

Friday, June 10, 2021

20th Anniversary FRESH MEAT FESTIVAL Is an Online Extravaganza of Trans and Queer Performance

Photos courtesy of Fresh Meat Festival



One of the great highlights of Pride season is the annual FRESH MEAT FESTIVAL of transgender and queer performance. The festival is known for its superb artists, innovation, sold-out crowds, and high energy. And this June 18–27, the FRESH MEAT FESTIVAL will present an expanded 20th Anniversary festival online.

Founding Artistic Director Sean Dorsey says, “We’re celebrating our 20th Anniversary festival in a BIG way! We’ve expanded the festival to two weeks, commissioned all-new work especially for our Anniversary, scoured the archives to bring audiences gorgeous past performances, and are offering the entire festival for FREE this year.” Dorsey adds that all festival programs are closed-captioned for Deaf and Hard-of-hearing audiences.

While tickets are free, audiences must register in advance (there is an option to add an optional donation during the registration process).

Two Weeks of Artistry

The online FRESH MEAT FESTIVAL features two weeks of exquisite, inspiring dance, theater, and live music—featuring more than 40 artists and ensembles performing bachata, blues, bomba, hula, hip-hop, jaw-dropping 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 more.

Especially exciting are the world premieres that have been commissioned by Fresh Meat Productions especially for this anniversary. Commissioned artists include: queer bachata dance champions **Jahaira Fajardo & Angelica Medina** (Bay Area); **DANDY** (performance duo Randy Ford and David Rue; Seattle); poet-storyteller **J Mase III** (Seattle); Black, Deaf dance trailblazer **Antoine Hunter/Purple Fire Crow** (Bay Area); trans writer and performer **Lady Dane Figueroa Edidi** (Washington, D.C.); and acclaimed integrated dance choreographer **Mark Travis Rivera** (Bay Area).

Mark Travis Rivera created and choreographed a solo for dancer Tajh Stallworth called “Yearning,” and shares that “Yearning’ is a special piece created during an unprecedented time of isolation, grief, and unrest. Creating this piece for the 20th anniversary FRESH MEAT FESTIVAL was both a privilege and an honor. As a Latinx, queer, disabled, gender nonconforming choreographer, I am so appreciative of Sean Dorsey using his platform to uplift voices of those who are even more marginalized. This Festival isn’t just highlighting the talents of queer and trans people, it is leading the way of how the greater arts sector should act.”

Award-winning poet J Mase III created a new commissioned piece that integrates his original poetry with digital animation. He shares, “Creating art during the pandemic has been difficult to imagine at times. The FRESH MEAT FESTIVAL has given me time to create art in a new way that doesn’t see the digital space as a deficit, but as an asset. I am proud of all the art we have created for the festival and of the ways that Trans & Queer folks manifest work that is going to be seen as both brilliant and stunning for years to come.”

Acclaimed transwoman singer-songwriter Shawna Virago is featured in several festival programs, and is debuting a new music video. Virago says, “Given the past year with both the COVID-19 lockdown, and the increase of legislative attacks against trans people, I am still so grateful the FRESH MEAT FESTIVAL is happening, presenting so many gifted trans and queer performers, and that our audiences can gather safely online to enjoy this artistry!”



Live and On-Demand Programs

The festival’s Opening Weekend (June 18–20) programs will feature world premieres and new work, and will stream on YouTube Live; Week Two of the festival (June 21–27) will feature past performances and exclusive archival footage from the last 20 years of FRESH MEAT FESTIVALS, available on Vimeo on-demand. All programs are closed-captioned for Deaf and Hard-of-hearing audiences.

The festival will also present new and recent work by a stunning lineup of artists including: **Gabe Christian** (movement and poetics artist); **lafemmebear** (acclaimed Black trans woman musician, music producer, and sound engineer); **Luis Gutierrez-Mock & Ngoc Huynh** (award-winning bachata dance duo); Mya Byrne (transwoman folk/country singer-songwriter); **Mariachi Arcoiris de Los Angeles** (billed as the world's first LGBTQ mariachi band); **NEVE** (disabled trans Nubian American choreographer and enchantress); **Rotimi Agbabiaka** (solo multidisciplinary theater artist); **Sean Dorsey Dance** (modern dance ensemble directed by trans choreographer and Fresh Meat Productions' founding Artistic Director Sean Dorsey); **Shawna Virago** (pioneering transwoman singer-songwriter); **The Monarchs** (all-femme salsa dance ensemble); **Toby MacNutt** (queer, nonbinary trans, disabled dancer/choreographer); and **Vanessa Sanchez & La Mezcla** (polyrhythmic dance and music ensemble rooted in Chicana, Latina and Indigenous traditions).

Looking Back Over 20 Years

The festival is presented by SF-based arts organization Fresh Meat Productions. Fresh Meat Productions invests in the creative expression and cultural leadership of transgender and gender-nonconforming communities through its year-round programs. Fresh Meat's programs include the annual FRESH MEAT FESTIVAL; FRESH WORKS! artist commissions; resident dance company Sean Dorsey Dance's performances, touring and teaching; its signature national education program TRANSform Dance; and national LGBTQ community residencies. Fresh Meat Productions invests in trans, gender-nonconforming, and queer artists as powerful agents of change; builds community, audiences, and opportunities for transgender and queer artists; promotes dialogue and understanding through the arts; and fights for racial, trans, and disability justice for trans and gender-nonconforming communities.

Founded in 2002 (at a time when almost no one would present trans artists), Fresh Meat Productions has made history, broken down barriers facing trans and non-binary artists, launched careers, and built a whole community around itself.

When asked what it feels like to be celebrating 20 years, Dorsey answers, "I feel so emotional when I think about that question! 20 years ago, I couldn't imagine almost any of this would be possible. I was told again and again that my trans body didn't belong in Dance, in the Arts. When we fight to pave the way for our communities to be onstage *and* in the audience, we are providing a mirror and an affirmation of the beauty, power, and wisdom of our communities. I feel incredibly blessed to be part of a team of brilliant humans who make all of this possible."

The Fresh Meat Family team Dorsey refers to includes: General Manager Shawna Virago, Production and Communications Manager Eric Garcia, Online Programs Coordinator Gwen Park, Krista Smith, Den Legaspie, StormMiguel Florez, and Ezra Unterseher, plus many talented technical crew folks who work on productions and performances.

The FRESH MEAT FESTIVAL plans to return to an in-person festival at its venue Z Space in June 2022; in the meantime, make sure to register for your free tickets in order to enjoy this special event.

20th ANNIVERSARY FRESH MEAT FESTIVAL of trans & queer performance

June 18–27

- June 18–20 @ 5 pm PDT
- June 21–27: on-demand

Advance online registration is required to reserve a virtual ticket: <https://tinyurl.com/3v8jafw8>

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