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# Bates Dance festival features new work about the AIDS crisis

Choreographer Sean Dorsey hopes 'The Missing Generation' helps people remember.

BY BOB KEYES STAFF WRITER

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THE MISSING GENERATION (Sean Dorsey Dance: May 14-17, 2015)



Sean Dorsey, one of America's top young choreographers, spent a year on a project that more closely resembles documentary than dance.

Dorsey traveled the country talking to survivors of the 1980s AIDS epidemic. He

connected with gay, bisexual and transgender people in their 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s who are living with HIV/AIDS or who lost friends and lovers to a disease that terrorized a generation.

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PHOTO GALLERY



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IF YOU GO:

**WHAT:** Bates Dance Festival

**WHERE:** Bates College, Lewiston

**WHEN:** Through Aug. 8

**PERFORMANCES:**

• DanceNow, 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Schaeffer Theatre

• Sean Dorsey Dance, “The Missing Generation,” 7:30 p.m. July 16 and July 18, Schaeffer Theatre, with sneak preview at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday

• Delfos Danza Contemporanea, 7:30 p.m. July 24-25, Schaeffer Theatre; sneak preview at 7:30 p.m. July 21

• Robert Moses’ Kin, 7:30 p.m. July 31 and Aug. 1, Schaeffer Theatre; sneak preview at 7:30 p.m. July 28

• The Musicians’ Concert, 7:30 p.m. Aug. 4. Franco-American

Their lives were decimated by an illness they knew little about, Dorsey said. Today, their struggles, as well as their grief, are largely forgotten by the wider culture. “We barely talk about AIDS anymore,” Dorsey said, explaining his motive for his new performance piece, “The Missing Generation.”

It premiered May 14 in San Francisco, where Dorsey lives and where his [dance company](#) is based. It gets its East Coast debut at the [Bates Dance Festival](#) in Lewiston later this month. Bates Dance co-commissioned the piece, along with the National Dance Project, the National Endowment for the Arts, private funders and other foundations.

Dorsey, 42, did a two-week residency at Bates last September, teaching classes and performing an earlier work, “The Secret History of Love.” He came back to Maine in the spring for community workshops, and he returns with his four-man dance company to teach at the festival and perform the new piece.

“The Missing Generation” is a high-energy performance that tells survivors’ stories with movement, music and oral histories. Dorsey talked to 25 LGBT elders in six cities, resulting in 75 hours of interviews.

From that, he and a team of collaborators made “The Missing Generation.” Dorsey describes it as “full-throttle” dance theater, with the voices of survivors mixed in an original score. It lasts about 65 minutes and is divided in 17 sections. “We are dripping when we’re done.” Dorsey said. “It’s a marathon.

**TICKETS & INFO:** \$12 to \$25; 876-6161 or [batesdancefestival.org](http://batesdancefestival.org)



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physically and emotionally.”

For those who survived the AIDS crisis, it’s unfathomable that people do not remember, Dorsey said. AIDS sparked panic and terror. Tens of thousands of men and women died, and now it sometimes feels like the disease never existed, he said.

Brian Fisher remembers the fear people lived with as part of their daily lives. He grew up in Maine and was dancing in New York at the time. He’s now a member of Dorsey’s company.

At first, he wasn’t interested when Dorsey presented the idea. Fisher didn’t want to re-live that part of his life. AIDS decimated the dance field. Fisher went to auditions fearful of who he wouldn’t see, hoping their absence was because they were working and not because they were dying.

“It was too hard losing people, watching them die, wondering where they were, wondering if you were next,” he wrote in an e-mail from California.

At first it had no name, and no one knew how it spread. But it killed every few days, and everybody paid attention, Fisher said. “I also remember the first medicines and the first tests, which many people did not want to take for fear of winding up on a government list,” he said.

At 52, Fisher is an older dancer now, one of the survivors. He’s the only one in Dorsey’s company who grew up with AIDS and HIV as a fact of life. Ultimately, that’s why he embraced the piece, despite his initial disinterest.

Bates Dance Festival director Laura Faure called “The Missing Generation” uplifting and inspiring. “It’s a beautiful piece of work, and not at all depressing,” she said. “I felt called to take on this project because it’s so important. This is about love.”

As co-commissioner, Bates Dance Festival helped fund the project, enabling Dorsey the time to collect the stories, create the movements and work with collaborators on the music and oral history elements.

For Fisher, coming back to Bates means coming home. His family has roots in Monmouth and Winthrop. Fisher learned to dance at Monmouth Academy, where he

graduated in 1980. He did community theater in Augusta, danced at Maine State Music Theatre in Brunswick and took classes at Bates before moving to New York to begin his career. His family remains in the area. He tries to get home to Maine once a year.

He rarely performs here, though, which makes the shows of “The Missing Generation” even more personal.

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