Entran-sed

By Peter Lawrence Kane

Wednesday, Jun 8 2016

Once again, public restrooms have become the locus of the fight for equal rights. In retrograde states like North Carolina, the struggle over allowing transgender Americans the right to use the toilet corresponding with their gender identity has complicated the enormous gains in trans visibility made during the last several years.

Meanwhile, transgender musician Anohni has released HOPELESSNESS (her first album since 2010's Swanlights, when she was known as Antony Hegarty of Antony and the Johnsons). A politically charged work of electronic dance with lyrics that touch on ecological destruction and the drone war and melodies that Pitchfork called "the sonic equivalent of a burning Shepard Fairey painting," it's an indictment of the West's unexamined comfort and self-satisfaction.

It's against this tumultuous backdrop that the 15th Annual Fresh Meat Festival of Transgender and Queer Performance returns to Z Space on June 16. A three-day bonanza of opera, aerial dance, voguing, hula, and gender-bending a cappella, it's a part of the 2016 National Queer Arts Festival and the only event of its kind in North America, staged by the first arts organization to create, present, and tour year-round transgender arts programs.
Fresh Meat's artistic director is Sean Dorsey, whose painstakingly researched, Isadora Duncan Award-nominated dance program about survivors of HIV/AIDS, *The Missing Generation*, stopped at Z Space last month as part of a 20-city tour. If you missed it that time around, he will perform an excerpt at the festival.

"It's full-throttle and very emotional," Dorsey says. "The show is based on the oral history interviews I recorded with transgender and queer survivors of the early AIDS epidemic, and these survivors' voices are woven into the soundscore and surround the audience as we dance."

But the trailblazing quality to Fresh Meat isn't limited to the themes. It's easy to assume that the arts world is among the most welcoming for gender-nonconforming people to make a living, but mediums like opera can be highly gendered. (Rare is the female-identified basso profundo, for instance.) Breanna Sinclairé is the first transwoman to have received a master's degree from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music's opera program. She's sung the national anthem for the Oakland A's, and isn't afraid to venture deep into the canon, either. She will perform two classical selections, "the famous, sultry 'Habanera' aria from Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, and Hector Berlioz's love lullaby, 'Absence,' from his *Nights of Summersong* cycle," she tells us.

Meanwhile, "transgender trickster" Shawna Virago, the artistic director of the San Francisco Transgender Film Festival whose lyrical songs have been heard on NPR and PBS, will look to personal experience for her contribution.

"I'll be doing my folk-punk troubadour routine, playing two new songs inspired by a brief encounter I had with a real transphobic guy who tried to pick me up at Tootsie's Orchid Lounge in Nashville a couple years back," Virago says. "One second I was there listening to a Loretta Lynn cover band, and the next, after a few choice words, the floor was wet with spilled booze and the hurled insults between me and him. I lived to tell the tale, and am grateful to the Fresh Meat Festival that I can sing about it, too."

Jahaira Fajardo and Angelica Medinas bring a syncopated Caribbean dance that many Americans are unfamiliar with (and which was, at times, suppressed in its own homeland).

"Bachata is a genre of music that originated in the countryside and rural neighborhoods of the Dominican Republic," Medina says. "During its early history, bachata music was denigrated by upper-class Dominican society and associated with rural backwardness and poverty. The piece we are performing at the Fresh Meat Festival choreography won first place at the World Latin Dance Cup's Ladies' Latin Dance Division. Jahaira is the first female bachata leader to win this award. This exemplifies the beautiful love that we two have for one another, for bachata music, and for the Dominican Republic."

From the middle of a different ocean, N Lei Hulu I Ka Wkiu combines traditional Hawaiian hula with pop, electronica, and opera — and there's a bit of a history lesson.

"Our piece honors Hawaii's longest ruling monarch, Kauikeaouli (also known as Kamehameha III)," says N Lei Hulu I Ka Wkiu's artistic director Patrick Makuakane.

"During his reign, Hawaii became one of the most literate nations of the world and was recognized as a sovereign and independent kingdom by the United States and many other countries around the globe," he adds. "The piece we are performing celebrates an intimate relationship the king shared with a close 'gentlemen friend' named Kaomi. The
king at one time even declared him a co-ruler. Literacy and Hawaiian sovereignty were key components of Kauikeaouli’s rule — a king dearly loved by his people.”

With all this and a dozen other acts from AXIS Dance Company to India Davis of the Topsy Turvy Queer Circus to voguing superstars Jocquese Whitfield and Saturn Rising, it’s the largest Fresh Meat to date. And while the lineup varies slightly night-to-night, there will be a post-show reception every evening with DJ Miz Rowdy, a photo booth, drinks, and dancing.

Trans and gender-nonconforming San Franciscans still face the same stigma and threats of violence that their brethren in other regions of the country have to deal with, but in a city that decks out its main street with Pride flags all month long, we instinctively pat ourselves on the back for our enlightened ways. At a time when the struggle for trans rights has never been so front-and-center — nor the backlash so visceral — the Fresh Meat Festival complicates the narrative by highlighting the full breadth of art by gender non-conforming performers.

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About The Author

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Peter Lawrence Kane is SF Weekly's Arts Editor. He has lived in San Francisco since 2008 and is two-thirds the way toward his goal of visiting all 59 national parks.

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**Breanna Sinclaire is NOT "male-identified," she is a transwoman. Hard to believe someone in San Francisco would make such a glaring (and hurtful) error. I hope you correct it ASAP.**

*Posted by Brooke Shelby Biggs on 06/11/2016 at 12:57 PM*

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