

'Uncovered: The Diary Project': Dance of gender

Nirmala Nataraj

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Award-winning choreographer Sean Dorsey has a knack for creating poignant movement poems - pieces that are driven by strong narratives, accessible to audiences who claim not to "get" modern dance. Dorsey's work delves deeply into the courageous accounts of individuals on the margins of recorded history with his latest performance, "Uncovered: The Diary Project."

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Lydia Daniller

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"Uncovered" consists of two parts ("Lou," a suite of dances centered around the journals of the late Bay Area transgender activist Lou Sullivan, and "Lost/Found," Dorsey's whimsical personal fantasy about the boyhood he never got to live out). The work stems from Dorsey's "curiosity as an artist and activist around the gap between recorded history versus collective memory versus actual lived experience when transgender/queer people get left out of history books."

After uncovering one of his own early childhood diaries, Dorsey researched the lives of transgender and queer people through diaries, letters and interviews.

After coming across Sullivan's journals, Dorsey knew that he wanted to devote a suite of dances to this pioneering Bay Area figure.

Dorsey was touched by the honesty and personal struggles of Sullivan, who longed to live as a boy through adolescence and identified as a gay man later in life. In the 1970s, Sullivan was rejected as a candidate for hormone treatments and surgery, and he eventually forged the way toward deeper understanding and education around transgender issues.

"At that time, there was no analysis or acceptance of sexual orientation and gender being separate things ... or being both trans and queer at the same time," Dorsey says. "Lou opened up the door for trans people who lived outside acceptable medical models of what being trans could look like."

The dances incorporate everything from Sullivan's writings as a young girl to pieces that he wrote a week before he died of AIDS-related complications in 1991. Something that struck Dorsey in his research was the experiences of those who came out as transgender before there was any identifiable trans community or level of acceptance from the queer community.

"It's easier for younger generations of trans people to forget or not even realize how much has changed in the last 10 or 20 years, so I was happy I had the opportunity to honor the stories of pioneers who have made my life possible."

In creating work with an activist slant, Dorsey believes that art can play a significant role in documenting, preserving and interpreting transgender/queer history.

"It is also up to us (the transgender and queer community) to make each other visible," he says, "and ensure that we document each other's lives, art and accomplishments."

8 p.m. Thurs.-Sun., also 4 p.m. Sun. \$15-\$20. Dance Mission Theater, 3316 24th St., S.F. (415) 273-4633. www.freshmeatproductions.org.

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