



**DIAVOLO | Architecture in Motion® is a modern dance company founded in 1992 in Los Angeles by Artistic Director Jacques Heim. DIAVOLO's mission is to “redefine dance through dynamic movement, enlightening communities through trust, teamwork, and individual expression.”**



Photo by Sharen Bradford

### **THE NAME**

Dia is Spanish for “day.” Volo is Latin for “I fly.” To the DIAVOLO dancer, this means “I fly through the day. As you watch, look for examples of dancers “flying through the day.”

### **CRITICAL ACCLAIM**

DIAVOLO attracted the critics’ attention from the very beginning. Los Angeles Times dance critic Lewis Segal wrote of Mr. Heim “...establishes him as a creative force in the community, someone with both a compelling vision and the ability to inspire others to uncompromising performances.”

### **A UNIQUE COMPANY**

Company members are dancers, gymnasts, actors, and always teammates. Under the guidance of Mr. Heim, the company members collaboratively create performances on large, outrageous, and surrealistic sets. These sets form an intrinsic part of each piece of work. They provide the backdrop for dramatic movement – leaping, flying, falling – that creates metaphors for the challenges of relationships, the absurdities of life, and the struggle to maintain our humanity in an increasingly technological world.

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### **Meet Artistic Director Jacques Heim**

Q: How old were you when you began studying dance?

A: 22 years old

Q: What attracted you to dance?

A: [The] lack of words made it attractive. I discovered that movement at times is more powerful than words. Movement never lies.

Q: Did you make any sacrifices or trade-offs while learning?

A: No. Learning is a privilege.

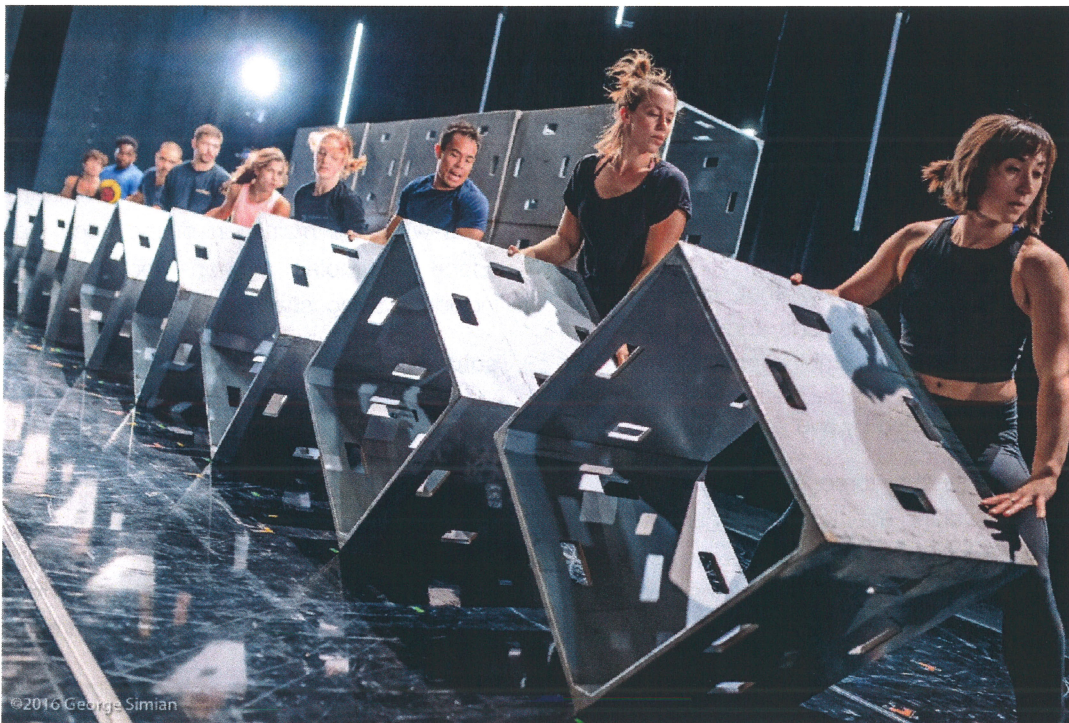
Q: What makes your program unique?

A: A combination of athletic movement and visual impact. DIAVOLO is not traditional modern dance...The performers are a mix of dancers, actors, gymnasts, dancing on large structures.



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## KEY IDEAS

**choreography:** the arrangement of movement in space and time. A series of moves usually set to music. DIAVOLO creates their choreography together.

**collaborate:** to work jointly with others or together, especially in an intellectual endeavor, in order to create or to resolve something.

**creativity:** the ability to go beyond traditional ideas, rules, and patterns in order to create meaningful new ideas, forms, methods, and interpretations.

**improvisation:** to create on the spot, in the moment.

**surrealistic:** fantasy-like or resembling a dream. DIAVOLO's large, sculptural set pieces are often described as being surrealistic.

**teamwork:** to work jointly with others or together in order to create or solve a problem.

**trust:** assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone.

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# DANCE TERMS

**action:** an element of dance that refers to locomotor and non-locomotor movement.

**body:** an element of dance that refers to the awareness of specific body parts and how they can be moved in isolation and combination.

**duet:** a dance performed by two dancers.

**energy:** refers to the force applied to dance to accentuate the weight, attack, strength, and flow of a dancer's movement. Adjectives such as explosive, smooth, free, restrained, wild, etc., describe some different types of energy that dancers can exhibit.

**locomotor movement:** movement where the body travels through space such as walking, running, jumping, and leaping.

**modern dance:** genre of dance that rejects the strict rules of ballet. Modern dance is rooted in the expression of emotion and ideas.

**non-locomotor movement:** movement of body parts while the main part of the body stays in one space. Examples of non-locomotor movement include swaying, shaking, stretching, and twisting.

**solo:** a dance performed by a single dancer.

**space:** an element of dance that refers to the space the body moves through, the direction of the body's movements, and the shapes, levels, and patterns of a group of dancers.

**tempo:** the time, speed, or rhythm of the beats of a piece of music or the pace of any movement activity.

**time:** an element of dance that includes beat, tempo (speed), accent, and duration.

**unison:** the same movement or series of movements performed at the same time by more than one dancer.



Photo by Sharen Bradford

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Photo by Sharen Bradford

## WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A DIAVOLO DANCER?

### SKILLS

DIAVOLO dancers come from many walks of life. They have trained as modern dancers, athletes, gymnasts, actors, ballet dancers, martial artists, and stunt performers. The majority have fine arts degrees, and some have masters degrees as well.

In addition to dancing well, DIAVOLO dancers need to be able to fall from large structures. This means they need to be able to trust themselves, to trust each other, and to work as a team. Teamwork, trust, and belief in oneself are the foundations of the

### TOURING

When the company is on tour and traveling all over the world presenting shows similar to the one you will see, the dancers work even harder. In addition to warm-up and rehearsal, the dancers will help set up the sets, do technical rehearsals, dress rehearsals, and perform.

### CREATING WORK

If a new dance is to be created or choreographed, the Artistic Director and Rehearsal Director will work together to do this. This makes DIAVOLO a little different from other dance companies. In most dance companies, only one person creates or choreographs dances. In DIAVOLO, everyone works together as a team to create them.

### REHEARSALS

The dancers rehearse from 9 am to 5 pm each day, Monday to Saturday. Some days dancers rehearse 9 am to 9 pm. Rehearsals always start with a one hour warm-up. This is very important so that the dancers' muscles stay strengthened and stretched and are ready to work for the rest of the day. Preventing injuries is another good reason for a warm-up. After warm-up, the Rehearsal Director will let the dancers know what

dances they are to work on for the rest of the day and how that work is to be scheduled. The Artistic Director and Rehearsal Director will teach the dancers the old dances and work

### PERSONAL TRAINING

After the rehearsal day, the dancers go take other kinds of classes in order to keep their bodies in proper shape. Dancers must train throughout their careers, and DIAVOLO dancers consider this personal training important to their careers and health. Classes may include ballet, gymnastics, martial arts, modern dance, or workouts at the gym.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How did the performers demonstrate teamwork?
- 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 the 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 3 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.)

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## ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

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 improved?  
Did each group work well as a team?

Finally, each group chooses a piece of music to accompany their dance. They refine and develop their dances before a final shar- ing.

- 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. "
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