

Ode to Joy

Sean Dorsey's *Lou* rises above, aches with beauty and grief

BY RITA FELCIANO

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REVIEW Sean Dorsey's new *Lou* is a gem. Deeply felt, splendidly shaped, Dorsey's most ambitious project yet tells a tale of vulnerability, passion, joy, and transcendence. It's the story of one human being: transgendered writer, lover, and poet Lou Sullivan, who died in 1991. Dorsey, who was born a woman and lives as a man, used Sullivan's extensive archives to create a portrait of a man who had the bravery and persistence to do what he thought was right, not only for him but others. Isn't that what the mythic heroes used to do — slay the dragons within and without? Yet an important story does not necessarily translate into good dance or theater. *Lou*, however, is very good.

Dorsey framed the story within the larger current debate on history. The scholar, politician, or family record keeper who gets to tell the story, or as Dorsey put it, build the "house" that contains the records, is the one who shapes our present and future perceptions of what happened. In this instance the multitasking Bay Area writer, actor, dancer, and thinker has pulled an involving, theatrically viable piece from the thousands of possibilities his research must have suggested.

He selected judiciously, opting for about dozen episodes at the center of which is a rollicking paean to love, sexuality, and ecstasy. Words, movement, music, and narration blend into a beautifully modulated dance-theater piece. The family portrait is hilarious; the delicate moment when Dorsey strips off his shirt feels as pure as freshly fallen snow; the lack of recognition of himself in the mirror is poignant; and the "Perfect Day" duet aches with beauty and grief. Working with the excellent Brian Fisher, Juan de la Rosa, and Nol Simonse, Dorsey chose an unadorned, intense contact movement style with the hug as a central motive that works. A small quibble. *Lou* has about three endings — that needs to be rethought.