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DANCE REVIEW

## Diavolo's at Circus; Froot, the Theater

By LEWIS SEGAL, Times Dance Critic

Two years ago, Jacques Heim's Diavolo Dance Theatre created a big stir with "Trajectoire," a one-act ensemble showpiece that took place on, around and inside an enormous platform on a semicircular rocking base. Nobody suspected the work was incomplete, but part two arrived Friday on the final weekend of the COLA (City of Los Angeles) Performance Series at the L.A. Theatre Center.

For T-1, Diavolo had placed the platform so that it rocked laterally, from stage left to right, with railings on the ends for performers to grab as they slid down the ever-shifting slopes. In T-2, however, the railings came off and the platform faced front, rocking toward and away from the audience and seeming to rear up like the prow of an enormous ship.

In the '99 section, complex patterns of mounting and leaving the platform had displayed Heim's choreographic dexterity--though on Friday (as before) nothing surpassed the flawless control and unanimity of style

achieved by a women's quartet early on. In contrast, unseen entrances (at the back) and easy exits (at the front) marked the new material, plus the daring of performers rolling on the floor in imminent danger of being crushed by the descending platform--or diving off of it when it reached maximum height.

If these moments offered circus-style thrills rather than the more sedate pleasures of professional dance, Heim announced that the COLA version was a work-in-progress, so any critical evaluation must await an official premiere. It breaks no journalistic code, however, to note that the 11-member cast proved awesomely fit, skilled and dedicated.

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Just as Daniel Wheeler's moving platform dominated "Trajectoire," Dan Hurlin's life-size toy theater set defined the whimsical style of Dan Froot's one-act COLA satire, "Shlammer."

Incorporating instrumental music, dance, juggling and passages in Yiddish--plus lessons in faking a Yiddish accent--Froot's script focused on a very serious theme: the connection between violence

and traditional concepts of manhood in Jewish culture. Here Tony Abatemarco, Froot and Aaron Fox-Lerner played three generations of threatening, manipulative Jewish thugs (a.k.a. shlammers).

So unbearably tense that he wore a suit jacket with the clothes hanger still inside, Froot's character tried to win over the audience with an arsenal of phony show-biz strategies but ended by simply ordering everyone around--along with oppressing the three-man bar mitzvah band in residence on Hurlin's stage-within-a-stage.

Ultimately, comments on Jewish identity merged with a statement about theater as an escape from real life and a context for enjoying behavior that we'd find unacceptable outside. In other words, we may love villains on stage--including the ever-growling Froot in this brilliantly sustained performance--but, oy, vat vould our Yiddishe mommes say if ve tried to bring von home?

