

Amy Seiwert & Sean Dorsey

ODC's Migrations: 'Hero,' 'Red Tie, Red Lipstick,' 'less-ness,' 'Passive Aggression'

by Rachel Howard

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The latest "Migrations" at ODC Theater was one of those events where the audience might have proved as interesting as the dancing. Saturday's sold-out performance drew stars from Smuin, Oakland, and San Francisco Ballets, out in force to support the work of Amy Seiwert, a member of the Smuin troupe who unveiled her abundant talent to the Bay Area during last July's West Wave Festival.

Mingling among the ballet A-list was the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgendered community, on hand to cheer the work of butch choreographer Sean Dorsey.



Charlie Neshyba-Hodges
in Seiwert's "Passive Aggression"
Photo: Andrea Flores

It was a night of revealing juxtapositions. This was ballet up-close and laid bare, the dancers' seemingly unending lines boxed within ODC's tight confines. And this was transgendered dance, if Dorsey's path-finding style can be so crudely reduced, playing to a decidedly wider audience than your typical Tranny showcase. Both choreographers' work looked slightly out of context, and all the stronger for it, not about to be upstaged by the people-watching opportunities.

Dorsey is tall with a wide pelvis, modest chest, and beautifully muscled yet fluid arms. I once interviewed Dorsey for a newspaper article and asked what gender pronoun he'd like me to use in reference to him; he asked me to use "he" and "she" randomly, a logistical impossibility, editorially, but a

request whose spirit is well-received. His work, like his use of pronouns, is potentially trailblazing, most obviously so in the opening dance "Hero," when Dorsey's character contemplates a personal ad placed by a shirtless beefcake cowboy (Ami Student) riding a clearly phallic toy-horse-on-a-stick.

Neither does subtlety reign during "Red Tie, Red Lipstick," a story of one butch (Dorsey), one femme (Linda Case), and one heartbreaking night of police brutality. The text is by Marcus Rene Van, and it could have easily subsumed the dancing were it not for the deep intimacy and sensuality between Dorsey and Case as they glided across the floor in a tender postmodern tango.

But Dorsey is at his most promising when not delivering a blatant message, as in his solo "a small class of words." The text, compiled by Dorsey and set to electronic music by Ben Neill, lists bird species, their habitats, and pronouns. Dorsey moves in a tightly circumscribed cross of light--a compass, perhaps, with its four cardinal points -- with arms so strong yet strangely undulating above a well-grounded stance. The legs could move more -- the occasional extension looks self-conscious, out of place -- and Dorsey is short on development, treating phrase material more like loops than building blocks.

But Dorsey's style is not about a woman proving her strength with pounding moves, as in the case of Krissy Keefer's militant Dance Brigade. It is something else altogether, a deeply personal refraction of the masculine through the feminine.