

Sean Dorsey's *The Missing Generation* gives voice to those lost to AIDS



By Monday Magazine

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Two men embrace on a dark stage. The mournful song of a cello breaks the silence. A voice speaks: "At a certain point, you're changed. ... Just like people who go through war. You're changed."

A powerful dance piece, **The Missing Generation**, gives voice to thousands who died during the early onslaught of AIDS, exposing the immense grief and trauma of the time. The work uses parts of some 75 hours of interviews choreographer Sean Dorsey recorded over a two-year period.

Dorsey says **The Missing Generation** turns an eye to a painful time in history of which, even the younger LGBT community has little understanding.

"We're not taught about this really important Canadian and US history which is that transgender women were profoundly and disproportionately affected by HIV and AIDS and everyone turned their backs on trans communities. ... If a trans woman went to a gay AIDS organization, she may very well (have been) turned away, mocked, ridiculed. There was this extra layer of discrimination that trans women experienced.

"I think our culture's turned its back on that painful time in history and also turned its back on this generation of people who experienced it. For me, the project became attuning ourselves and attending to this forgotten generation of survivors and exploring the ways that we need to show up for these people.

"Holding them in the grief and sadness, also listening and learning about the incredible power of people's response and activism and incredible heroic, deeply human, love and care-taking and community building that happened."

Dorsey has made a name as a queer activist and artist, but at his core is a person with a passion for storytelling.

"Early on, I started making work as a student in dance school and getting so that I could bring my trans and queer self and experience into this work in order to finally bring some trans and queer experiences and bodies to the stage," he says.

His choreography often begins with conversations. He is moved and inspired by people in the LGBT community.

"I'm very proud of being trans and that's very much a part of my identity and the work I do in the world as an activist and an artist," he says.

It was in the research phase of another project that he realized an entire generation of the community was gone.

"There is a whole swath of an entire generation who I couldn't meet with and interview, or talk to about our community's experiences in decades past, because we had lost so much of an entire generation of transgender and gay and bisexual people to HIV and AIDS in the early epidemic. That was kind of the real spark for the project."

The Missing Generation is Dorsey's love letter to that forgotten generation of survivors and people who witnessed and experienced the early AIDS epidemic first hand.

"It's been a totally life-changing project from the very beginning," says Dorsey. "We feel good about it and proud that we embodied and expressed people's stories and histories with integrity and compassion. ... The response has really been just extraordinary astronomical."

Dorsey was born and raised in Vancouver. He moved to San Francisco 15 years ago and founded Fresh Meat Productions, which builds community through transgender arts programs. Sean Dorsey Dance, which celebrates its 10th season this year, is its resident dance company. The company is bringing **The Missing Generation** to UVic's Farquhar Auditorium July 8 as part of Victoria Pride Week.

"This is our first international tour with **The Missing Generation**. It's my first time bringing my whole company to my homeland and I'm really excited to be at such a beautiful venue," he says.

Sean Dorsey is offering two free workshops July 9 for Transgender and LGBTQ individuals, groups, non-profits and services agencies. uvic.ca

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