

## DIAVOLO / ARCHITECTURE IN MOTION—T.R.U.S.T.

**ART FORM:** Dance

**STYLE:** Contemporary

**CULTURE:** Western European and American

### MEET THE ARTIST:

Parisian born Jacques Heim is the dynamic creator and director of *Diavolo*, which takes a daring, compelling, and uncompromising look at contemporary human life through physicality. Mr. Heim, a transformative director for over 20 years, has studied dance, film, and choreography in France, the United States, and England; he has an MFA in Theatre, Dance, and Film from the California Institute of the Arts. He created *Diavolo Dance Theatre* in 1992 after graduating from Cal Arts. Due to the unusual and innovative way that *Diavolo* works with architectural structures, the creative team at Cirque du Soleil hired him to choreograph a show in Las Vegas entitled "Ka," which opened in 2005 and is still running. *Diavolo* has performed internationally in Scotland, Japan, Chile, Mexico, Canada, South Korea, Brazil, Italy, Spain, Holland, Germany, and Austria. He was also a Creative Director for the Opening Ceremony of the 16th Asian Game in Guangzhou, China and a consulting choreographer on *Ice Age Live!*

### ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

*Diavolo* is composed of dancers, gymnasts, and actors who all work as teammates. As collaborators they work on, and around, outrageous surrealistic sets and structures.

"T.R.U.S.T.," featured in this performance, is a piece choreographed in several sections. The first sections take place in the space on and around a simple platform, a traveling ottoman, and an acrobatic wheel. All of these are manipulated by the dancers as they help each other explore the shared pathways and gravity. They tumble, catch, and slice through the air with perfect precision and teamwork. The next sections have the dancers interact with more familiar structures - like benches, ladders, and a door. As they work with these structures they reveal the importance of cooperative partnering, problem solving, and cooperative space sharing. The final section brings the dancers together as they move through a maze filled with obstacles and tight spaces. The audience will see their ability to overcome adversity and develop confidence. *Diavolo's* gravity-defying movements create metaphors for the challenges of human relationships and the struggle to maintain one's balance in today's technical, and often detached world.

### PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

*Diavolo* investigates the influences of environment, possessions, and relationships in life. They capture the frequently humorous patterns of human behavior that reveal the everyday struggles we all face in modern society.

Although no two pieces are alike, *Diavolo* has developed a specific method of working and collaborating. Each new work begins with the selection of a physical set piece that serves as the catalyst for building ideas and movement. Examples include a doorway, staircase, or table. Whether it is a pre-existing or specially constructed structure, Jacques makes his selection based on its role and importance in everyday life. Its architectural qualities, geometric shape, or mechanical functionality are also part of the selection rationale.

The next step in the creative process is to explore ideas through improvisation and collaboration. The performers begin to explore ways to move on and around the set, discovering what kind of movement is possible for individuals, as well as groups. Slowly, the performers begin to reveal the landscape of the set so that it becomes more than just an object. The set designer also plays an important role at this stage of development, constantly adjusting the set and finding ways to both assist and challenge the performers.

After the initial exploration, Mr. Heim begins to shape and edit the piece around the skills of the individual performers, creating solos, duets, and group studies. It is only at this point that the theme of the piece is established. After costumes and lighting designs are added, the final stage in developing the dance is to layer in the sound. The composer comes in, only when the piece is nearly finished, to create the music in much the same way as a film score is written. The creative process is truly collaborative, with each person's contribution being vital to the success of the finished piece. Ultimately, *Diavolo's* movement vocabulary is assembled in the manner of a building a collage that becomes an artistic, moving picture of powerful and lasting images.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How did the performers demonstrate teamwork?
- What was your favorite set piece (ottoman, bench, door, ladder, or box)? Describe how the set piece was used to challenge the dancers and shape the theme of the dance.
- What ideas or feelings did you get from watching each dance?
- Can you think of an everyday object or structure to use in a dance piece? How would you have the dancers interact with the object? What thematic ideas come to mind?

## FRAMEWORK FOCUS—SCIENCE:

Much of *Diavolo's* work explores the concepts of gravity and weight. Choose three different objects of varying size and weight (e.g., a feather, a book, a silk scarf). Drop each object from shoulder height. Examine how each falls to the ground. Is the rate of speed at which they fall constant or does it fluctuate according to the weight and size of each object?

Spread students out in the space and direct them to observe how different objects fall when dropped. Ask them to imitate these ideas by safely falling to the ground. Change the speed and use contrasting qualities. If you are falling like the feather your descent will be slow and light (indirect path). If you are a book, it will be fast and heavy (direct path). How might a ball, or a coin, fall? Use adjectives to describe each falling action. In groups, observe each other and look for these contrasts. Also, in exploring these different qualities of falling, the fall will take longer than in real time.

Think about what happens to astronauts in space. Can they actually fall? Discuss weightlessness. Explore moving as if you were on the moon; how does this lighter force of gravity impact your body and movements? How does the speed at which you can travel change? Walk normally for 8 counts, and then walk as if weightless for 16 counts. Build a series of movements that combine traveling through the space with normal speed and gravity and then showing a slower speed and weightlessness. Add falling to the ground as a new movement. (Example: 8 counts walking normally; 8 counts as if weightless; 8 counts falling in slow motion; and 8 counts rising back up quickly; holding a final pose for 8 counts.)

### California Arts Standards: Artistic Processes

<b>Cr</b>	Creating
<b>Pr</b>	Performing/Producing/Presenting
<b>Re</b>	Responding
<b>Cn</b>	Connecting

Learn more at:

<https://tinyurl.com/ArtsStandardsCA>

## ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

**Cr** Three key elements of *Diavolo's* process are the use of *structures, teamwork* and *collaboration*. As a group they not only create their dances together, but they build on each others ideas, problem solve and critique each other. In this activity, classroom chairs (or desks) serve as the structure. Move and arrange the chairs into an interesting shape in the center, or front, of the classroom. Take a moment to observe the shape that has been created with all the chairs. Then, make any changes which might improve the design. Look at the different levels that have been created, the angles and spaces in between. Divide the students into groups of five. As one group works, the other groups watch. Each group has 3- 4 minutes to explore moving through, over, under, and around the structure. The purpose is not to compete with one another, but to work together to explore the different possibilities for movement. After each group has had 3 - 4 minutes to explore the structure, each group then comes up with an idea or theme for a piece, and then creates a 1 minute dance using the following criteria:

1. Explore going around and through the structure.
2. Explore going over and under the structure.
3. Have a moment of stillness.
4. Create at least 3 frozen shapes or designs that are held still.
5. Have a clear beginning, middle, and end.

Have each group share their dance and listen to feedback:

What was successful?

What could be revised?

Did each group work well as a team?

Finally, each group chooses a piece of music to accompany their dance. They refine and plan their dances before a final sharing.

**Cn** *Diavolo* has several possible meanings. But a favorite is dia—Spanish for "day," and volo, Latin for "I will fly." Write an essay titled, "The Day I Will Fly" in which students explore how the name could relate to them.

## SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

"Diavolo's Artsource® Curriculum." The Music Center , The Music Center, [www.musiccenter.org/education/Teacher-Resources/Artsource-Curriculum/](http://www.musiccenter.org/education/Teacher-Resources/Artsource-Curriculum/).

Diavolo Dance Theater. "Diavolo / Architecture in Motion: Who We Are." *YouTube*, YouTube, 29 Sept. 2014, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=oc2hrLbvXMg&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oc2hrLbvXMg&feature=youtu.be).