

Fresh Meat Festival - transgender, queer art

Nirmala Nataraj

Thursday, June 17, 2010



Lydia Daniller

Singer-songwriter Shawna Virago, who adds a modern edge to roots music, will present a new work at the festival.

[View Larger Image](#)

When the first Fresh Meat Festival - the nation's only multidisciplinary arts event dedicated to the work of transgender and queer artists - hit the stage in 2002, choreographer Sean Dorsey thought it was going to be only a one-time thing. But the community response from that event enabled Dorsey to establish Fresh Meat Productions, a nonprofit arts organization that presents programs on a year-round basis.

In many ways, the festival remains at the heart of Fresh Meat Productions, especially because of its role in giving trans and queer artists access to high-quality venues where they are able to produce artistically excellent work.

"Despite the amazing groundswell of tremendously talented trans artists in the Bay Area, nobody was putting transgender artists on the nation's stages, or gallery

walls, or film screens at that time," Dorsey says. "We didn't have an organization supporting us, presenting us, mentoring us."

This year's lineup encompasses multiple genres and includes performances by Barbary Coast Cloggers, Sean Dorsey Dance, SoliRose, the GAPA Men's Chorus and Shawna Virago.

At least half a dozen world premieres pepper the festival, including new work by the all-male gay Appalachian dance company the Barbary Coast Cloggers. The company presents a stirring piece based on the life of Jeanne Bonnet, said to be the first transgender person in San Francisco, who lived as a man and helped rescue women from the brothels of the Barbary Coast in the late 1800s.

Barbary Coast Cloggers Director Ian Enriquez says that although clogging is a forgotten art form, "it celebrates the diversity of our people by demonstrating that people of different ethnicities had to have partied together in order for this style to emerge. And queer dancers have played a strong part in passing down all dance styles."

Virago's piece is "about slackers and the people who love them," she says. Virago, whose music is a grittily eclectic combination of country and glam that she calls "glitter twang," presents a multifaceted new performance that follows a character from adolescence to adulthood, "being an outcast as a young person, spending a lot of time in detention, and then finding herself on a life-changing road trip as an adult, with an element of revenge on an untrustworthy ex-husband."

Virago notes that the festival "is still the only place I get to perform where my gender is not the first thing people notice onstage. Instead, my art and performance is. ... It's a community-building event built on a foundation of amazing curation and art."

Dorsey says that despite the diversity of themes in this year's lineup, human connection is a major motif. "We are in a really challenging time - between the economy, anti-immigrant hatred, anti-queer marriage movements - and so, more than anything, I think we are hungry for meaningful connection."

8 p.m. today-Sat., 7 p.m. Sun. \$17-\$20. Z Space at Theater Artaud, 450 Florida St., S.F. www.freshmeatproductions.org.

- Nirmala Nataraj, 96hours@sfgate.com

This article appeared on page G - 18 of the San Francisco Chronicle