

Success sends Fresh Meat Festival packing to bigger quarters

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Fresh Meat artistic director Sean Dorsey
(Source: Lydia Daniller)

The growing popularity of San Francisco's Fresh Meat Festival--a multidisciplinary queer and transgender performance--has forced the festival to bigger digs for this year's rendition, which will run June 19-22 at Project Artaud Theater.

"We have been at the ODC Theater (on 17th Street) for the past six years and had 20 sold-out performances of our festival there," said Fresh Meat Artistic Director Sean Dorsey. "We've been trying to keep up with audience demand--last year, we pre-sold out every night--and to accommodate larger ensembles, made us decide to move this year to Project Artaud

Theater. It's a significantly larger theater and a beautiful space. It's a very exciting week for us. Our audiences have grown so enormously and are so loyal, we didn't have enough seats for all the people who wanted to come."

Fresh Meat's popularity goes back to its roots. Begun in 2001 as a one-time only event, the festival has run every summer since. "Many transgender and queer activists and artists came together because at the time--seven years ago--there were very few platforms for transgender and queer artists," Dorsey said. "Even today, we see that transgender and gender-variant people are excluded from basically all forms of public artistic expressions in our culture."

Although the first Fresh Meat festival was intended as a one-time event, but there was such an incredible response from the community, an outpouring of emotion and interest and excitement, that the Fresh Meat Festival transformed into Fresh Meat Productions and became a non-profit arts organization. Seven years later, we have gone from being a one-time only event into the nation's first and largest transgender arts organization presenting year-round transgender arts programs."

Performers at this year's festival include Dorsey--an award-winning choreographer and dancer--as well as Scott Turner Schofield (trans theater from the deep South), Shawna Virago (trans rock legend), Jose Luis Munoz (gender-bending opera countertenor from Carla Lucero's opera "Juana"), and Freeplay Dance Crew (sexy hip hop), Nejla Baguio and Prado Gomez, the Barbary Coast Cloggers, Colombian Soul, Na Lei Hulu I Ka Wekiu (hula), and the Transcendence Gospel Choir.

The festival also includes five specially commissioned pieces. "We're celebrating our expansion with an out-of-this world, powerhouse lineup of artists who will astonish audiences with their innovation, skill, heart and strength," Dorsey said.

The festival has gained wide acceptance throughout queer and mainstream audiences patronizing the event. "Everyone has been extremely open and welcoming," Dorsey said. "The show is of very high quality, and it's so joyful."

The Seventh Annual Fresh Meat Festival Transgender and Queer Performance Festival runs June 19-22, 2008 at Project Artaud Theater, 450 Florida St. between 17th Street and Mariposa. Thursday-Saturday, 8 p.m.; Sunday, 7 p.m. Tickets are \$15, and advance tickets are recommended. For tickets, call (415) 863-9834, or visit www.brownpapertickets.com or www.ticketweb.com. For more about the festival and Fresh Meat Productions, visit www.freshmeatproductions.org.