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Trans performance celebrated: 'Fresh Meat Festival'

by Rae Raucci

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Jahaira Fajardo and Angelica Medina are part of Fresh Meat Festival 2019. Photo: Courtesy Fresh Meat Festival

The Fresh Meat Festival is an annual San Francisco performance celebration of transgender talent in diverse areas, from musical and vocal acts to dance performances, performance arts, theater pieces, and beyond.

Now in its 17th year, the festival grew out of the frustration the founders had in putting on such an event. As Sean Dorsey, the impresario behind the Sean Dorsey Dance Company, explained, when he and his founding partner Shawna Virago looked at the trans landscape for performance in the founding year of 2002, "Even though there was this incredible groundswell of trans artistry here in the Bay Area, no one was putting trans artists onstage."

Because the traditional venues for trans performers, drag bars and nightclubs, held a narrow view of what trans performance was, they had had no place for trans artists of a different type. "So we put together a group of artists for what we thought would be a one-time festival, working in a variety of types of performances. The community response and love of that initial festival led to its 17-year continuance and our expansion into a year-round arts organization."

Dorsey explained, "The Fresh Meat Festival shows the worth and beauty of trans artists, and shows that trans artists are worthy of being in positions of cultural authority. But that worth can't survive without a proper venue with high production values, with events open to all. This year's lineup includes bachata dancers, vogue shows, and an enormous new trans choir, the New Voices Bay Area Choir."

The full lineup includes the African-American Deaf dance trailblazer Antoine Hunter; Vogue superstars #kNOwSHADE Vogue Ensemble; sublime harmonies by the GAPA Men's Chorus; exquisite poetry and dance by J Mase III & Randy Ford; integrated/disabled dance pioneers AXIS Dance Company; queer bachata champions Jahaira Fajardo & Angelica Medina; cutting-edge performance artists Javier Stell-Fresquez & Ivy Monteiro; sidesplitting comedy-storytelling by Lottie Riot; the groundbreaking New Voices Bay Area TIGQ Chorus; trailblazing trans/queer modern dance by Sean Dorsey Dance; folk-punk by Shawna Virago; multi-disciplinary music superstar Star Amerasu; R&B songs by Tajah J; and queer retro quartet The Singing Bois.

When asked if he saw the Fresh Meat Festival as a necessary addition to traditional drag venues, Dorsey explained, "Our communities need all of these places — drag shows, trans and queer performance festivals — because artists of all kinds need the right conditions and support for our work." The Fresh Meat Festival features trans performers of all types: genderqueer, genderfluid, trans. "We are in love with and embrace the full experience and range of trans people."

The Fresh Meat Festival fits that bill. Catch it at Z Space, 450 Florida St., SF, from June 20-22.

Tickets, info, nightly lineup: www.freshmeatproductions.org