

DIABOLO

Pas-Sages

Art Form: Dance

Style: Contemporary

Culture: Western European and American

MEET THE ARTIST:

Parisian born *Jacques Heim* is the creator and director of **Diavolo**, a dance theatre company. He takes a daring and compelling look at contemporary human life, which informs and shapes his choreographic choices. A groundbreaking choreographer and director, Jacques was named one of the *100 Coolest People in LA* by *Buzz Magazine*. He has received numerous awards and grants: the Martha Hill Choreography award in 1992, the special Prize of the Jury at the 6th Saitama International Dance Festival in Japan and a James Irvine Fellowship. In 2003, after receiving international critical acclaim, Jacques was invited to choreograph for *Cirque du Soleil's* production *KA* which opened in Las Vegas in February 2005. The dances he creates shed light on the relationships between people and their physical surroundings. The 1994 Northridge earthquake - which Jacques sites as a source of inspiration - is an example of this. He says: "For me, I had the best time after the earthquake, when everybody started to share - when chaos and a state of survival happen, people come together."

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

Pas-Sages (pronounced 'passages') is comprised of dancers, actors and gymnasts. They are teammates, who collaboratively develop work around everyday objects, outrageous sets and structures. *Diavolo* is driven to discover how people survive, adapt and ultimately remain free in the modern world of confined spaces. *Pas-Sages* is based on the ancient Greek concept of "A Hero's Journey." It is a piece about the creative expression of the individual, the struggles of the hero, learning to trust while being alone or together. Three dancers, two men and one woman emerge out of individual cocoons (zippered bags), and pick up different suitcases to pack for their trip. They begin their journeys in isolation, a solo dancer organically moves through a river of little ladders, representing the crossing of the abyss. As the obstacles emerge (a small door they must squeeze through, benches, hoops, bubbles and water), they begin to collaborate with each other, finding ways to interact, help each other, and learn about trust, teamwork and harmony. A poetic text is read throughout the performance, interweaving with the dance.



MUSIC · CENTER

One sequence in *Pas-Sages* is called *Sleep Duet* (pictured below), and is about catching dreams. A girl is suspended on an imaginary floating bed. Sheets and pillows unfold around her as she is carried through metamorphic obstacles in this dreamlike sequence of beautiful lifts.

PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

"Diavolo investigates the latent absurdities of contemporary life - exploring the influences of environment, possessions and relationships" Jacques Heim

Diavolo has several meanings, one being the Greek translation for "through, across, and from point to point." The essence of Mr. Heim's material includes architecture, geometric shapes, mechanical functionality and landscapes. Although no two pieces are developed identically, he usually begins by finding or constructing a set piece. From there he begins a lengthy process of improvisation and collaboration with his dancers. They explore ways to move on and around the set, or to even be manipulated by it. The performers discover what is possible individually and as a group. Sequences are developed and assembled in the manner of a collage, with Jacques shaping and editing the piece around the skills of the performers, creating solos, duets and group studies. It is during this stage of development, that the true theme of the piece emerges and the costume and lighting designers step into the collaborative process. Sound is the final layer. The composer only comes in when the piece is nearly

finished, much as a score is created for a film. *Diavolo's* creative process is truly collaborative; each person's contribution is vital to the success of the finished piece. This exciting company creates powerful and lasting images that remind audiences of an ever-changing movement collage.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How did the performers work together to overcome obstacles?
- What was your favorite object or set piece? What did you like about it? How was it used?
- How did the sound or music affect the mood of the piece?
- What was different about the dancers' movements when they were alone and then when they danced as a group?
- Why is teamwork important in a piece like *Pas-Sages*?
- Balance is a very important part of the work. What does it mean to balance?

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - LANGUAGE ARTS:

Much of *Diavolo's* work deals with exploring structures like staircases, ladders, doorways, tunnels, platforms and walls. They reveal how these modern-day structures that may appear confining, can actually be liberating. One of Jacques aims is to "comment upon the frequently humorous patterns" that develop. There is a whimsical element that elevates the performers as well as the audience. The sight of a dancer flying through the air on a pillow breaks with the traditional idea of the function of a pillow. It is then a metaphor for stepping out of the ordinary and into a dream. A zippered bag becomes a cocoon for a dancer, a symbol of the unknown.

Have students choose an everyday object, for example: a book, piece of fabric, or an umbrella. Discuss each of the objects with the class, and find ways to categorize each of them by identifying the function of the object, its location in the world and when it was designed and built. Now have the students explore the possibility of it being something completely different.

Have students stand in a circle. One by one, each object is passed around the circle and each person who handles it has to turn it into something else with an action movement. For example: a book becomes a fan, or a mirror; the umbrella could be a golf club or a flute. Now have the students return to their original object and explore ways that it could be an obstacle to overcome.

In groups of three, have the students write "A Hero's Journey". Clearly identify the world of the heroes (the place, time, environment). What is he/she searching for? Where does their journey take them? What obstacles does the hero face? How do he/she overcome these obstacles?

Have the students share their stories and discuss them. Have the students act out their journeys in their groups of three, using their objects to either transform their world or represent the obstacles they must face.

- Legend:
- 🌀 Artistic perception
 - ❖ Creative expression
 - 📖 Historical & cultural context
 - 👁️ Aesthetic valuing
 - ✳️ Connections, Relations, Applications

Criteria:

- Find a place to begin in isolation.
- Show the struggle of emerging
- Transform an object into something you discover on the journey
- Identify an obstacle
- Work as a team to overcome the obstacle.

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

Diavolo's work demands that each performer develop trust, collaboration and good communication with fellow company members.

- ❖ Pair up the students. Have them create three unison shapes with their partner, incorporating low medium and high levels. Have the students identify three different areas in the space to perform each shape, area A, B and C. Now have the students explore ways to transition from one area to another, using locomotor and axial movements such as: turn, roll, jump or swing. Each pair shares their dance and discusses the experience of working together.
- ✳️ Have the students create dance maps to accompany their partner dances. Each pair writes down their dances on a piece of paper, clearly identifying the shapes to be performed and where in the space they happen. Using words and symbols they must describe how to travel from one area to another. For example: 8 jumps, 2 skips and 1 roll from point A to point B. Each pair exchanges dance maps with another pair. Each has to interpret their dance from the dance map.
- ✳️ Have the students draw a door on a piece of paper and (using symbols and words) draw images from their life on one side of the door. Now have them create an imaginary world on the other side of the door, a world where they will take a journey into the unknown. Identify at least 5 key events on the journey, for example: visiting a new land, fighting a dragon, meeting a hero or heroine. Now have the students share and discuss their journey with the class, describing the events and characters they encountered.



WEBLINKS:

Diavolo Dance Theatre Web Page:
<http://www.diavolo.org>