



Walton Arts Center

# Performance Guide



## *Air Play*



Photo Credit: Florence Montmare

*Circus and science collide in an homage to the power of air. Flying umbrellas, larger-than-life balloons, giant kites floating over the audience, and the biggest snow globe you've ever seen will make you gasp in wonder and laugh until it hurts. Air Play is a contemporary circus-style journey through a surreal land of air revealing the uncommon beauty ordinary objects.*

### Ideas for Curriculum Connections:

Arkansas Learning Standards: Fine Arts Standards  
Music: P.6.K.3, P.6.1.3, P.6.2.3, P.6.3.3, P.6.4.3, P.6.5.3; CRA.SL.1; R.7.6.1, R.7.7.1, R.7.8.1; R.7.6.3, R.7.7.3, R.7.8.3; R.8.6.1, R.8.7.1, R.8.8.1; CN.10.5.1, CN.10.6.1, CN.10.7.1, CN.10.8.1; CN.11.3.2 CN.11.4.2, CN.11.5.1, CN.11.6.1, CN.11.7.1, CN.11.8.1; CN.11.6.2, CN.11.7.2, CN.11.8.2; R.9.MA.1. Fine Arts Standards  
Dance: R.1.DAP.1, R.1.DAP.2, R.1.DAP.3; R.2.DAP.1; CN.5.DAP.1; CN.5.DAP.3; CN.5.DAP.5.



Photos Credit: Florence Montmare

## The Artists

Acrobuffos' Seth Bloom and Christina Gelsone met at a circus in Afghanistan, became engaged while street performing in Scotland and married in China. Since becoming clown partners in 2006, they have created six shows together. Before becoming clowns, Seth was a professional juggler who has graduated from three clown schools and has a master's degree in theater. Christina was a professional ballet dancer, went to one clown school and graduated from Princeton University.

Daniel Wurtzel is a sculptor. His early work was with huge and heavy pieces of stone, wood, bronze and silicone. More recently, he has focused on creating invisible air streams and transforming humble materials into beautiful art with air. Unexpectedly, his air sculptures became fascinating to an entirely different profession than his own: theater.

## The Show

Bloom, Gelsone and Wurtzel didn't know what *Air Play* would be when they started working together. It took months of experimenting and brainstorming to develop enough new sculptures to use in a full-length show, and then more rehearsal to find out how the characters related to the sculptures. Only at the end of the process was the story created. This is quite the opposite of most theater development where the story comes first.

*Air Play* is structured as a circus. In the circus, amazing acrobats and jugglers and animal trainers take your breath away. The clowns recuperate the audience by doing something simple and funny. In *Air Play*, Wurtzel's sculptures are the acrobats: beautiful and breathtakingly high. Bloom and Gelsone are disguised clowns, jugglers, and air tamers in his spectacle.

## The Artform

In the western world, clowning and pantomime have entertained audiences since ancient Roman times. Eastern Europe, in particular, has had a long tradition of clowning and pantomime as part of study in theatrical and circus arts. Clowning and pantomime became important in America during the 20th century in Vaudeville. It borrowed from European traditions of comedy and pantomime and featured these art forms in specialty acts with music, movement and clowning.



# Learning Activities

## Elements of the Arts

**Air Play is elemental.** It is about air, after all. While in workshop, Gelsone and Bloom realized the design for the show would also have to be elemental and simple, reduced to the bare minimum. They had already decided their characters would be only red and yellow, so they turned to the work of Joan Miró, a visual artist who played with the same basic principles.

Check out these two paintings by Miró:

[The Magic of Color](#), 1930

[Bleu II](#), 1961

Joan Miró's large paintings (12 feet by 9 feet!) were stunningly simple, abstract, used only a few intense colors, and were exactly the kind of inspiration needed. His work process were also encouraging to Acrobuffs: *"My characters have undergone the same process of simplification as the colors. Now that they have been simplified, they appear more human and alive than if they had been represented in all their details."* -Joan Miró

**After the performance**, ask students the following questions:

- Where do you see Miró's influence while watching *Air Play*?
- What colors does *Air Play* use?
- Why do you think those colors were chosen?

Miró often used a special blue commonly seen on farmyard walls in Catalonia, Spain, where he grew up. Ask students:

- What color from your everyday life inspires you?



Photo Credit: Florence Montmare

## The Right Stuff

How do you make a show about air? The short answer: by looking at the world around you in a different way. Specifically for *Air Play*, the artists looked at everything with fresh eyes and guessed which objects could fly in the air and then tested them. The first experiment was the "drop test." It's as simple as it sounds: take something and drop it. If it falls slowly, it might be able to fly. Even better, if it does not fall down in a straight line, there's a chance it might fly in an interesting way.

### Drop Test

- Look around your classroom and guess what might fall down slowly and softly.
- Hold the object above head height and drop it. (ask your teacher first!)
- Does it fall slowly and softly?
- Does it fall in a straight line or in a different way?
- Can the object be changed to fall differently (slower, quicker)?
- What was successful? Was anything worth showing to the class?

### Fly Test (You'll need a hair dryer for this.)

- Choose an object that passed the "drop test," preferably small.
- Have your hair dryer setting at "cool."
- Hold the hair dryer to face upwards and turn it on.
- Place the object above the air stream and let it go.
- Does the object fall, fly away or hover? (A ping pong ball usually hovers.)
- Does the object need to be changed for the air stream? Made smaller or bigger?



Photo Credit: Florence Montmare

### Reflect and Assess

Ask the following questions. Record the group's answers on the board and discuss.

- Describe the performance in as much detail as possible.
- Which clowning skills were emphasized? (tumbling, flexibility, balancing or dancing?)
- What were the characters doing? Why?
- How did the space contribute to the performance?
- What did you like most about the live performance?
- How did movement elements of body, energy, space and time convey mood?
- How did the music help build excitement during the performance?
- What did you already know about the story before seeing the performance?
- Describe the characters. Who were they? What were they doing? Why?
- How did the performance make you feel?
- What moment in the performance do you remember most?

### Learn More Online

Official website of *Airplay*

[airplayshow.com](http://airplayshow.com)

Official website of Acrobuffos

[acrobuffos.com](http://acrobuffos.com)

Official website of Daniel Wurtzel

[danielwurtzel.com](http://danielwurtzel.com)

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