

Fresh Meat Festival: Supporting Transgender and Queer Artists

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Courtesy Fresh Meat Productions

Katastrophe

Feeling isolated never really deterred Sean Dorsey from getting what he wanted.

"I think that growing up and [...] never seeing another person like me in modern dance -- and so few transgender artists even being able to be onstage or getting visibility -- was the fire that [pushed] me."

Canadian-born Dorsey arrived in San Francisco looking to create a revolutionary platform for artists from the queer and transgender community. "I knew the talent was there. I knew the artists were there and the art was being made," he says, "It was just about people being given the opportunity."

And so when he felt the opportunity wasn't in front of him he simply created it himself.

It started out simply -- with the first ever Fresh Meat Festival, an evening-length performance conceived by

Dorsey that brought together the very best LGTB performers.

The Fresh Meat Festival was a success and spawned the idea for Fresh Meat Productions, where Dorsey's own Sean Dorsey Dance is currently resident company. Currently, it's the nation's largest transgender arts organization.

After 13 years of constructing new works, national touring, and gaining a loyal fan base, Dorsey and Fresh Meat Productions have grown tremendously. They've received numerous awards including three coveted Isadora Duncan Dance Awards, they've been named one of Dance Magazine's "25 to Watch," and they have even won the title *SF Weekly's Best Dance Performance Troupe* in 2008 -- all of this while establishing a unique arts service program to help other transgender organizations. And thanks in part to this type of community collaboration, the growth is spreading rapidly.

"Thirteen years ago nobody would put transgender performers onstage or in their festivals," says Dorsey. "Media wouldn't cover events and funders definitely weren't supporting the artists or organizations. [Now] there is a lot more general awareness about transgender and LGBT issues."

He adds, "I think that's shifting culture in a whole new way that we couldn't imagine 30 years ago. At the same time [...] we're still really mindful that there's a long way to go in the movement towards gender equality.

Ever working toward closing this gap, Fresh Meat Productions presents 2014's Fresh Meat Festival this Thursday. Now in its 13th year, the festival features an expertly curated collection of LGTBQ performers. And although Sean Dorsey Dance is mainly modern dance, audiences can (and should) be prepared for anything. The evening includes Taiko drumming, Bomba dance, voguing, hip-hop, ballroom, and original music -- all queer, all terribly talented, and all treated as equals.

"The vision for Fresh Meat was to pay artists well and demand a really high level of excellence," says Dorsey. "For audiences who come to the Fresh Meat Festival, they know that they're given the cream of the crop of LGBT artists -- they'll be seeing award winning world and world premieres because we demand a lot of our artists."

Fresh Meat Productions presents Fresh Meat Festival at 8 p.m. and continues through June 21 at Z Space (450 Florida). Tickets are \$15-\$25; visit freshmeatproductions.org.

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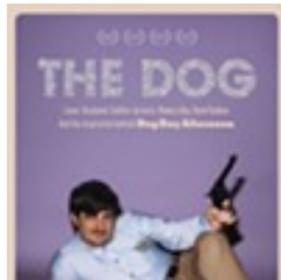
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