



SETH WENIG

ARTIST STATEMENT

I've always envisioned a society in which: all people are recognized as viable and valuable; difference is upheld, not feared; increased understanding and communication take the place of isolation, alienation and lack of contact; people do not detach from their bodies because of external judgments and conventional standards they have internalized; people are encouraged to "own" and value their bodies; and a high standard of excellence is achieved through sustained work and focus.

I strive to create a private world onstage that the audience is drawn into. I love watching dancers so consumed by their tasks that they do not have the time to "act". I want to see the human being who is moving; to feel their fleeting emotions that respond to and inform the movements they're executing. I am fascinated by technical virtuosity but I am just as compelled by someone taking a risk, showing their vulnerability, being in a raw state. I like to play with the balance between control and out-of-control and love sheer frenetic muscular power. I love to "twitch" when I watch my dancers. Only then do I know they're feeling something and there is a visceral exchange.

From my work with Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, through my partnership with Lawrence Goldhuber (who is much heavier than a typical dancer) and my twenty years coaching actors in movement, there has always been a common thread of working with unexpected bodies. My current body of work with disability and my mission to redefine virtuosity take this direction to another level. The work also embodies my belief system and has opened up a whole other world to me politically and artistically.

Can a dance featuring performers with varied limbs be perceived as a viable work of art that transcends the striking physical differences seen onstage? Can it create new frames of reference and opportunities? Can audiences reflect on their own bodies and prejudices by confronting their individual responses to bodies different from theirs?

"GIMP" takes the "dis" out of disabled and reveals a whole new realm of abilities."
—The Washington Post

GIMP
A Heidi Latsky Dance
and Alliger Arts production

www.thegimpproject.com



I have always used my body as the starting point in my work. With GIMP, however, this is not physically possible or preferable. My approach is to not fit the disabled performers into a dance mold but to use their unique movement in dynamic ways. Ironically, the integration difficulties lie with the non-disabled dancers who must now meet the high standard of risk and vulnerability set by the disabled performers.

The disability component makes the work so much larger than the dance itself. First and foremost my commitment is to the work and having people experience it as a work of art. I have worked diligently towards a product that is both elegant and powerful. But the gestalt of GIMP also fascinates me and I am finding that, contrary to what I thought, my commitment to researching the politics around disability is very much informing the work.

There is curiosity, a desire to talk, and a sense of awe around GIMP's unconventional beauty. Conversely, audiences have voiced discomfort and shame when watching GIMP and there are many misperceptions surrounding disability and dance.

For example, a preview for GIMP stated that the company featured amputees and people suffering from disabilities. But there are no amputees or wheelchair users (another assumption about mixed-ability dance) and as one of my dancers aptly responded: "Which of the dancers is suffering?"

I am addressing misperceptions like these through post-performance talkbacks and outreach. I have created surveys to analyze the current environment and the effects of seeing GIMP and conversing with company members. My goal is to use GIMP to educate and uphold the company's commitment to the tolerance of difference.

GIMP is an evolving body of work. I am exceedingly stimulated by this explosive world of dance, body image and "being watched" and the vast potential of this mix of limbs and dynamic and vital personalities.

—Heidi Latsky

"Among other things, the excerpts of "GIMP" effectively demonstrated that dance can be performed by all sorts of bodies. Indeed, "GIMP" showed that compelling movement can be produced by someone who is missing a limb or whose knees turn inward. More important to dance than an idealized physical form is the human spirit. This worthy message resounds throughout "GIMP."

—Ballet-Dance Magazine

"The performers are like a thicket of trees subsisting on the same soil, light, and water, but each expressing its response to those elements with irrefutable distinction"

—Dance Magazine

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