

Fresh Meat Festival Features Bold Transgender and Queer Performance

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By *Dia Vergados*

On Thursday June 18th, the nation's best and boldest transgender and queer performers will kick off the 8th annual Fresh Meat Festival. This year's Festival lineup includes some of the nation's finest Asian and Pacific Islander LGBT artists including Taiko Ren, D'Lo and Ryka Aoki de la Cruz.

The Fresh Meat Festival is an annual festival of transgender and queer performance - the first and only event of its kind in the nation. The Fresh Meat Festival has received national attention for its cutting-edge lineup and standing-room-only audiences - and for its celebration of the diversity of the LGBT community.

This year, Fresh Meat is bringing its biggest lineup ever to Project Artaud Theater from June 18-21. Artists from the leading edge meet artists on the cutting edge: from taiko to roots rock, ballroom to hip hop, freestyle to folk, this year's Festival offers a top-notch roster of transgender and queer trailblazers. Sri Lankan, Japanese American, Appalachian and Mexican-American voices come together in the acclaimed Festival that is still the only event of its kind in North America.

Fresh Meat Productions' Artistic Director Sean Dorsey curated this special lineup and says, "We really pushed ourselves this year to find the best of the best, the trailblazers and the history-makers. You won't find a lineup like this anywhere else."



The 2009 Fresh Meat Festival lineup includes a world premiere by Taiko Ren and performances by Ryka Aoki de la Cruz and D'Lo. Ryka Aoki de la Cruz is a trans-dyke writer, performer, and composer from Los Angeles. She has a third-degree black belt in Kodokan Judo and is a professor of English at Santa Monica College and the University of Phoenix. Asked why she is excited about performing at the festival, Ryka says, "I like Fresh Meat because it is one of the few venues that lets me showcase work that incorporates my poetry, my music, and my martial arts experience. Growing up Asian-American, I found myself showing different parts of my self to different people - families, schools, other

Asians, queers... The soul yearns for a time it can present itself completely, without apology. Fresh Meat lives for those moments, as well."



D'Lo, described as a "jolt of creative and comedic energy," is a Tamil Sri Lankan-American political theater artist, writer and music producer from L.A. D'Lo has performed throughout the US, Canada, UK, Germany, Sri Lanka, and India. D'Lo's 'Ramble-Ations: A One D'Lo Show' received a National Performance Network Creation Fund Grant. D'Lo says, "Fresh Meat Productions and the Festival is one of the only spaces of its caliber solely dedicated to trans and queer performing arts. In a sort of way, a festival of this size with the amount of publicity and support and arts funding is a validation of gender queer and trans bodied artists - we are trans, yes, but we are artists... This space/festival is extremely important and should be revered because it allows for both the audience and artist to feel celebrated in our multi-emotional, multi-faceted lived experience of walking in these bodies."

The Festival lineup includes taiko, hip hop, theater, modern dance, ballroom and live music with performances by Zoe Balfour and Citabria Phillips, the Barbary Coast Cloggers, Ryka Aoki de la Cruz, Deadlee, D'Lo, Sean Dorsey Dance, Storm Miguel Florez, Mind Over Matter, Taiko Ren and Shawna Virago. Dorsey says, "We want to show the world how transgender and queer communities are at the forefront of cultural innovation. This year's artists are breaking all the rules, pushing boundaries and making history."

The annual Fresh Meat Festival is the highlight of Fresh Meat Productions' annual transgender and queer arts programs. Fresh Meat Productions is the nation's first arts organization with year-round transgender arts programs, which include the Fresh Meat Festival, Artistic Director Sean Dorsey's award-winning dance company (Sean Dorsey Dance), visual art exhibitions and media arts events. Fresh Meat Productions was founded in 2002 to foster the artistic development of transgender artists, build community and audiences for transgender and queer artistic expression, and to promote dialogue and understanding through the arts. Fresh Meat is the nation's largest transgender arts organization.

"Our community looks forward to this event all year long," Dorsey says, "the quality of the art is so strong, and so too is the sense of community and celebration. It's truly a transformative experience."

The Fresh Meat Festival runs June 18-21 at Project Artaud Theater in San Francisco (Thursday-Saturday 8pm shows, Sunday 7pm show). ASL interpretation is offered on Sunday June 21. Tickets are \$15. Advance tickets are recommended, as this popular event sells out quickly. For information please visit www.freshmeatproductions.org.