

Rare and well-done

'Fresh Meat' comes of age at ODC Theater

by Zak Szymanski

Dubbed a "queer and trans cabaret" and "smorgasbord" when it was launched in 2001, the high-energy revue *Fresh Meat* outgrew its campy adjectives at the ODC Theater last month, securing its place in history as a springboard of the interdisciplinary revolution.

Seasoned hip-hop performers and experimental dancers, spoken-word artists and diesel rockers converged: from Shawna Virago, the garage-style vocalist with a ser-



Hip-hop performers and experimental dancers, spoken-word and rock.

rated edge; to Extra Credit/Sisterz of the Underground, whose broken dance had the audience still pounding the floor in applause minutes after they left the stage.

Artistic director/*Fresh Meat* founder Sean Dorsey, a modern dancer, performed "Second Kiss" with Mair Culbreth, a reflection through movement and text on a young genderqueer's first schoolyard kiss as the boy she really was. The piece evoked rather than dictated emotion, and infused humor into a form that can take itself too seriously. Dorsey's physicality was a commitment to total expression, and the audience laughter was heavy with shared experience.

Lesbian rapper JenRO adapted an Eminem song to announce, "Sorry, Mama, I'm coming out of the closet." MC Katastrophe, an unapologetic trans-man, threatened to steal the girlfriends of straight men everywhere. Perhaps

the most powerful act, Sonya Smith and Christopher Love's "Ground Birds," featured a soundtrack in crescendo as the pair, suspended from cords, swam through the air.

To call *Fresh Meat* "multicultural" seems tokenistic, while "variety show" lacks substance. The show is what genuine community through fierce and fine-tuned work looks like. Still, the diversity was noticeably astounding for a popular LGBTQ event, leaving one to wonder which comes first: the tireless, artistically-intertwined radicals, or the performance venues that have propelled them into the spotlight?

One thing remains certain: *Fresh Meat* is the first venue to truly honor emerging queer performance in all of its manifestations, by demanding a level of professionalism not usually required of rebel artists. ▼