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The Gimp Project shows Nebraska that dance is universal

BY JEFF KORBELIK

From *The Lincoln Journal Star* in Neb.:

When choreographer Heidi Latsky told Lawrence Carter-Long (pictured) she wanted to work with him, he thought she meant in a public relations capacity.

That's his expertise, after all. He's a popular speaker on a wide variety of topics ranging from disability issues to animal advocacy to media literacy.

"I told her I was too busy, that I had more than enough on my plate," he said in a phone interview. "She said, 'I don't need you for P.R. I want to work with you as a performer.'"

It gave him pause.

Carter-Long has cerebral palsy and walks with a gait.

"Heidi said, 'I like the way you move. I can't move like that, and I would like to work with you,'" he said.

She placed him and dancer Jeffrey Freeze, the associate director of her company, in a dance called "Two Men Walking," which compared and contrasted their movements.

"We're more WWE than Martha Graham," Carter-Long said, jokingly. "We really throw each other around."

The piece was a hit.

So much so, the eight-minute dance has evolved into an entire show featuring other disabled dancers.

Latsky's "The Gimp Project" will be on stage Friday night at the Lied Center for Performing Arts. The 75-minute dance concludes Latsky's residency in Lincoln with her company as part of the Interdisciplinary Arts Symposium at the Hixson-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts.

The symposium, organized by Rhonda Garelick, is in its second season. "Technology, Prosthetics and the Body in Performance" showcases artists who stretch, alter or question the limits of the physical body through technology.



Lawrence Carter-Long (kneeling) and Jeffrey Freeze in GIMP

Photo: Arthur Fink

Latsky is a celebrated dancer and choreographer who received much acclaim as a principal dancer for Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance.

She became a renowned choreographer through her collaboration with Lawrence Goldhuber in Goldhuber & Latsky.

In 2001, she formed her New York-based modern dance company, Heidi Latsky Dance.

She created "Gimp" in 2007, and Dance Magazine called it "without doubt a gleaming milestone in the progress of contemporary dance and theater, proving that the term 'disabled dancer' is an oxymoron."

"This has been incredible," said Carter-Long, who is the executive director for the Disabilities Network of New York City. "If you had told me three years ago I would be doing this, I would have asked what you were smoking and when can I get some. It was the furthest thing from my mind."

"Gimp" has opened all kinds of doors for him and others with disabilities. Latsky uses the dance for workshops, outreach and community building.

"You particularly can see (the effects) in (disabled) young folks who are 16 or 17," Carter-Long said. "They say, 'Wow, I can do this' or 'This is an option for me now.'"

As it was for Carter-Long, who began dancing in his late 30s.

"It's still kind of a kick to me when people say, 'What do you do for a living?' and I say to them, in all honesty, 'I'm a professional dancer,'" he said. "I watch how they react to that and try to make sense of that."