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# 'Meat' me for a hot time

## Nat'l Queer Arts Fest's smorgasbord

F-96

by Zak Szymanski

It's hard to muster up the energy to go to yet another queer performance during the last few days of June. But those who made it to *Fresh Meat*, the debut queer and transgender cabaret at the ODC Theater on June 25 & 26, were able to experience exactly what they had been missing all summer: a show that transformed the audience from spectators into members of the groovy revolution.

No, *Fresh Meat* was not consistently overtly political. It didn't have to be: its mission was to provide a venue for populations underrepresented in the arts. With that came new messages and meanings, often accompanied by high-energy perfectionism. Mario Balcita's "In a Fat Gay Boy's Skin," for instance, commanded an almost relieved discomfort by airing how the community's body obsessions relate to intimacy. And Deep Dick Collective's "Intro to the Famous Outlaw League of Proto-Negroes" wittily drew attention to gay racism and black homophobia with its chant, "Don't let faggots call you nigger, and don't let niggers call you faggot."

But the surprise stand-outs were in the show's dance numbers, strikingly moving works that somehow managed, with few or no words, to convey a bigger



Shawna Virago (left) and *Fresh Meat* performers energized the audience.

picture. "Box," by the dance company Steamroller, used actual anti-gay messages from dancer Jesse Bie's answering machine as the soundtrack for a genre-packed choreographed exchange. The intricate tango steps by Debby Kajiyama and Jose Navarrete sneaked in gradually to convey enormous power from two of the smallest statures on stage. And House of Vogue's deliberate stances were designed to "take voguing back to its roots in black inner-city gay culture" and stay "true to the street and battle elements of the ballroom," according to the artists.

*Fresh Meat* billed itself as "the

smorgasbord" of the National Queer Arts Festival, offering a little bit of everything. And while it could have whittled its line-up down to all dance and music, its inclusion of other voices, in the form of spoken word or skits, often provided a much-needed change of mood or pace.

Sean Dorsey, *Fresh Meat*'s founder, who also danced in the performances, said the show was originally created in response to the Tranny Fest film festival and the Gay and Lesbian Dance Festival taking hiatuses this year. But it has already become apparent that this tasty cabaret is nowhere near its expiration date. ▼