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Arts & Culture » Dance

Dreamin' is free: Sean Dorsey Dance presents new online works

by Jim Provenzano
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Sean Dorsey (Source:Annalise Ophelian)

Taking his art outdoors and on video, the always-innovative [Sean Dorsey](#) discussed his new dance works as part of the company's 2021 At-Home Season, and the new series, [The Lost Art of Dreaming](#). The company has received funding and sponsorship from numerous arts organizations, and stands out as a prominent Bay Area dance company with a trans artistic director.

Can you talk about the choreographic language you're using in your film dances and how they have changed from stage works?

The movement language you see in our dance films comes from choreographic inquiries into

questions like, 'What does it feel like to rouse, to stir up possibility and imagination from deep inside our bodies? What is the relationship between our bodies' cellular structure, and the patterns and structures we see in stars and constellations in the sky above us? How do you navigate dreaming about your future when you have never been allowed to dream about your own future?

When the pandemic hit last year, we were in the rehearsal studio four days a week, creating a new show. I kept my dancers employed and immediately shifted our rehearsals over to Zoom. Our Zoom rehearsals include lots of conversation and mutual support. We also added regular workouts, conditioning, and giving each other class to keep our bodies trained and safe during this time.

Choreographing during a pandemic forced a lot of changes in my process, obviously. But it also challenged me to find ways to support my dancers (and myself) through movement research and creation while we were so isolated and physically separated.

I'm seeing a lot of hand gestures, almost like a language. Is there a hidden language in the choreography?

One of the wonderful things about Dance is that every human experiences it differently. My job as a choreographer is to make you feel things, remember things, connect with memories, or your imagination or other people.

I absolutely love the power and intricacy of gesture to express emotions, ideas and energy. There is nothing literal in the gestures I use or create; and there is no hidden language — but there is most certainly an intent to reveal an idea, emotion or feeling.

My choreographic process is a collaboration with my brilliant dancers (Nol Simonse, Raúl Torres-Bonilla and Will Woodward). I work with dancers whose own movement voice and physicality is unique, powerful and skilled. We all create gestures, we all create the movement and partnering you see on stage (or on film). So it's a conversation, not a lecture that you're watching.



Will Woodward, Nol Simonse, Raúl Torres-Bonilla, Sean Dorsey. Photo: Annalise Ophelian

Several choreographers have used skirts or dresses on men to defy stereotypes or gender presumptions. Are you using it merely as fabric to accentuate the work, or is it a statement on gender?

Definitely the former; my choices for costuming in this project are driven by my central theme of investigating and imagining expansive futures. So I'm interested in how we can express that expansiveness and that bold imagination on stage, and through our bodies.

And in my research, I specifically became interested in how voluminous amounts of fabric (in a skirt or a gown) becomes an extension of our limbs, our spine. I'm interested in how fabric, like liquid, is constantly in flow and in flux, and it directs and pulls the audiences eye in a different way.

So much pop-culture representation of The Future is all about robots and metal and technology and war-like machines and weapons. I actually believe in a future where our softer selves, our humanity, and all beings flourish; where our relationships with the planet and with all living beings is more connected, loving and sustainable.

I started working with my brilliant longtime collaborator Costume Designer Tiffany Amundson on costume ideas about a year and a half ago, so things are getting really juicy now!

Can you tell me more a little bit about what to expect for the season dances; will they all be outdoors like the clips online, or have you been able to figure out a way to dance together in a space?

We met and danced and filmed in the most gorgeous outdoors locations, on hillsides, barren rock, wetlands and at the ocean's edge.

The absolute number one priority for all of us was safety, safety, safety. We did all rehearsals and preparation via Zoom and video — and then met outdoors with lots of pre-planning and following strict COVID protocols (I'm working with acclaimed cinematographer Annalise Ophelian, who directed the *Major!* documentary, and the Syfy series *Looking For Leia*).

I've used bits of dreams for some of my literary work, and I remember when I was making dances that I would sometimes dream movement (but too often forget the steps later). Is that a reflection on your creative process for *The Lost Art of Dreaming* project? Or is it, as I'm seeing, also outwardly directed at viewers, to encourage dreaming?

I love the feeling when I'm deep in a project, and I'll lie in bed just imagining and visualizing a moment of movement, choreographic structure, text/dialogue or lighting ideas. I'll run it over and over in my head. As artists, we fall in love with what we're creating. I mean we create the thing, but the thing also creates us, doesn't it?

I want *The Lost Art Of Dreaming* to propel us into expansive thinking and imagining about our futures. That applies to myself, my dancers, my collaborators, our audiences and the folks who will come to our Dream Labs or trans-supportive dance workshops.

You can't dream without a mirror — something or somebody telling you, Yes: dreaming is your birthright! I hope we can all be that mirror for each other in this project.

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