

Emerging, returning talent to headline Fresh Meat fest

NEWS

by Khaled Sayed

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Trans opera singer Breanna Sinclair. Photo: Khaled Sayed

Groundbreaking performances by a transgender opera singer, gay ballroom champions, and a gender-bending boy band are all on tap for this year's Fresh Meat Festival.

The festival, taking place Thursday, June 18 through Saturday, June 20, features a lineup of some of the nation's history-making, trailblazing transgender and queer artists, said choreographer Sean Dorsey, a trans man who curates and produces the event, now in its 14th year.

"This year, we're presenting world-class artists who are trailblazers, pioneers, and on the cutting edge of American performance," Dorsey said in a news release.

One of those artists is Breanna Sinclair, who is the first transgender woman to receive a master's degree in the opera program from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

Sinclair, 25, with a mezzo soprano voice, was a headliner at last year's Trans March.

A native of Baltimore and a graduate of the esteemed Baltimore School for the Arts, Sinclair earned her bachelor's of fine arts degree at the Herb Alpert School of Music at California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California, under the tutelage of Maria Fortuna Dean and former Cirque du Soleil star Kate Conklin. At the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, she studied under Ruby Pleasure.

Two years ago Sinclair moved to San Francisco after receiving a scholarship to the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Living far away from her family, she tries to keep in contact.

"I am still in touch with my family, but for them it's still a process. I have not spoken to my father in six years. My mother and I are working on our mother-daughter relationship. I got my SRS two months ago and she is finally pulling through," Sinclair said, referring to sexual reassignment surgery.

Sinclair has performed in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, Rameau's *Platée*, Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, and Bernstein's *West Side Story*. She has also been part of some special projects in Los Angeles, at the Roy and Edna Disney CalArts Theatre (Meredith Monk's *Songs of Ascension*) and at the Museum of Contemporary Art (Zachary Sharrin's *Time Bodies*).

She was most recently seen performing as Carmen in "Melons! Coupons!" from *Carmen*.

Among many people who inspire her is Jessye Norman, the native Georgian opera singer who gained fame for her roles in *Aida* and *Les*

Troyen and became one of the most popular opera singers in the world.

"Jessye Norman has the most incredible, unique sound," Sinclair said. "Her musicianship is on point and she is articulate and educated."

Sinclair said that she's looking forward to her upcoming performances.

"I am so honored to be one of the chosen performers for Fresh Meat Productions," she said. "Each performer has a story to tell and it is important to get these stories out. Sean Dorsey has a vision for trans and queer performers, and this show demonstrates

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his passion."

The young opera singer has a lot of hopes and dreams for her career.

"I want to sing in opera houses, concerts, travel the world," Sinclair said. "But I do want to develop my own scholarship fund for trans musicians. Music is my truth and I want to be an advocate for my community."

In recent weeks the Caitlyn Jenner story has been all over the mainstream media. Jenner, who was already well-known as an Olympic athlete and reality TV show star, has drawn much attention for her gender transition at age 65.

"This is what the world needs," Sinclair said. "There are many trans individuals who have stories that need to be heard. The more visibility the better the world will see who we are as a community. The world is slowly changing. I'm not going to say she's the face of the movement, but now her visibility makes her part of the movement. Hopefully her reality show – there will be a positive outcome to this."

Other highlights of the festival include Robbie Tristan and Ernesto Palma, one of the world's most successful same-sex ballroom dance duos; The Singing Bois, which is described as part boy-band, part Rat Pack; transgender comedian Natasha Muse; Dorsey's partner, Shawna Virago, a trans woman who is a musician celebrated for her striking lyric-based songs; Sean Dorsey Dance; and Colombian Soul, a Colombian folkloric dance company founded by artistic director Adriana Sanchez.

The Fresh Meat Festival takes place at Z Space, 450 Florida Street (between 17th Street and Mariposa) in San Francisco. All shows start at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$15-\$25, sliding scale, and can be purchased at www.zspace.org.

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