to major international festivals, evolving into a fresh and thrilling form of movement theater. Heim combines influences as diverse as Parisian street theater, Hollywood movies, the choreography of Pilobolus and Elizabeth Streb, the painting of Robert Longo, the imagery of Pina Bausch, the spectacle of Cirque du Soleil, and everyday life to create large-scale, interdisciplinary performances that “examine the funny and frightening ways individuals interact with their environment.” But it is French contemporary dance and modern art movements to which Heim is most indebted.

Diavolo’s subject matter hinges on a common theme in contemporary French dance—individuals trapped in an alienated world—but stylistically looks to the origins of modernism, including: futurism—where abstract, geometric imagery abounds; dadaism, utilizing the strategies of irony and play; and surrealism, the dreamy, ominous world of realism. Through the inventive interaction between the dancers and structures, based on these styles, Diavolo explores the challenge of relationships, the absurdities of life, and the struggle to maintain our humanity in an increasingly technological world. It reflects Heim’s idea of being an “urban person—one who loves the movement of the city, the patterns of the people and seeing that everyone’s heads are in the air, so to speak, that we’re all struggling with identity confusion to one degree or other, over and over, as part of a weird cycle of ongoing change.”

The two-part program the troupe is bringing to the UC Davis Main Theatre begins with their signature work, *Tete en L’Air*, and concludes with an apocalyptic journey entitled *Trajectoire*. In a parade of urban archetypes, the dark-suited dancers of *Tete en L’Air* descend a giant staircase with trapdoors hidden under the steps. This chaotic number—inspired by the Belgian surrealist painter Rene Magritte and French filmmaker Jacques Tati—finds the well-muscled dancers bounding, cavorting, and leaping fearlessly to an unknown destination. At first they move as innocent travelers, overloaded with luggage, but all sorts of personal quirks soon surface, the pace builds, contradictions mount, involvements develop, and mysteries brew. Their state of transit becomes synonymous with the pace and stress of modern-day life, and before long, the wayward traffic and frenzied comings and goings rise in a crescendo as startling as it is provocative, as humorous as it is dark.

Similarly episodic and chaotic, dancers again assume the role of travelers in the sink or swim world of *Trajectoire*. Highlighting the ever-shifting landscape of relations in modern society, the set—a cross-section from a 21st Century galleon—dips and rolls with the weight of the dancer’s movements. Set to excerpts from the soundtrack for *The Thin Red Line* and Philip Glass’ *Mishima*, *Trajectoire* sends the entire company in rounds of jumping, sliding, and even pirouetting on the lit-from-within craft. Part Noah’s Ark, part Titanic, the massive ship represents the passengers’

emotionally charged journey through time and space. *Trajectoire*, Heim said, “feels like a journey going to an unknown destination on an ocean that is calm, wild, stormy, unpredictable. It finishes with a solo, a metaphor for hope, when you stand up tall on the edge of the rocker.”

ABOUT THE COMPANY

Jacques Heim, Artistic Director

Performers

Sita Acevedo ~ Monica Campbell ~ Hassan Christopher ~ Nick Erickson

Laura Everling ~ Vince Hederman ~ Jennifer Jackson ~ Nehara Kalev

Allen Moon ~ Garrett Wolf

Diavolo was founded in 1992 in Los Angeles by Jacques Heim to create large-scale interdisciplinary performances which examine the funny and frightening ways individuals act with their environment. Born in Paris, Jacques Heim was schooled in the United States and England and he completed his dance training at the California Institute of Arts. Currently a professor at UCLA, Heim is also in residence at California State University at Los Angeles.

The company is comprised of dancers, gymnasts and actors who create performances collaboratively under Heim’s guidance. Diavolo has attracted the critics’ attention from the very beginning. After seeing Diavolo’s first Los Angeles performance, *Los Angeles Times* dance critic Lewis Segal wrote of Heim that the performance "establishes him as a creative force in the community, someone with both a compelling vision and the ability to inspire others to uncompromising performances." In 1993, the young company was nominated for two Lester Horton Awards in Los Angeles, and in 1995, the company made its European debut at the Edinburgh Festival where it was named Best of the Fest by The London Independent and Critic’s Choice by The Guardian. The company also received three Lester Horton Awards in 1995 for the work *Tete en L’Air*. In 1997, Artistic Director Jacques Heim was recognized by the *Los Angeles Times* as one of "36 Faces to Watch."

DANCE REPERTOIRE



Apex, 1998 (10 minutes, 30 seconds)

With spinning ladders and accompanied by jaunty music, the performers explore the intricacies of human relationships: how we support each other, let each other down and move intricately to avoid collision.

Bonjour, 1992 (6 minutes)

With a cast of two, *Bonjour* sketches a relationship from beginning to end in six minutes: from the moment of attraction, through infatuation, the throes of love, differences, outright conflict, until a resolution is found.

Capture, 1998 (12 minutes)

Two performers are involved in a courtship dance. One is attached within a rocking silver half-sphere while the other dances with and around him. Together they explore the beauty and hardships of a relationship, and discover the strength to sustain it.

Chamber, 1996 (10 minutes)

Staged entirely beneath a 20 x 20' piece of spandex stretched above the floor, this piece explores the unique properties of the setting, as well as the human reaction to its inherent confinement.

Performers remain beneath the cloth for the duration of the piece, save one figure who cannot escape its confines and is eventually swallowed within the spandex's organically shifting form.

D.2.R. I, 1995 (10:00 minutes)

D.2.R.II, 1996 (12:00 minutes)

Descent to Return, Detour is set on a vertical wall sometimes peppered with protruding metal bars, sometimes with a dozen dangling loops of rope. Upon this abstract military obstacle course, the performers make their way through the chaos that represents everyday life. The restrictions of being wounded or physically limited influence movement and the dancers must achieve their goals despite self-imposed handicaps and inescapable gravity. Yet, in the end, they discover no destination.

Equilibre, 1996 (8 minutes)

Strapped to a spring-loaded suspended chair, a lone performer struggles to find his equilibrium. Relatively immobilized at first, the performer reaches out to a female performer in an attempt to find equilibrium within himself and in his interpersonal relationships. As he masters his surroundings, he also discovers balance within himself.

Lapse, 1992 (8 minutes)

Within the confines of roped lanes, the dancers are forced to rely on one another to deal with a limiting environment. The dancers use gymnastic stunts to pit themselves against each other, at times using one another to accomplish moves. The dancers are manipulated by the ropes as they move and create a geometric landscape.

Man Made, 1995 (15 minutes)

A ten-foot long steel tunnel suspended above the floor creates the landscape for this piece. Musicians play upon the structure, creating an industrial, pulsating sound. Performers lower themselves into the tunnel moving vertically, horizontally and circularly using the walls of the tunnel as well as one another. Man-made is a surrealistic metaphor for the relationship between the temporal limitations of the human being and the unforgiving quality of an industrial environment.

Catapult: La Comedie Humaine, 1999 (Full evening work: 75 minutes plus intermission)

Trajectoire, 1999 (22 minutes)

This striking and emotional piece is performed on a majestic rocking set.

Le Seige, 2000 (16 minutes)

This work explores a simple bench as a metaphor for territory, possession and relationships.

La Series Des Tetes is an exploration of how we define our social domain and the behavior inspired by these delimiting elements. Using a pedestrian movement vocabulary and elaborate set constructs, the works investigate the distinctive challenges and restrictions of modern architecture.

Tete au Carre, 1993/revised 1999 (16 minutes)

Tete au Carre, translated from the French, means "mentally and physically beaten to a point of change." Employing a square metal grid-like structure measuring 8'x10'x10', the company explores the cage as a team and in various groups until identity is lost and enveloped into a unified organism. The performers must rely on each other in order to safely navigate the structure.

Tete en l'Air, 1994/revised 2000 (27 minutes)

Literally translated, Tete en l'Air means "head in the sky" and is used to describe a sense of bewilderment and wonder. Performers pose as citizens of the world, with individual agendas and "too much baggage." They stream down a staircase replete with trap doors and floors. The luggage carried by the performers represents belongings. Along the way a transition takes place as the performers become their belongings. This work explores the bewilderment brought about by endless commuting and relocation, as people work to transcend the disconnection in their lives.

Tete a Claque, 1997 (25 minutes)

The performers are confronted with a series of doors of varying sizes. As they enter, exit, reconfigure, climb and collide with the doors, the dancers explore the possibilities, difficulties, and subsequent absurdities of our relationship with one of the most common architectural structures. At times the human body becomes an extension of the door, and at times the door becomes an extension of the body. *Tete a Claque* concerns itself primarily with relationships and passageways, investigating the manner in which doors facilitate the division of space, the implications of crossing

the myriad of thresholds we encounter daily, and the ways in which we--literally and figuratively--open and close doors within our personal relationships.

Artistic Vision Statement

Jacques Heim, Artistic Director

As Modern society becomes more complex with new technologies and marvelous possibilities, the everyday act of survival becomes increasingly fraught with danger and anxiety. My work investigates the latent absurdities of contemporary human life and seeks to recontextualize those absurdities through the body, exploring the influences of the environment, possessions and relationships. My aim is to capture and comment upon the ironic and frequently humorous patterns, as well as the darker consequences, of human behavior. I am also searching to expand the boundaries of what is considered to be dance by trying to create movement that offers audiences a cinematic experience of powerful images and abstract narratives.

I created Diavolo Dance Theatre in 1992 after graduating from CalArts. Through the company, I try to convey an appreciation for movement by breaking down barriers to dance via a vocabulary based on everyday activities. Diavolo is made up of people of varied abilities and training - dancers, gymnasts, rock climbers, and actors - all of whom are teammates. Building a team that allows for complete trust has been essential to creating a kind of work where dancers are inspired to take serious risks. Architectural structures or sculpted adaptations of everyday items - sofas, doors, stairs - provide the backdrop for dramatic and risky movement, revealing metaphors for the challenge of maintaining human relationships in modern environments.

Collaboration, interconnectivity and relationships play important roles in my work. When asked about my process, I often think of a quote I once read by essayist Roger Rosenblatt: "The best in art and life comes from a center, something urgent and powerful - an idea or emotion that insists on its being. From that insistence, a shape emerges and creates its own structure out of passion. If you begin with structure, you have to make up the passion. And that's very hard to do." I am really excited about exploring the very tension that exists between passion and structure. I am concerned with how we navigate this terrain, how we adapt to it, and finally, how we remain free. Although no two Diavolo pieces are created identically, they do always start with a passionate idea - born out of artwork that moved me in a certain way, or an exchange I watched between two people

on the street, for example. I immediately decide on an idea for a constructivist set piece. Whether found or constructed, I choose the set because of its role in our lives - its architectural qualities, its geometric shapes and its mechanical functionality. In short, it must be something striking, as landscape or as object, that compels exploration and the desire to understand the ways in which it influences human behavior.

Using a structured improvisation process, I engage dancers in a journey of "working out" with a new prop for at least six weeks - exploring the set's possibilities, and cultivating the story behind the work. Sometimes the process takes more time, or goes off in an entirely new direction. It helps me toss out any preconceptions I with which I might have entered the process, and allows the piece to emerge. After the improvisation period is over, I develop the structure and movement script, setting the piece and developing metaphoric content. My work is never static, and pieces will change from performance to performance, sometimes quite radically over the course of a year.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Talking with your teacher, friends, and family about a performance after attending the theater is part of the experience. When you share what you saw and felt you learn more about the performance. You can now compare ideas and ask questions and find out how to learn even more. Here are some questions to think about:

- 1) How would you describe the Diavolo Dance Theater matinee to a friend?
- 2) If you were to choreograph a dance what would it be about, and why? Develop your own artistic vision statement.
- 3) Pretend you are a reporter for the *Sacramento Bee* newspaper. Write a cultural review of the matinee for the *Arts* section. Describe the dancers, stage props, and music with as much detail as you can remember. Then discuss what you liked best about the performance and why.

ATTENDING THE THEATER

What is expected of student audiences at the matinee:

- Enter the auditorium quietly and take seats immediately (*note that all matinees now have reserved seating*);
- Show courtesy to the artist and other guests at all times;
- Demonstrate appreciation for the artist's work by applauding at the appropriate times;
- Refrain from making unnecessary noise or movements;
- Please turn off all cell phones prior to the performance;
- Refrain from using any flash photography during the performance;
- Please eat lunch before or after the performance to avoid disruption;
- Relate any information acquired from the pre-matinee discussion to the new information gained from the matinee.

What you can expect of your experience in a performing arts theater:

A theater is a charged space, full of energy and anticipation. When the house lights (the lights that illuminate the audience seating) go down, the excitement level goes up! Theaters are designed so that the voices of the singers and actors and the music of the musicians can be heard. But this also means that any sound in the audience: whispering, rustling of papers, speaking and moving about, can be heard by other audience members and by the performers. Distractions like these upset everyone's concentration and can spoil a performance.

The performers on stage show respect for their art form and for the audience by doing their very best work. The audience shows respect for the performers by watching attentively. Applause is the best way for audience members to share their enthusiasm and to show their appreciation for the performers. Applaud at the end of a performance! Sometimes the audience will clap during a performance, as after a featured solo. Audience members may feel like laughing if the action on stage is funny, crying if the action is sad, or sighing if something is seen or heard that is beautiful. Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form and the culture(s)

of the people in the audience. While the audience at a dance performance will sit quietly, other types of performance invite audience participation.

This Teacher's Guide was compiled by ANETT JESSOP, Graduate Program Coordinator, Department of English, UC Davis