Uncovered: The Diary Project

Sean Dorsey shines a spotlight on trans issues with Uncovered: The Diary Project. By Justin O'cean

There's nothing quite like the body—the instrument—of a dancer, who spends hours learning its limits and configurations in precise detail. But what happens when that dancer's external body clashes with his or her inner self?

"It's both a blessing and a huge challenge," admits Sean Dorsey, a female-to-male trans dancer and choreographer. This week, the world-renowned San Francisco dancer and choreographer, Sean Dorsey, will bring his fascinating and controversial piece, "Katie Romstein," an Australian drag king, to a town as part of Dixon Place's Hot! Festival. "Almost all modern dance is completely traditionally gendered. Yet there's something really magical about being in your body and your skin is so close, so fully, and being able to share something physically. In my work, I strive to articulate that which is most human and visceral and honest about sex.

In the case of Uncovered, the crux of Dorsey's work is to evoke the experience of being transgendered. "What has been the most difficult thing about being a woman," Dorsey says, "is to explore universal issues of difference, belonging, love, and loss. It's a mouthful, for sure, but surprisingly accessible one, as its translated onstage into a dance that challenges us all."

That accessibility makes sense considering Dorsey's background. A Vancouver native with graduate work in political science and environmental economics, the dancer has always dreamed of becoming a dancer. Today, he's a dancer who performs and creates shows that challenge our assumptions about gender identity.

"I realized that the diaries were not only a way to document but also a way to challenge the audience to think about identity in a new way," Dorsey says. "As humans, we are all trans, and we all have our own narratives of identity."

Dorsey's style has a distinctly musical quality, and his choreography is often informed by music and narrative. He believes that dance is a powerful tool for social change, and he has been active in using dance to promote gender equality. His latest work, "Uncovered: The Diary Project," is a bold exploration of gender identity and the complexities of being transgender.

"I hope that people will leave the show feeling challenged and inspired," Dorsey says. "We all have our own narratives of identity, and it's important to think about how we can use our art to challenge and inspire others to do the same."