

## TransNation

### Crossing Boundaries with Fresh Meat

By Jacob Anderson-Minshall

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"If I respected genre boundaries, I'd look between my legs and never be trans," Ryka Aoki de la Cruz declares. "If I can say I have a penis and I'm a woman, I can sure as hell say I'm a poet and write poetry." L.A. based performance artist de la Cruz is just one of the trans performers crossing boundaries at the Sixth Fresh Meat Festival, San Francisco's annual transgender and queer performance festival ([freshmeatproductions.org](http://freshmeatproductions.org)), June 14-16.

Festival director and trans choreographer Sean Dorsey credits Fresh Meat's professionally produced presentations with giving voice to transgender experiences. "Real change happens when we're empowered...to speak positively and authentically...about [being] transgender."

This year's performers (including Dorsey, Colombian Soul, Na Lei Hulu I Ka Wekiu, Triple Threat Taiko, Freeplay Dance Crew, Miguel Chernus Goldstein and de la Cruz) will put trans and queer spins on tradition, producing original Hula dances, taiko drumming, Afro-Colombian dance, theater pieces and hip hop beats.

In addition to being a performance artist, the Japanese American Goth dyke de la Cruz ([rykaryka.com](http://rykaryka.com)) is a poet, musician, author, zine publisher, literature professor and activist. She's been featured in numerous anthologies and publications including *Beyond the Valley of Contemporary Poets*, *Lodestar Quarterly* and the forthcoming *Poetry is Not a Luxury*. She is a charter member of the Transgender Advisory Committee for Asian Pacific Islanders for Human Rights, a LGBTIQ education and advocacy organization based in L.A.

Her artistic work has been showcased in L.A. museums, numerous poetry festivals, LGBT prides and the documentary *Trans Art*; and she founded ([transgiving.org](http://transgiving.org)), L.A.'s art and performance series dedicated to trans, genderqueer, and intersex artists. "Art is the single most powerful humanizing force we have. So...we have a trans actor get up and do a Shakespearean monologue to poetry and then, after we've made the audience cry, then say, 'Now tell me I'm not human.'"

Honored for her work with *Trans/Giving*, de la Cruz recently stepped down, saying, "I never wanted to...become the grand Pooh Bah. I'm an artist, I'm not an organizer."

Now working on a solo album, de la Cruz admits she's a little nervous about going it alone. "I used to rely on a singer for my voice because I'm trans. Now I'm starting to get more confidence...singing my own words. I'm never going to be a soprano—but I can still sing higher than Amy Ray."

The Goth lesbian has found acceptance in the alternative community, she wonders if it's just because she passes so well. "I'm five foot five. I'm Asian and femme. [What] if I were just as trans, just as much a woman, but 6'5" with a huge jaw? Would I be as welcome?"

There's one part of her identity de la Cruz never hides. "You can't be stealth [about] being Asian. No amount of surgery or blue contacts lenses is going to make me look white. I mean, I walk down the streets and I am Asian. I don't come out to people about being Asian."

While de la Cruz says that Asian Americans can benefit from close-knit families and cultural groups, she recognizes that those things sometimes make things difficult for trans individuals. "If I hang out with my family and we run into other Asians, and they recognize me as the son that's now the daughter, it makes the entire family look bad. For the longest time, I didn't want to go into Little Tokyo, because I was afraid I'd see somebody I knew. But it's kind of fucked up not to be able to go and smell the smells that you grew up with."

Seeking a publisher for her novel about Hawaii, de la Cruz says, she'd love to write screenplays and scripts—involving dykes and Mexican wrestlers. "But I don't know one end of the camera from the other. So if anyone wants to collaborate with me—I'm totally open."

Catch Ryka Aoki de la Cruz and the rest of the Fresh Meat Festival at San Francisco's ODC Theater, 3153 17th Street, June 14-16. Check the website ([odctheater.org](http://odctheater.org)) for times and line ups and get your tickets early, because they sell out.

*Trans writer, Jacob Anderson-Minshall, co-authored *Blind Curves*, the first in the *Blind Eye Mystery* series, available now. Contact [jake@trans-nation.org](mailto:jake@trans-nation.org) or visit [Anderson-minshall.com](http://Anderson-minshall.com) for more information.*