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REVIEW:

Sean Dorsey's *The Secret History of Love* at Dance Mission Theater



Lydia Daniller

By IRENE HSIAO

Sean Dorsey is a big fat romantic, and he's not afraid to tell you all about it.

A cupid, a madman, a fool, a poet, a lover -- Dorsey is fearless and human in meditation on love at Dance Mission Theater. (The performance ran March 28-31.) His choreography draws on gesture and lyrical movement, as well as vaudeville and cabaret, to paint a broad picture of LGBT history in the United States and present the allegory of a transgender initiate on his quest for love. At the same time, love's universal frustrations and ecstasies are celebrated in *The Secret History Of Love*, performed by Dorsey,

Juan De La Rosa, Brian Fisher and Nol Simonse, with musical guest Shawna Virago.

Reminiscent of Cherubino's "Voi che sapete" in the *Marriage of Figaro*-- a boy's song about his infatuation for his godmother that is frequently performed by women, as it happens -- Dorsey's opening is the innocent but exuberant inquiry: what is this marvelous thing that he's never felt but is sure he must, yet fears he never can? Yes, that is wordy, but love is complicated, and queer love is even more so, as we are reminded by the nearly constant narration, in voiceover, spoken, or sung onstage, that accompanies and leads the dancing.



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Yet despite the theatricality of the work, the real voices and stories of members of the LGBT community give weight to a piece that shifts from humor to pathos in the blink of an eye. As friends, guides, and fellow lovers, the four men speak with sass and sincerity, and dance with virtuosic ease. The work moves from the present to the 19th Century and back again, with the 1920s speakeasy as the central resting point, a utopic underground space that nurtures transgression and excess, replete with transgender singer Shawna Virago as a sequined siren.

The queer body is frequently made out to be wrong in its own skin, born into the wrong sex or desiring the wrong mate. This mindset is reinforced in classical choreography; as Zurich Ballet's Christian Spuck remarked in the *New York Times* this week, "The ballet world is a very heterosexual one onstage. I think it has a lot to do with the technical demands of a pas de deux and the different physicalities of the two sexes. It keeps it more interesting, and of course it's a tradition."

Dorsey's work, among others, demonstrates that men partnering with each other is not only physically possible but aesthetically valuable, with the dancers sharing weight and lifts equally among themselves, perhaps grounded in the even greater authenticity of portraying the kinds of relationships they actually experience.

The Secret History of Love celebrates the body's power and joy in movement, its articulateness, its comfort in itself, and its sheer ability to bear 75 minutes of physical and emotional intensity. Its conclusion, with the dancers paired off in a simple embrace, slowly revolving, highlights the support members of the LGBT community give each other, as well as the vulnerability everyone risks in the venture of love. As a political statement, particularly timely given last week's Supreme Court hearings on gay marriage, Secret History delivers the simple message that love requires all our human wit and courage to endure, and its achievement deserves our respect, not our obstruction.

Learn more about Sean Dorsey Dance at www.seandorseydance.com.