Review: Sean Dorsey's Secrets

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CATEGORIES: ARTICLE TYPE, COLONY THEATER, CONTEMPORARY, FUNDRAISE, GEAR, MEDIA, PRESENTER, REVIEWS, SUN POST, VENUE

In its third year of Out in the Tropics — a performing arts series that highlights contemporary GLBTQ arts and their work in dance, theater and film — FUNDArte opened this year's series with Sean Dorsey Dance and The Secret History of Love. The performance on Saturday, May 12, at The Colony Theater, was equal parts dance concert and theatrical performance that both educated and inspired as much as it entertained by laying bare the landscape of gay love through the ages in the pre-Stonewall era of the 20th century.

Through movement and dialogue, both like and recorded, the company brings to light the personal tales of the community to older GLBTQ generation and how they found or fought for their intimate, intense, and passionate love despite discrimination and warranted fear of persecution and prosecution. At the heart of this dance production was Dorsey's "soundcore" that included recorded live interviews with gay elders and their personal true accounts of first loves; of heartbreaks and police brutality; and of the inception of the cornerstone of gay life before such ideas as gay community or gay movement came to being — the underground bars and meeting holes from the speakeasies of the 1920s, to the wartime joints after 1940; and the clandestine clubs of the 1960s. The interviews painted a picture of life in Chicago's Boytown, to New York City's Harlem and Greenwich Village, to New Orleans French Quarter, and to Boston's South End. The first recorded interview reveals that "secrets are our greatest industry." In these charming, chilling, and heart rending testimonials, a unique, fragile, yet precious love abounds. There were moments recounted of excruciating, passion, fear, and genuine humor in these personal accounts of both life-long loves, of loves long ago and the elegant to faceful trappings of the making '20s to the dapper dress of the '50s.

A running thread in both the live and recorded dialogue is Dorsey's character's search for love in a time where same sex "fraternizing" was punishable by fines, prison time, and in some cases death. The overbearing question of love was, "Where and how do I find it?" in a world of supreme secrecy.

The other three dancers/performers advertise, cajole, push, and pull the way to breeze, dancing, and the special fraternity of the night spots. At times Dorsey would speak to a recorded voice of an assumed psychoanalyst who was mentoring her patient to his ultimate goal. At other times both parts of the dialogue were recorded while Dorsey danced a physical soliloquy as counterpart. At other times she lip-synched to her own recorded voice.

These various levels of unscripted, recorded, and live voice that made the soundcore so intriguing would change the surface of the audience experience from an instant visceral moment to one that was subtle.

The company consisted of a quartet, with Dorsey and three other male dancers who moved irresistibly through broad-shouldered moments of sinewy phrases of constantly changing partners, and which incorporated lifts like punctuation after a long important sentence. The dancers moved through the historical landscape with subtle yet marked change in costume while the tenor of their movement changed from tragic to surges bursts to the intimate couplings at the dawn of the dancehouse.

As a whole this piece that Dorsey self-described as dance theatre, endeavors to gain appreciation for an irreconcilable time in the social fabric of GLBTQ persons — before the modern age we live in now of Kurt-Schiffler on Gi (and GREEE-SEEN) precedents affirming the right to gay marriage. The previous secrets of the love that once "does not speak its name" is as enduring as the political and cultural movements that came after to ensure its right to be heard.

Photo: Lynda Nantler

This article also appears in the Miami Sun Post.