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Dancing For Pride: Fresh Meat Festival's 20th, online

by David-Elijah Nahmod

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Vanessa Sanchez and La Mezcla will perform in the Fresh Meat Performance Festival. photo: Anthony Thornton

Fresh Meat Productions, a dance and performance troupe headed by trans dancer-choreographer Sean Dorsey, celebrates both Pride and its 20th anniversary with a two-week festival featuring more than 40 performers.

Transgender, non-binary, queer, Black, Indigenous people of color, deaf and disabled artists will take to the stage for two weeks of free online performances showcasing dance, theater, music, poetry, and comedy.

According to Dorsey, twenty years ago cisgender people refused to hire or present trans artists.

"As a choreographer and activist, I longed not only to bring my own work to the stage, but to help lift up other artists, and to build community," Dorsey said.

And so Dorsey set out to make it happen. He brought together a group of artists and activists. They put together what they all thought would be a one shot-festival of trans, genderqueer and queer performance. Much to their surprise, the show was a massive hit, with many people telling Dorsey that they felt a deep hunger and need for these kinds of performances to continue.

"And twenty years later we've grown and deepened," said Dorsey. "Today we're a thriving arts nonprofit with year-round programs. We believe in trans, gender non-conforming and queer artists are powerful agents of change. And we believe that justice must be approached intersectionally through racial, trans and disability justice."

Dorsey has many feelings about reaching the 20th anniversary milestone. He points out that the community is in the middle of intense uprising and resistance against anti-Black and white supremacist institutions, while also enduring loss, grief, isolation, and financial stress from the pandemic.

"I see the work of Fresh Meat Productions to be balm, medicine, and fuel for our communities," he said. "We want to inspire, we want to ignite, we want to uplift."



Toby MacNutt

He takes great pride in the diversity of Fresh Meat's performers.

"Fresh Meat Productions is proud to have broken down so many barriers facing trans, non-binary and gender-non-conforming artists," Dorsey said. "We're so proud of the caliber, innovation, and boldness of the artists we get to work with."

He has very strong feelings about what Pride means to him and wants to remind people that Pride is

about trans, BIPOC, queer, sex workers and others who rose up and fought back against police violence and state sanctioned abuse.

"Today, Black communities, BIPOC trans folks, and sex workers are still enduring intense police violence and murder, covered up and minimized by the state," he said. "This is why, for me, Pride should be about defunding police and instead investing in these communities. This is also why sassy kinksters and outsiders and sex workers do belong, with bells on, at Pride. Pride to me means solidarity, it means heart-centered mutual support, listening and justice work. It means reveling in our glorious, gorgeous, resilient communities."



Jahaira and Angelica

Dorsey is very excited about celebrating the 20th anniversary of Fresh Meat Productions. To commemorate the occasion, he's made the anniversary performances free. The festival will be presented online and features three programs of world premieres and new works, plus five retrospective programs featuring exclusive, archival footage culled from the company's 20-year history.

"The line-up is incredible," he said. "These artists honestly leave me speechless with their talent and power. This year we're presenting more than forty artists and ensembles in everything from bachata, blues, bomba, hula, hip-hop, jaw-vogue, trans and queer mariachi, contemporary R&B, queer dance theater, along with award-winning wordsmith poets, disabled dance pioneers, world champion queer ballroom, and so much more."

Though the performances are free, pre-registration is required. The first weekend is three nights on YouTube Live, June 18-20 at 5pm Pacific Time. Week 2 is pre-edited archival footage from the last twenty years, and can be accessed on demand anytime from June 21-27 on Vimeo.

Information about the artists and the nightly lineups, as well as registration for free tickets can be

found at the Fresh Meat Productions website.

"I cannot express enough how gorgeous these performances are," Dorsey said. "This is some of the most exquisite, moving, innovative, and important performance work being done anywhere, period. We talk a lot about the Fresh Meat Family, and it truly is a family of people that makes all this happen. I am so, so blessed to be in family and community with them all."

freshmeatproductions.org