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The Missing Generation: Voices from the Early AIDS Epidemic Expressed in Dance



Marking the 35th Anniversary of the advent of AIDS, Sean Dorsey Dance's new show *The Missing Generation* explores the impact of the loss of part of an entire generation of gay and transgender people to AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s. This powerful work by award-winning transgender choreographer Sean Dorsey

premieres May 14–17 at Dance Mission Theater, during the company's tenth anniversary season.

The Missing Generation invites us to reckon with our long-buried grief and lost loves, and to connect to the enormous power of our community's compassion, righteous anger and resiliency.

We recently spoke with Dorsey about the world premiere, forgotten survivors and trans history.

San Francisco Bay Times: What inspired you to create this work?

Sean Dorsey: There was an incredible urgency to undertake this project now: during my lifetime, we will see the passing of the last generation of people who actually experienced the early years of the AIDS epidemic first-hand. We are already rapidly losing our community's stories. I wanted to capture and share part of this important history and keep it alive.

San Francisco Bay Times: You talk about the missing generation as "giving voice to those who lived through the early epidemic." Why is this important to you?

Sean Dorsey: I think of the show as a love letter to a forgotten generation of survivors—those who witnessed and experienced the loss of part of an entire generation of gay and transgender people to AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s.

I think our culture has turned its back not only on the history (those terrifying early years of the epidemic), but also on an entire generation of survivors. People who lived through those years had to pack a lot of it away just to continue functioning, but then our culture turned its back on all those survivors.

Some of the people I interviewed for this project said that our conversation was the most anybody—in 20 or 30 years—had let them speak about their experiences of the early AIDS crisis. We're talking about a lot of people who have been ignored for a really long time.

This project is an invitation to long-term survivors: tell us your story. Tell us about your losses, your grief, your rage, your loves. And it's an invitation to all of us to show up and hold each other.

San Francisco Bay Times: What can people expect to see when they come to *The Missing Generation*?

Sean Dorsey: It's a powerful show. It's intense physically and emotionally. This is full-throttle dance, luscious queer partnering, intimate story-telling—



and through all of it, we're dancing to the real-life recorded voices of longtime survivors of the early AIDS epidemic.

San Francisco Bay Times: Is this why you refer to your work as dance-theater?

Sean Dorsey: Yes. I'm working with world-class, award-winning dancers, so the technique and beauty of the dancing are extraordinary. But this is not abstract,

inaccessible modern dance! This is deeply human, deeply felt and very accessible, emotionally resonant work. The whole show is rooted in story and in real human characters, and explores themes of longing, love, loss and grief. Things we can all relate to.

San Francisco Bay Times: You spent over two years creating this show. What was your process?

Sean Dorsey: First, I travelled to six cities across the U.S. where I met with communities and recorded oral history interviews with people who lived through the early epidemic. I recorded 25 long interviews, and talked to people who were diagnosed with HIV 30 years ago; people who lost lovers and friends; early ACT UP activists; early health care workers and family members. I then had to transcribe and spend hundreds of hours sitting with all those interviews in order to start building the soundscore in sections. Then I worked with a team of composers to develop music for the score. And then I spent a year choreographing with my dancers in the studio. The soundscore itself took over 300 hours! The audience hears people's actual real-life stories in their own voices, as recorded in our interviews.

San Francisco Bay Times: Share more concerning your passion about bringing attention to transgender histories of AIDS.

Sean Dorsey: If culturally we've turned our back on this history and its survivors, then we've completely abandoned transgender people—especially transwomen. Transwomen's communities were decimated by the early AIDS epidemic, but there were no resources, nonprofits, agencies or lobbyists of any kind serving transpeople. Transwomen were dying painful deaths, completely unseen by politicians, media, and the rest of the LGB community. As a transperson, it was very important for me to bring trans stories into this work.

San Francisco Bay Times: What do you hope people take away from the show?

Sean Dorsey: The show is full of pain and loss, but also full of beauty and deep love, bravery and connection. We need to look at all of these things in order to heal and in order to continue fighting for our communities' well being. I want people to leave the theater with full hearts and with hope in the power of love.

San Francisco Bay Times: What's next for you and the project?

Sean Dorsey: We will be touring the show to 20 cities over the next couple of years. On tour, we not only perform, but also teach free classes and workshops and host conversations in communities. People can visit our website to see where we're touring next and to bring us to your city!

The Missing Generation by Sean Dorsey Dance will be at Dance Mission Theater, 3316 24th Street in San Francisco from May 14–17. For a video preview, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PyuvAfjsNXA>

For tickets and additional information, please visit www.seandorseydance.com