

SPOTLIGHT ON “Diavolo | Architecture in Motion” COMING MAY 10 TO THE SHARON



Performer Chisa Yamaguchi stepped offstage to share what you can look forward to about “Diavolo | Architecture in Motion.” Yamaguchi is in her seventh season with Diavolo, a Los Angeles dance company of 25 years. She also oversees its marketing and education programs.

“Diavolo” explores the human body’s relationship with its architectural environment through dance. Can you expand upon that process?

“Diavolo’s” mission is to really showcase on stage how the perfect architecture of the human body is perfectly integrated into the architectural environment. The human body’s perfect, organic construction interacts with the world around us and shows how we are constantly affected emotionally, socially and physically by our environment. It’s just such a unique experience. It’s a dance company, but it’s really exploring the world that we take for granted, like how a doorway really does affect us — how you walk through it and out of it and how it transforms us and we transform it back. It’s this really cyclical relationship. We as dancers get to be extreme versions of human beings existing in a world that we create and that creates us.

Where has the company toured and what has the reaction been like?

We have toured pretty much every continent except Antarctica. It has been so well received on a universal level because, in its specificity of arch and movement, we are able to connect with so many different audiences. This will be our first time coming to The Villages, so it’s always nice to go to brand new venues and test out how people will react to the work.

Artistic director Jacques Heim describes the performances as a fusion of everyday movement, ballet, modern dance, gymnastics, martial arts and hip hop. Is that versatility challenging to find in a dancer?

A “Diavolo” dancer is a very rare performer to have and to find. We currently are 12 dancers — six men and six women. Our audition cycle tends to be a little more extensive and rigorous than other dance companies that don’t have such a wide range of disciplines. Everyone has a couple aspects that they are strong in and other aspects that they need to train in or strengthen. In the last two to three seasons, the company has started to cultivate really strong contemporary dancers in ballet, jazz and hip hop, whereas in the past we’ve had a lot of former gymnasts or acrobats or circus artists. It’s really interesting to see “Diavolo” become a little bit of a movement chameleon, and we end up adapting to the performers we have for that season.



What kind of training does it take to condition your body to meet the demands of the show, both in skill and strength?

It is a very, very fine line to find the blend of training that keeps you very strong, but very flexible, still able to achieve the beautiful lines of a dancer, but also be able to manipulate architectural structures as heavy as you or heavier. Some of our structures are 1,800 pounds or more. We have to couple that strength training with so much technique. We have to mix the two and blend them quite a bit because we don’t just move with each other, but also with the structures.

We as dancers are on a teaching schedule. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays are movement days — either contemporary or modern dance or ballet or even Pilates or yoga. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, we have strength days that can range from high-intensity interval training to a Crossfit circuit where we train pullups, handstand pushups...

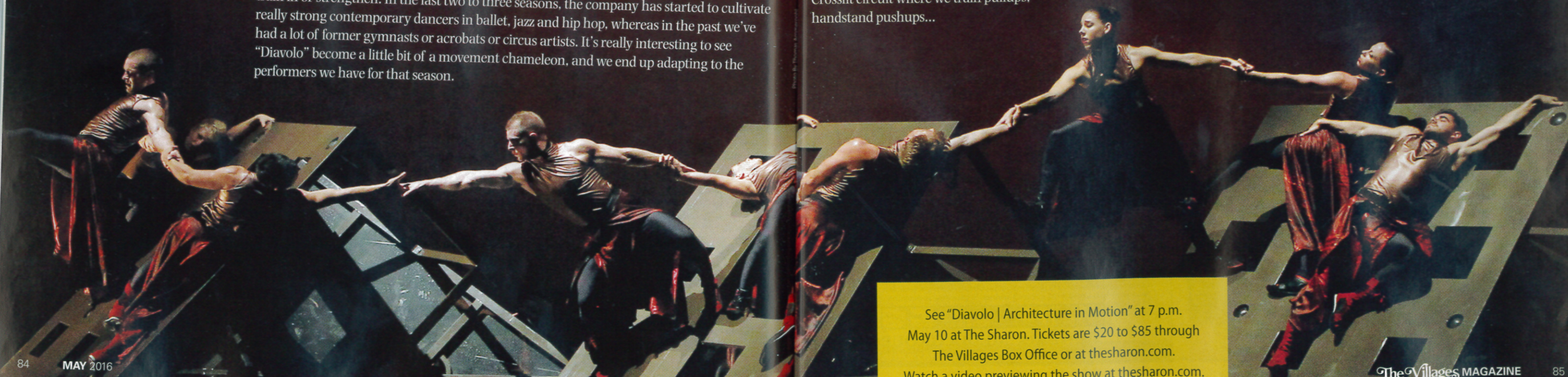
“Diavolo’s” performances are known to be dangerous and thrilling. What’s it like doing the stunts?

I never really considered myself to be an adrenaline junkie. Going into “Diavolo,” some of it felt like, “I’m going to die doing this,” especially in the beginning. Now, I’ve gotten into reading and watching extreme sports because there is something really similar to the mindset of watching extreme athletes achieve incredible things. Why do I give my mother a heart attack every time I go on stage? Why is it OK? That risk aspect is calculated and part of our job to show risk and spend quite a bit of time making it look easy and seamless. I feel that level of responsibility every time I hit the stage. That’s why people see live theater. They want to see moments of danger and trust and faith on stage. It’s almost like magic.

What seems to wow audiences the most in the show?

What people are just amazed by is how we have to make it look effortless when we move these structures around and morph them and transform them into ways the audiences’ collective imagination never could have formulated. The audience gets to see different perspectives that they wouldn’t have seen if we hadn’t created them. One of the signature moments is when they see people flying in the air. They’re fixated on how she comes down and where she is going to land. Flying and jumping off things is like glorified falling for us.

In one of our pieces, “Fluid Infinities,” there’s a dome that resembles a moon. At its peak, it’s 9 feet high, so someone stands on it and jumps and lands into people. It’s such a thrill. It’s one of my favorite parts of the job. I had to pinch myself during practice. I stopped and said, “We’re flying into people. This is my 9-to-5 job.” It’s so cool. It still gets me. ■



See “Diavolo | Architecture in Motion” at 7 p.m. May 10 at The Sharon. Tickets are \$20 to \$85 through The Villages Box Office or at thesharon.com. Watch a video previewing the show at thesharon.com.