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Moved to See More Than 'Disabled'

BY EMILY MACEL

A dancer reaches her left arm to the side, then high above her head. Snakelike, her arm wraps around her head or slides around her torso. When the strong muscular limb disappears behind her back, she is standing with no arms, fingertips barely emerging from her right side. Catherine Long has only one arm, but what an arm it is.

The dancers of Heidi Latsky's "GIMP," which was performed in excerpts at the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage free performance series on Wednesday, are of mixed ability. In "GIMP," presented in conjunction with the National Forum on Careers in the Arts for People with Disabilities, Latsky asks us to look at people for what they are capable of, rather than what they can't do. Some of the performers, like Latsky herself, are what we typically think of as dancers, while others like Long prove to the audience that it doesn't take two arms to have strength and grace.

Lawrence Carter-Long, Catherine Long's husband, struts around the stage with a heavy, rhythmic gait. Because of his cerebral palsy, his knees turn inward and his back is permanently arched. Yet in a duet with Jeffrey Freeze, who swings his arms with a swift crispness and leaps effortlessly, our eyes are drawn to Carter-Long's punches, impossibly inverted plies or fitful falls to the floor.

"GIMP" means to shock us at times. But by focusing our attention on what isn't there, it creates striking imagery that won't be found at just any dance concert. The show ended with the Longs locked in an embrace, Catherine swiveling her hips while "I Like the Way You Move" blared. "GIMP" takes the "dis" out of disabled and reveals a whole new realm of abilities.



Dancers perform a movement from Heidi Latsky's "GIMP."

(By Carlos Arias)