



Issue: Vol. 45 / No. 23 / 4 June 2015

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Dance show looks at AIDS

NEWS

by Khaled Sayed

Published 05/07/2015



Dance choreographer Sean Dorsey. Photo: Khaled Sayed

Sean Dorsey Dance is celebrating its 10th anniversary home season with *The Missing Generation*, a new program that will premier in San Francisco next week.

Dorsey, who runs the eponymous named dance company, is a transgender man who's an acclaimed contemporary dance choreographer. He has won accolades from San Francisco to New York with his powerful dance-theater.

The Missing Generation features the voices of many AIDS survivors and was edited from 25 people who told their stories to accompany the dance.

"These are oral interviews that I conducted with longtime survivors of the AIDS epidemic," Dorsey said. "For two years I researched and then I did six residencies in cities around the U.S. in which I recorded oral histories of AIDS survivors from the late 1980s to early 1990s."

"These are people who lost a lover, a partner, a friend, a child, a parent," Dorsey said. "These were early activists and members of ACT UP, early hospice workers, nurses, and people who were diagnosed 30 or 40 years ago and are still with us today."

The work explores the loss of part of an entire generation of gay and transgender people to AIDS. It features full-throttle dance, luscious partnering, intimate storytelling, and theater.

Dorsey said that he started to notice a theme emerge from the interviews.

"I asked people specific questions that I had in mind, but a particular theme that people started talking about emerged, like a common experience, even across communities," he said. "I really ingested these stories. It was a very intense process to sit across the table from someone who is a longtime survivor whose experience, for me and people like me and younger than me, seems like an unthinkable horror."

Based on these interviews, some of which were four hours long, Dorsey worked with a team of composers to develop the sound score.

"What the audience hears is original music and the real voices of the people I interviewed and their remarkable real-life stories," he said.

"Part of why this project is important to me is that people my age and younger don't know what the early days of the epidemic were like. It's no fault of our own," Dorsey, 42, added. "We just were not taught that history in school, and it is often lost or not documented for younger people, who have no idea about that part of LGBT history."

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Dorsey believes that American culture has turned its back on the survivors of the early part of the epidemic.

"It was so much death, it was so much grief and such loss to the point of exhaustion," he said. "I think that part of the story has really been put away."

With *The Missing Generation*, Dorsey would like to remind people how the LGBT community founded creative care teams and support agencies.

"Lesbian and gay men started working together for the first time," Dorsey said. "But I think we talk less about the unresolved grief and loss that the LGBT community experienced during that period."

The Missing Generation is supported by several organizations, including the National Endowment for the Arts, National Dance

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Project, and the San Francisco Arts Commission.

The 10th anniversary home season will be performed by Dorsey, Brian Fisher, ArVejon Jones and Nol Simonse, with original music by Alex Kelly, Ben Kessler, Jesse Olson Bay, and Storm Miguel Florez.

After its San Francisco premiere the show will tour 20 cities around the U.S.

The Missing Generation takes place at Dance Mission Theater, 3316 24th Street (at Mission). Show times are May 14-15, 8 p.m.; May 16, 4 and 8 p.m.; and May 17, 4 and 7 p.m.

Tickets are \$15-\$25 sliding scale, and available at <http://www.brownpapertickets.com>. Post-show receptions will be held every night.

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