

Awesome dude

Dance

Sean Dorsey's 'Fresh Meat Festival'

by Paul Parish

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It could have been predicted that the transgender community might toss up the most imaginative and intriguing dance artist in the Bay Area. Who has a more complex perspective on life than a person who feels he's in the wrong body? In any case, there may not be a more generous-spirited, imaginative choreographer-storyteller than Sean Dorsey, a 20-something child of two lesbians who's making dance-theater out of his life as a female who sincerely feels like he's a guy, though he doesn't need any surgery to ratify it. His dance-stories reveal great powers of imagination, presence of mind, and compassion for all concerned, including (thank God) the audience.

Dorsey has certainly won the allegiance of the dance community and the critics, who've given him two Isadora Duncan Dance Awards and a Goldie (from a rival paper), a large audience outside the gay community, and a big mention in European dance mags.

His signature "Outsider Chronicles" bypassed identity issues ("who am I, and what do they think of me") and went straight to the awkward facts of relationships, in a series of short-story dances that showed the awkward first kiss, first love. And he got the details right: whatever their sexuality, people saw it and said, yeah, that's about it.

Dorsey already had the transgender community behind him, and for the 7th year now he has put together a festival of monologues, dances, and songs that express many facets of trans consciousness. This year's *Fresh Meat Festival* opened to a packed, excited house at Project Artaud Theater last Thursday, and played through the hot weekend. *Fresh Meat* tries to give every perspective its voice — trannies trying to have kids got their say, as did a former Southern belle (Scott Turner Schofield) who's making it as a (Grace-Kelly-good-looking) male performance artist. Schofield's act is uneven, but at its best he is brilliantly insightful, and like Dorsey, he is disarmingly sweet-natured. The stunning blonde rock diva Shawna Virago, who's kinda in-your-face, sang in protest against the army of Christians who want to tell her what to do. Then, at the finale, an entire choir of transgender Christians, many of them African American, put their entire souls into trying to bring us to Jesus. "I need you to survive," they were singing, and they wanted us to sing along, "I love you, I will never speak words to hurt you," and more of that sort, and if I had not been with a friend who'd have been mortified, I'd have gone down onto that stage myself and been saved.

Tradition!

Some of the acts appealed to me more than others, but everyone had a following in the crowd. The big talent is in the assemblage. Dorsey understands that a rising tide raises all the boats, and that LBGTs have allies amongst traditional cultures if we only seek them. Nearly half the artists were somehow representing traditional cultures. He commissioned new work from the Barbary Coast Cloggers (who did an old-time Western 49er, stomping clog dance to Gwen Stefani's "Hollaback Girl," to huge cheers). There was new work reflecting a transgender perspective from the foremost stateside hula troupe (Na Lei Hulu I Ka Wekiu), and from a folkloric group based in Colombian culture. News of this led me to hope for more — perhaps an Inca dance in honor of hermaphrodites, or an old-wild-West dance for two men setting up housekeeping, or a hula in honor of a gay king. No, none of that. But what we got was sweet. The Colombian set started with a religious procession, but before long, segued into a dance with same-sex couples cuddling — with traditional modesty, thank you, but no backing down — and a rousing communal finale that made you feel that our relationships get honored in this community. Which is, if you ask me, saying plenty.

Similarly, the cloggers and the hula folk endeared themselves with "we like your music" gestures that brought roars of gratitude from the crowd (median age probably 29, mostly female-by-birth, and very stylish). Both troupes reveal the joy they take in dancing. The all-male cloggers thunder and crash with tremendous gusto. The hula dancers sink deep into their hips, and swirl in unison like waves of the sea — especially the women, in their dark-green satin gowns — while the men show the power in the pelvis in a different way, with their naked legs separating around their loincloths at sharper angles, and with more striking attack. The lovely thing about the Colombians was how gracious they were to their partners.



Dorsey showed a poignant, wry duet, in which former ODC star Brian Freeman mirrored Dorsey's moves as the boy he might have been. As usual, Dorsey voiced-over the story, based on a diary he actually had written in as a child: a big, gold-leather *Diary for a Girl*, with sentimental illustrations by Norman Rockwell. Turns out that not long ago, Dorsey actually found a second-hand copy of Rockwell's *Diary for a Boy*, a coming-of-age document he hoped to learn something from — which, alas, revealed many similar anxieties ("I am the biggest dork in the school," "New outbreak of zits," "Wish I were more like Josh"). The big irony is that both kids devoted pages to their crush on George Michael. Dorsey will likely perform this again in his show in November.

It was a fascinating coming-of-age study. A big irony is that I find myself wondering if Dorsey doesn't owe some of his big-hearted generosity, decency, and modesty to Norman Rockwell.



Choreographer-storyteller Sean Dorsey. Photo: Lydia Dansiller

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