

Sean Dorsey's 'Missing Generation' a powerful look at AIDS

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IMAGE 1 OF 3

Brian Fisher (left), ArVejon Jones, Nol Simonse and Sean Dorsey in "The Missing Generation."

The image you retain most vividly from Sean Dorsey's new work, "The Missing Generation," is that of the four performers huddled in a circle under a harsh spotlight. That tableau undergoes many variations in the course of the 65-minute piece, given its premiere by Sean Dorsey Dance on Thursday evening at [Dance Mission Theater](#) before a packed house. But the message — the gay community must sustain its solidarity and compassion to survive

— is clear.

Dorsey, a transgender artist, planned this 10th anniversary project as a memoir of the harrowing toll taken by the AIDS epidemic, the significance of which means little to the Millennial crowd. To that end, Dorsey spent two years preparing “The Missing Generation” by interviewing witnesses and survivors of the plague years. The result was 75 hours of oral material, which Dorsey then wove into scores by four composers.

But as the work unrolls, AIDS sometimes seems a metaphor for dealing with any inexorably destructive force. At moments, “The Missing Generation” seems like a primer for living well; at other times, it seems a prescription for just living.

Dorsey has collaborated with Nol Simonse, **Brian Fisher** and recent arrival **ArVejon Jones**, three of the finest male dancers around. The remarkable ensemble values, both in minute gestures and sweeping unisons, are cause for rejoicing.

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Divided into 16 sections, which flow smoothly, “The Missing Generation” abounds in sculptural detail. Arms sweep, pliés proliferate; AIDS victims are elevated, like Simonse in the first sections, and Dorsey suggests affection by one dancer running his finger down the backbone of another. Often, the dancers ward off evil with a phalanx of defiant, jutting elbows.

And, as the recorded voices recall their anguish, the dancers line up, face each other solemnly, and the score by **Alex Kelly** yields an appropriately mournful quality, suggestive of a wheezing harmonium. The other composers are Jesse Olsen Bay, **Ben Kessler** and **Jeffrey Alphonsus Mooney**.

With the fifth section, “The Great Rainbow Migration,” Dorsey traces the sexual revolution of the 1970s: Fisher steps to the microphone and recounts the experience of a gay provincial youth in Manhattan, then he and Jones switch to black athletic wear, falling into a nasty sarabande of seduction in the shadows. The team jogs in place and they melt into a celebration of hedonism. Less convincing is the mildly lewd patter the quartet delivers. The episode of bar talk may relieve the tension, but it all sounds terribly artificial.

The four, now garbed in red, conclude “The Missing Generation.” External forces batter the group; they hang on for dear life, as arms twist. But they keep going, wiser and more aware of the forces that annihilate.

There's one serious problem here. Most of the oral material has been poorly recorded; the voices distort to the point where they are often incomprehensible through the music. This is dynamite stuff; I hope that Dorsey can remix the score before the work's 20-city tour later this year.

Allan Ulrich is The San Francisco Chronicle's dance correspondent.

Sean Dorsey Dance: "The Missing Generation." Through Sunday, May 17, at 8 p.m. \$15-\$25. Dance Mission Theater, 3316 24th St., S.F. (415) 826-4411. <http://themissinggeneration.brownpapertickets.com>.

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