

ORIGINAL PLUMBING

SEAN DORSEY DANCE & THE SECRET HISTORY OF LOVE

by [JOSH](#) on MAY 14, 2012



Sean Dorsey! (photo / Lydia Daniller)

I recently had the opportunity to interview Award Winning choreographer and dancer, Sean Dorsey. Dance Magazine named Sean one of the "Top 25 to Watch" in the nation, and SF Weekly named his company, Sean Dorsey Dance, San Francisco's Best Dance/Performance Company. Here's what Sean had to say!

OP: I hear you're on the road with your latest work, "The Secret History of Love"! Where did I catch you for this interview?

Sean Dorsey: I'm in San Francisco back at daily rehearsals with my company — we're in between tours: last month was our California tour (San Jose, Chico, Claremont) and this week we leave for tours to Santa Cruz, Miami and Boston.

And how would you summarize the show in one sentence?

The Secret History Of Love is a full-bodied, full-throttle dance-theater show that reveals the ways that queer and transgender people managed to find — and LOVE — each other in decades past. From 1920s speakeasies to wartime love affairs to 1950s police raids to long-lost love letters, the show is based on real-life and real-love stories.

I've seen "Secret History" and was one in the sea of standing ovation. How long did it take to create, and what was your light at the end of the creative process tunnel, so to speak?

The Secret History Of Love is the culmination of a two-year research and creation process, including a national LGBT Elders Oral History Project I conducted. I did a ton of archival research, and then recorded interviews of LGBT elders sharing their life stories and love stories. These elders' voices and stories are the heart of the show.

I spent about a year transcribing these interviews and writing and recording the soundscore to the show (the dances are accompanied by spoken narrative, stories and the elders' voices). After I had a draft of the soundscore, I started rehearsing with my dancers to create the choreography. We did intensive rehearsals over two periods during this two years.

My light at the end of the 'creative process tunnel' ... ah, yes the light! This project was REALLY intensive and intense — for every minute of my hour-long soundscore, I spent up to 6 hours in the recording studio, and then I still had all the choreography ahead of me. It was enormous and at times overwhelming. My light was the remarkable group of elders I worked with on this project — the inspiration of their stories, and my drive to share those stories before they are lost or forgotten.

What's it like working with cis-gendered men in your dance company?

Right now, my dance company is all-male — I am the only transgender guy in the company. There are really interesting, ongoing conversations and exchanges about masculinity, gender and sexuality amongst us all and our varied gender expressions and life experiences. We are always learning from each other. I also think there has been some revolutionary opening up in the Bay Area gay men's community from my company; gay men haven't always connected with trans guys, but my work has really attracted a huge non-trans gay-male audience. Really it's remarkable how diverse my audience is: trans, queer, straight...

What are the most challenging and conversely most rewarding aspects of your work?

The most challenging part of my work is early in the creative process — writing my soundscore, re-writing the soundscore and working to land on a clear vision for the movement. These processes are very solitary, by necessity. The most rewarding aspects of my work are working in the studio with my dancers, working with my Sound Engineer and Composers in the recording studio and performing and touring the final work.

If you could define your artistic legacy, what would that be?

I hope that I succeed in making dances that move people deeply. I hope I succeed in making work that speaks to transgender and queer people and our lives. I hope I continue to be able to create space for transgender and gender-variant people in dance — both on stage and in audiences.

What message do you have for the next generation of trans dancers and choreographers?

DO IT — DANCE! Despite every message from our culture that tells you otherwise, your body is beautiful and what you have to say with it is important. Share your body, share your dances, share your story. And keep doing it, despite the ruckus it may cause. Find safe places to dance and move and train — and find each other.

Finally — where can people see you next?!

I'll be performing The Secret History Of Love on tour this year in Santa Cruz (May 5), Miami (May 12), Boston (May 17-19), Los Angeles (August), Chicago (October) and Whitewater Wisconsin (October). In 2013 we tour to Philadelphia, San Antonio, Chico, Claremont, San Jose and other cities.

Sean Dorsey and "The Secret History of Love" are always looking for cities, festivals and colleges to tour: if you have an interest or a contact, please email him at freshmeatinfo@gmail.com. To learn more about Sean, visit: www.seandorseydance.com

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Sean in motion. photo / Lydia Daniller