

# Dancing from the outside in

Sean Dorsey's 'Outside Chronicles' premieres at ODC Theater

by Joe Landini

**T**ransgender choreographer Sean Dorsey is all about breaking the rules. At only 33, he is a favorite Bay Area dance-

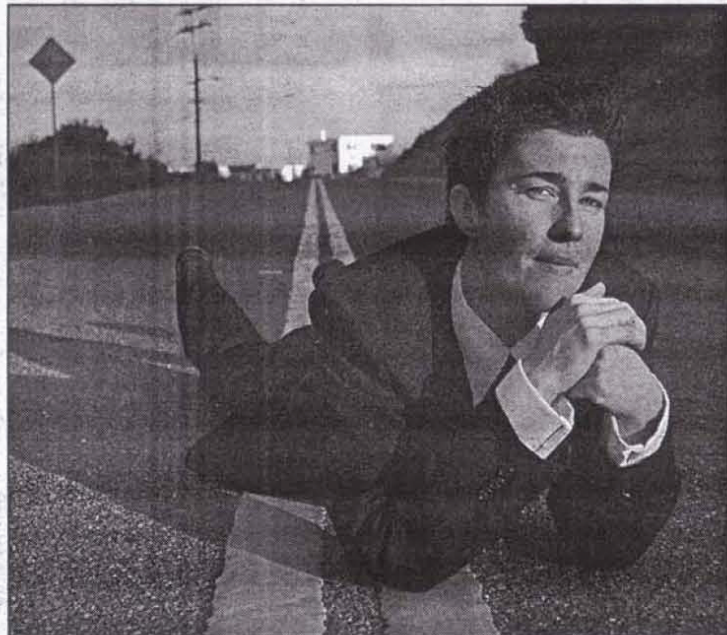
maker and has been equally embraced by both critics and audiences. Canadian-born Dorsey established the popular *Fresh Meat* transgender performance festival presented during the annual Queer Arts Festival. On November 18 & 19, Dorsey will present his first evening-length work, *The Outsider Chronicles*, at ODC Theatre. The work fuses dance, theater, storytelling and music to explore aspects of coming out and living as transgender.

**Joe Landini:** In what ways do you think being a San Francisco-based choreographer has influenced your work?

**Sean Dorsey:** Making work in San Francisco has given me a lot of freedom to develop my own style and voice, to make work that speaks directly to the queer and trans experience. SF is home to the world's largest transgender community, is an incredibly prolific and supportive place to make dance, and is teeming with experimental and non-traditional work. I don't do traditional modern dance, with dancers in flowing gossamer dresses doing abstract movement. I'm not interested in the purely abstract, I'm interested in the visceral, stuff that will really move people.

**From your perspective as a transgendered artist, do you think men and women approach art-making in different ways?**

Well, I don't fully believe in those discrete, binary categories to



Choreographer Sean Dorsey: 'I'm interested in the visceral.'

begin with. But I do think that being transgender influences the kind of work I make. The point of all of my dances is to convey meaning and to create a shift in the audience. I want to interrupt, inspire, challenge, move people.

*The Outsider Chronicles* looks at foiled first love, lovers' spats, coming out (or not) to family, road trips, violence, "til death do us part," and the joys of therapy, all through a transgender lens. But the concert doesn't only speak to transgender people. My dances use the specific experience of being trans to look at the universal

questions we all face, the human condition.

**Do you feel a part of the San Francisco tradition of text-driven modern choreography?**

I think text-based dances run the risk of being cheesy, taking themselves too seriously. My work isn't like that—it's playful. I do use text in all my work, it's an integral part of my dances because language is an integral part of the human experience.

Modern dance has a reputation of being cryptic and inaccessible. My goal is to make dances that

people can actually understand and relate to. This is why I use storytelling in my work. People can instantly grasp narrative and character in a way they can't always with abstract movement. We can all relate to the outsider character, we have all felt that way at some point in our lives.

**Fresh Meat Productions was created shortly after the Lesbian & Gay Dance Festival stopped. How did it come about?**

In 2001, Krissy Keefer gave me my first Bay Area gig at the Lesbian and Gay Dance Festival. The LGDF was an all-queer dance festival, how incredible was that? In 2002, the Festival was cancelled. Lots of us were grieving this, and I was simultaneously witnessing the growth of transgender arts in the Bay Area. I saw that SF had the potential to become the world's first transgender arts community. Trans artists were making amazing work, but there was no organization dedicated exclusively to producing it. I felt called into action to create something new. I created Fresh Meat Productions, the nation's first arts organization dedicated to year-round transgender dance, performance, visual art and media arts.▼

***The Outsider Chronicles* runs Fri. & Sat., Nov. 18 & 19, 8 p.m. at ODC Theater, 3153 17th St. Tickets (\$15) at (415) 863-9834, [www.odctheater.org](http://www.odctheater.org). Info: [www.freshmeatproductions.org](http://www.freshmeatproductions.org).**