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Review: UK Premier GIMP at Liverpool Playhouse Theatre

BY JANE PHILLIPS

You don't often feel challenged watching a dance show, certainly not the likes of Strictly Come Dancing, but the eight strong cast that make up the GIMP Project command the viewer's full attention.

A provocative piece of modern dance performance that explores physical movement and its limitations through the medium of dance, the GIMP Project examines disability and the physicality of the human body. Choreographer and director Heidi Latsky explores the human body using disabled dancers and presents a very fast paced performance that is full of drama.

The show starts with a breathtaking spectacle from two dancers who use a long piece of red silk attached to a bar above the theatre. They use gymnastics and physical ability to propel themselves, and this resulted in a stunning ten-minute routine. Because of the unpredictability of using the silk, there were a few hair raising points where you think they might fall off, or lose grip, but, well practised in using just their arms to get about, the dancers' upper arm strength is astonishing.

Heidi Latsky started the Gimp Project in 2007. Based in New York she became fascinated in how other people moved, and in particular people with disabilities, and wanted to explore this further. GIMP is a result of working with able bodied and disabled dancers and, by exploring how they move and putting it to music, Latsky has put together a piece that challenges our preconceptions and makes us as an audience re-think accepted ideas about dance.

There are no unnecessary costume changes or gaps in either performance or music. The transition from one section of the piece to the next is done so gracefully that you don't know it's happened. The energy from the dancers was phenomenal, particularly Jeffrey Freeze whose performance was staggering to watch. His immense physical strength was as you would expect from any dancer, but as you watch you realise that there is also a story being told.

Latsky tests the way we perceive others, and ourselves, opening our minds to examine "disability" and how the body supports or doesn't support us. We rebel against things we don't understand, Latsky manages to portray this message without any shouting or dramatics needed. An empty stage, some subtle lighting and a varied music track, and eight talented individuals who happened to have some disabilities were more than enough to get the point across.

