



The voices of the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts community.

# “Every Week There Was Another Funeral. I Stopped Counting After 100”

By Kiera Hufford, contributor

A review of Sean Dorsey’s *The Missing Generation: Voices from the Early AIDS Epidemic*, performed on Friday, October 20, on the MainStage.



I have no words (in the most powerful, speechless kind of way). I didn’t even take any notes, which is crazy for a reviewer to admit, I know. But it’s not that I was unprepared—I had a pen, my notebook was open, and I was ready to start jotting down thoughts and

observations. The thing is: as soon as the lights shut off and the soundscore started, I didn't *want* to.

Something in me said, "Ignore everything you learned about being a reviewer. Shut the notebook and just listen, watch." *The Missing Generation* wasn't, by any means, a performance where I should have been multitasking. The hours that Sean Dorsey put into this project and the devotion the dancers Brian Fisher, Arvejon Jones, and Nol Simonse had to help make it come alive was so captivating. It didn't deserve anything less than my undivided attention.

I had this idea of layering quotes from the survivors' stories featured in Dorsey's soundscore into this review, and although it would have been powerful, it wouldn't do the show justice. There's a great deal of vulnerability that went into this production. Watching the four of them dance near and far, together and apart, their movements followed the momentum and emotion of every story Dorsey featured.

My heart hurt at the beginning and felt all the pain of a generation by the end. I could feel the energy and emotion on stage from the middle of the theater.

And the stories stuck. Regardless of whether I wrote quotes down or not, I remember them: The 92-pound man who asked to be carried to the roof of the hospital and thrown off. The "long party" that was an everyday-risk of being outed, fired, or hurt. The survivors who cried in their interviews, recounting the loss and pain, saying how the way things are now makes it worthwhile. How the journey was anything but easy.

Then the spotlight fell on one of the dancers, and he told pieces of his own journey during what Dorsey dubbed "The Great Rainbow Migration." The mood of the audience shifted, becoming even more solemn. One of the dancers in front of us lived through the time when gay and trans communities were coming together in cities like San Francisco, many leaving their previous lives behind.

When the epidemic began, though, it was impossible to look away from everyone who was sick, dying—the exact opposite of how it is now. A survivor talked about how you could tell when you saw someone on the street, and they looked like they weighed 110 (or even 90) pounds. People were going to bed fine and waking up with blue spots on their bodies. Some got sick at the beginning of the weekend and had died by the end.

The best way I could think to capture all those emotions and stories was in the title—itsself a quote from one of the survivors—from a man whose friends were dying week after week.

Dorsey's production was intense, emotional, and easily the most powerful thing I've ever seen. The narrative in his soundscore acknowledges our "inexhaustible capacity to look away" and forces us to do just the opposite. It invites us into the past, the pain, and the fear that we've so long ignored. It was a portion of America's history I'd never heard of or knew about before, and I commend Dorsey for bringing it into the light in a way that makes everyone understand the pain and hurt of an entire generation that our country has turned a blind-eye to.