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## DAILY QMMUNITY

### Sean Dorsey Dance Unpacks Masculinity Onstage

Trailblazing choreographer's latest dance theatre piece hits Austin

BY [MAC IRVINE](#), 11:08AM, THU. SEP. 26, 2019



*A scene from Sean Dorsey's Boys in Trouble (Photo by Kegan Marling)*

The question that animates dancer and choreographer [Sean Dorsey's](#) newest work [Boys in Trouble](#) is simple: What is the current state of masculinity? The answer, however, is less straightforward.

In the feature-length dance – making its Lone Star debut at Texas Performing Arts' McCullough Theatre on Friday, Sept. 27 – Dorsey and his dance company tackle this unwieldy query by offering

a variety of vignettes that speak to the diversity of masculinities across gender, race, and sexual orientation.

Presenting a range of trans and queer experiences has been a throughline in Dorsey's work, in part due to the lack of representation in dance that reflects his identity as a transgender man. A relative latecomer to the artform, Dorsey only began training professionally in his mid-20s. "As a young person, I didn't have any understanding that dance could be a vehicle for social change," Dorsey notes. "I certainly knew and had felt how transformative dance could be both to do and to witness, but in my life I had never seen any dance performed that was charged with political or emotional themes, especially that related in any way to me as a trans or queer person. So for many years I experienced dance and social justice as very different and disparate things."

Today the San Francisco native bridges the gap between dance and social justice through community work that serves as both a source of inspiration for his art and a vehicle for social change in and of itself. "The practice of being in and with and among my community ... engaging my community through workshops and forums is my life's work and passion," Dorsey explains. "That process is part of but also parallel to the creation of the production itself."

Aesthetically, Dorsey finds power in queerness and works to center it in his dance. "Maybe you're a cisgender man who is queer identifying and you have a natural flair and a femme edge that you've learned to tone down in public or dance spaces. In our workshops and productions, we try to embrace that and celebrate that," Dorsey says. "I celebrate the artistry and queer aesthetics and trans aesthetics and name those. I consider it a gift to be trans."



*Dancer and choreographer Sean Dorsey (Photo by Lydia Daniller)*

*Boys in Trouble* was developed over the past several years, during which Dorsey (along with his trusted collaborators) used conversations and stories that arose in community forums, rehearsals, and self-reflection to create the score, choreography, costuming, staging, and lighting. Over the course of two years, Dorsey led community conversations on the "intersectional experiences of identity and gender expression" as it relates to masculinity, gender, and race – a straying, if you will, from his previous works that focused largely on researching queer and trans histories. "This

obviously wasn't about archival research, and though I was working in community I wasn't doing oral history interviews." Instead, he taught "trans-supportive" dance workshops, including some that catered to "anyone who lives or identifies or dips their toes anywhere on the masculine spectrum whether trans, cisgender, queer, straight, allied, where we made spaces for talking about and exploring masculinity."

The experiences of Dorsey's dancers also feature prominently in the production. For example, numbers featuring ArVejon Jones and Nol Simonse include narration by the dancers that speak to their respective racialized and gendered experiences of masculinity. Yet Dorsey says he considers *Boys in Trouble* simultaneously hyper-specific and universal.

"It's very personal," says Dorsey. "I think because, as performers, we're all so willing to go deep and vulnerable, that's why it's so deeply touching audiences of all experiences, whether queer, straight, trans, cisgender, totally mainstream straight churchgoing dance fans, or young goth trans teens who would never normally go see dance in their life."

Dorsey finds this universality incredibly important today. "It's such an urgent time and this work really carries an urgency and timeliness with it. I feel really excited to be in Texas and in Austin at this moment in America with this work."

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Sean Dorsey Dance will perform *Boys in Trouble* Fri., Sept. 27, 7:30pm, at McCullough Theatre, 2375 Robert Dedman, UT campus. \$40, but discounts are available to UT students, faculty, and staff, as well as military, seniors, and subscribers. **[Tickets are available online.](#)**