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## The BAY AREA REPORTER

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### Trans dance company to debut new season

NEWS

by Elliot Owen

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Choreographer and dancer Sean Dorsey is preparing for the new season of the Sean Dorsey Dance Company. Photo: Elliot Owen

Second only to longstanding powerhouse New York, San Francisco is home to the nation's most dynamic dance climate, and may soon surpass its previously uncontested competition when it comes to pushing the boundaries of contemporary dance.

A front-runner in the movement to redefine the dance world is Sean Dorsey Dance, an award-winning San Francisco-based company founded and directed by transgender choreographer and dancer Sean Dorsey. The company combines dance, storytelling, and theater to create performances that breathe life into LGBTQ narratives from the past, and mirror timeless sentiments shared between all beneficiaries of the human experience, regardless of identity.

"Our productions feature full-throttle, high-energy athletic dancing, luscious queer partnering, dynamic live theater, and intimate storytelling," Dorsey, 41, told the *Bay Area Reporter*. "The work I create has elements of movement, text, and narrative. It's not abstract modern dance; it's accessible, relevant, and meant to move people."

The company is currently gearing up for its 2014 home season, which runs from April 24-26 at Z Space, and features the return of an audience favorite, and debut of highly-anticipated new work. Dorsey is excited to "remount" "Lou," a 45-minute suite of dances that's part of the larger production, *Uncovered: The Diary Project*, which uses text from real-life diaries of transgender and queer people.

"Lou" is based on the journal entries of Lou Sullivan, a Bay Area gay transgender man and activist who educated the medical community about the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity, and founded a few early transgender support groups before dying of AIDS complications in 1991.

"He's also a co-founder of the GLBT Historical Society where he left 30 years of his lifelong diaries," Dorsey said. "I spent a year transcribing the diaries by hand because you can't photocopy them, then created a soundscore based on his diary excerpts, then choreography based on his life. 'Lou' is gorgeous, very powerful work and speaks to all people – transgender, gay, straight, questioning – of all ages."

"Lou" premiered in 2009 and has been performed in 20 cities across the country. Each year it is featured in a home season, Dorsey said, shows sell out in advance.

"There's still of lot of Bay Area audience that hasn't seen the work, so I wanted to bring it back," Dorsey continued.

Complementing the long-standing favorite during the company's home season is the world premiere of *The Missing Generation*, a production

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based on two years of oral interviews that Dorsey conducted with survivors of the early AIDS epidemic. While the full production is set to debut in April 2015 before touring to 15 cities, attendees of this year's program will enjoy a sneak-peek excerpt. Dorsey's intention with *The Missing Generation* is to honor LGBTQ ancestors that died during peak AIDS-incidence years; in 1994 and 1995, HIV was the nation's leading cause of death for those ages 25-44.



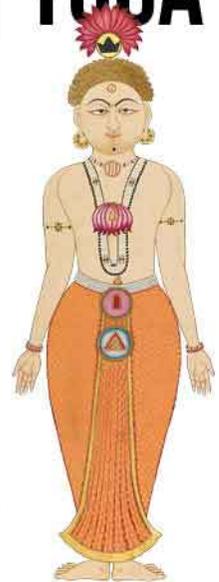
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"In addition," Dorsey explained, "I want to bring transgender experiences into the AIDS narrative, which I still feel are silent around this particular subject."

Dorsey's work has been recognized as unparalleled in many circles, winning praises that include "San Francisco's Best Dance Company" by *SF Weekly*, an inclusion in *Dance* magazine's "Top 25 to Watch" list, three Isadora Duncan Dance Awards – which Dorsey describes as "the Oscars of the dance world" – and a Golden Crown Literary Award (Goldie) for performance.

Not only is Dorsey the nation's first transgender modern dance choreographer, he is also the first transgender artist to receive a National Endowment for the Arts grant, awarded in January, to allocate toward Sean Dorsey Dance productions. The NEA is the largest federal funding body for the arts and, under President Barack Obama, restored funding for LGBTQ-related projects after a stretch of censorship that began in 1989, making Dorsey's grant particularly noteworthy.

"I feel so blessed to support transgender visibility," Dorsey said. "It's revolutionary to have transgender and queer bodies onstage performing well-crafted professional work and giving voice to those experiences. It's revolutionary to be a transgender artist directing work that's award-winning, touring, and breaking new ground in terms of content and form.

"There are times," Dorsey added, "especially when I was in dance school, when I didn't know anybody like me who danced, times where it's lonely and challenging. It's still a challenge to feel like I don't have many peers. I'm very mindful that the reason I can do this work is because I'm standing on the shoulders of my elders and ancestors who struggled through violence, life in closet, and busting out of the closet."

Dorsey is also the founder and artistic director of Fresh Meat Productions, a San Francisco nonprofit committed to creating year-round transgender and queer dance and performing arts programs and events, including the annual Fresh Meat Festival. Sean Dorsey Dance operates under Fresh Meat Productions.

*Z Space is located at 450 Florida Street, San Francisco. To purchase Sean Dorsey Dance 2014 home season tickets, visit [www.brownpapertickets.com/event/608721](http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/608721).*

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