

The Secret History of Love Captures Voices of Local LGBT Elders

BY BAY WINDOWS STAFF | MAY 17, 2012



Photo: LydiaDaniller

Having served as the legislative assistant to Congressman Barney Frank and the first openly transgender staffer on Capitol Hill, South End resident Diego Sanchez has a lot of stories. Sanchez's stories, along with locals Marilyn Monteiro, Laura Godtfredsen, and Frank Lapiana, are captured in *The Secret History of Love*, a new dance-theater production by award-winning transgender choreographer Sean Dorsey Dance.

"We are rapidly losing our community's stories," said Dorsey, explaining the urgency of *Secret History*. "In the 1980s, we lost part of an entire generation of queer and trans people to AIDS. Every year we lose more and more of our community's elders as they pass on. I am passionate about capturing these stories – of trailblazing entertainers, bold

transpeople and drag queens who fought the police, people who fell in love or raised families – before they are lost forever."

The Secret History of Love reveals love affairs, the history of outlawing love, and the underground ways that transgender and queer people found each other through the decades. Dorsey takes the stage in this trailblazing dance theater piece, which features a troupe of four dancers as well as transgender superstar musician Shawna Virago. Dorsey is the founder and Artistic Director of Fresh Meat Productions, the nation's first transgender arts nonprofit creating, presenting and touring year-round transgender arts programs. Dorsey says being a transgender dancer is "both a blessing and a huge challenge. Almost all modern dance is completely, traditionally gendered. Yet there's something really magical about being in your body and your skin in an honest, full way and being able to share something physically. In my work, I strive to articulate that which is most human and visceral and honest about us."

The Secret History of Love's San Francisco debut in April was met with high praise by reviewers and audiences alike, to no one's surprise. In 2011, *SF Weekly* named Fresh Meat Productions "San Francisco's Best Dance/Performance Company," and the *Bay Area Reporter* called Dorsey "the most imaginative and intriguing dance artist in the Bay Area." Dorsey's work breaks boundaries for the transgender community through powerful dance theater depicting transgender and queer experiences.

The Theater Offensive is the lead co-commissioner of *The Secret History of Love* along with the National Performance Network and partners in Chicago and California. The Theater Offensive co-facilitated creative development for *Secret History* by organizing the Boston-area interviews for Dorsey's LGBT Elders Oral History Project.

"It's so cool that he came here to work with folks in our neighborhoods," said Executive Artistic Director Abe Rybeck, who co-founded The Theater Offensive in 1988. "Sean Dorsey tunes his artistry perfectly to the beating heart of our community's love stories as he translates them into movement."

The Secret History of Love's local element featuring LGBT seniors' love stories fits in well with The Theater Offensive's (TTO) OUT in Your Neighborhood programming. OUT in Your Neighborhood engages local community members in creating art that gives voice to the diversity of LGBT experience where we live, work and play. TTO's year-round community-based workshops, intensive engagement with at-risk youth to end bullying, and free street theater performances are focused in Roxbury, Dorchester, Jamaica Plain and the South End. In Spring 2011,

As an intersectional element of OUT in Your Neighborhood, The Theater Offensive will honor community organizer Gunner Scott with the Out on the Edge award on the opening night of *The Secret History of Love*. The Out on the Edge Award honors community members who break boundaries for LGBT advocacy, arts and activism, a field in which Scott has gone above & beyond the call of duty.

As Executive Director of the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition, Scott led the battle for passage of the Massachusetts Transgender Equal Rights Bill in November. The Transgender Equal Rights Bill, also known as An Act Relative to Gender Identity, makes it illegal to discriminate on the basis of gender identity in the areas of employment, housing, public education and credit & lending. While the transgender community has a long way to go before they have truly equal rights, Scott says the Trans Equality Bill was a step in the right direction.

"I am proud of the work I have done with MTPC along with GLBT and allied activists from around the state to pass the 2011 Transgender Equal Rights law. Even though it did not include everything that is needed to fully protect transgender youth, adults, and our families it will make a difference in the daily lives of thousands of people across the state who need jobs, a safe place to live and access to education," said Scott. "I am working with members of MTPC in making sure the new law is implemented and MTPC is committed to getting public accommodations protections for our community."

Rybeck sang high praises of Scott, emphasizing his influence in and beyond the transgender community. "Gunner Scott is my hero! His deft political organizing around transgender issues challenges us to step up and come together for our community members who face horrifying bigotry. His incredibly hard-fought victories make us proud to be part of a movement for transgender civil rights. Gunner is also an accomplished artist and impresario, who has influenced an entire generation of trans and queer activists to pick up their cameras, strum their guitars, or rock their poetic hearts out or lip sync for their lives!"

The Secret History of Love's east coast premiere hits Boston May 17-19th at Hibernian Hall in Roxbury. Tickets are available online: <http://bit.ly/SHLove>. The Theater Offensive's Out on the Edge award will be presented to Gunner Scott on opening night May 17th, to be followed by a post-show celebratory reception.