

Dorsey's dances based on activist's diary

By: Greg Archer

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There's nowhere to hide onstage, especially when you're a dancer.

Some may argue that artists can hide behind their own performance, but those who have experienced performances created by celebrated local choreographer Sean Dorsey would find that idea ludicrous.

That's because Dorsey's work is inventive and gutsy, something evident in "Uncovered: The Diary Project," which returns to The City beginning Thursday.

Think of it as a kaleidoscope of modern dance that captures some of the emotional undercurrents found in the transgender experience that, as Dorsey points out, "history has tried to erase."

This outing features four dancers, including Dorsey, and uses texts from the real-life diaries of transgender and queer people, mostly Lou Sullivan, the trailblazing local transgender activist who had a strong dedication to community. Sullivan died from AIDS in 1991 but bequeathed 30 years of his diaries to the GLBT Historical Society.

Dorsey, who was born female and now uses the pronoun "he," sifted through hundreds of pages from the diaries and eventually choreographed a suite of dances — "Lou" — based on Sullivan's mesmerizing life work.

"It was profoundly important to me to share this story of Lou," Dorsey says. "He was pioneering, but not many young people have heard of him. I had to bring this story forward."

In addition to "Lou," there is "Lost/Found," a festive duet about living the childhood one could never have.

All of it comes to life, thanks to what Dorsey calls the "beautiful dancing bodies" of Brian Fisher, Juan De La Rosa and Nol Simonse.

"The movement is modern dance/modern dance theater," Dorsey says of the work, as a whole. "But I always add that this is not the type of modern dance that people should feel afraid of. Most people feel modern dance is extremely abstract and inaccessible. They leave modern dance concerts scratching their heads, saying: 'I don't get it.' But the movement here is very accessible and it tells a clear story."

The trick? Dorsey also makes it human. And, at the end of day, that's something everybody can relate to — no matter what gender you are.



Making it human: Choreographer Sean Dorsey says his work is more accessible than people might think when they hear the phrase "modern dance." (Courtesy photo)