

'The Secret History of Love': LGBT story in motion

Nirmala Nataraj

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Lydia Daniller

Sean Dorsey choreographs the enduring language of the heart in "The Secret History of Love."

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Award-winning choreographer Sean Dorsey creates visual poems hinging on universal narratives of love, heartbreak and the desire for community. His dances seamlessly stitch together past and present, hope and history, personal intimacy and social context. His newest production, "The Secret History of Love," is an epic work that chronicles the ways LGBT people have built relationships throughout history, under circumstances when it was required that they remain inconspicuous. The result is a rollicking, stirring treatise on the enduring language of the heart.

Dorsey notes that the two-year journey to create "The Secret History of Love" has been life-changing, and not just because of the huge national scope of the project.

"Working intimately with the life stories of LGBT elders - people who by their courage

and bold acts of love in decades past made my life today possible - has been humbling, moving, profoundly inspiring."

LGBT lives are so often deleted from the annals of mainstream history, and even family albums, so Dorsey's work has been largely invested in preserving this history and celebrating its legacy. "There is an urgency to this work. ... People will see in this show that these stories are so incredibly alive and relevant, and I hope they will be inspired to seek out more stories."

Dorsey's archival research is incorporated into the show, featuring everything from language on a handbill for an "illegal" queer speakeasy to nicknames and terms of endearment from more than 300 LGBT love letters dating to the 1600s. He also conducted recorded interviews with LGBT elders, which form the heart of the show; this tapestry of oral histories has resulted in "a wonderful arc through the decades," he says.

Because Dorsey's choreography is never divested of story and context, the show features an evocative nexus of text, audiovisuals and dance.

The collaborative team, which has been working and reworking all elements of the score and dance over the past two years, includes Dorsey alongside dancers Brian Fisher, Nol Simonse and Juan De La Rosa; composers Alex Kelly, Jesse Olsen Bay, Ben Kessler, StormMiguel Florez and Jeff Mooney; and Dorsey's long-time sound engineer, Laura Dean.

After the premiere of the piece, it will go on a national tour, with stops in Boston, Chicago, Santa Monica, Philadelphia and Miami. Dorsey says an important component of touring is working with local LGBT communities in each of the cities to offer dance workshops and panels, and to incite enthusiasm about art making as a fundamental tool for preserving LGBT history.

More than anything, the show is a testament to the victorious nature of love and passion in the face of danger and repression.

"This show is about human connection and the phenomenal power of love," he says. "Despite all the repression and violence, there is so much humor and sauciness and sexiness in all of this. That's how we survived!"

8 p.m. Thurs.-Sun., 4 p.m. Sat.-Sun. \$10-\$25. Dance Mission Theater, 3316 24th St., S.F. www.seandorseydance.com.

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