



TRANSGENDER DANCER SEAN DORSEY DREAMS OF A LIMITLESS FUTURE FOR TRANS AND QUEER COMMUNITIES

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As a choreographer and as a trans person, Sean Dorsey felt irresistibly drawn to San Francisco. “It was this deep gut calling,” he says. “For so many trans and queer folks, San Francisco is the only place that we can live.” And yet, the city he moved to in the early 2000s was not the city he had envisioned.

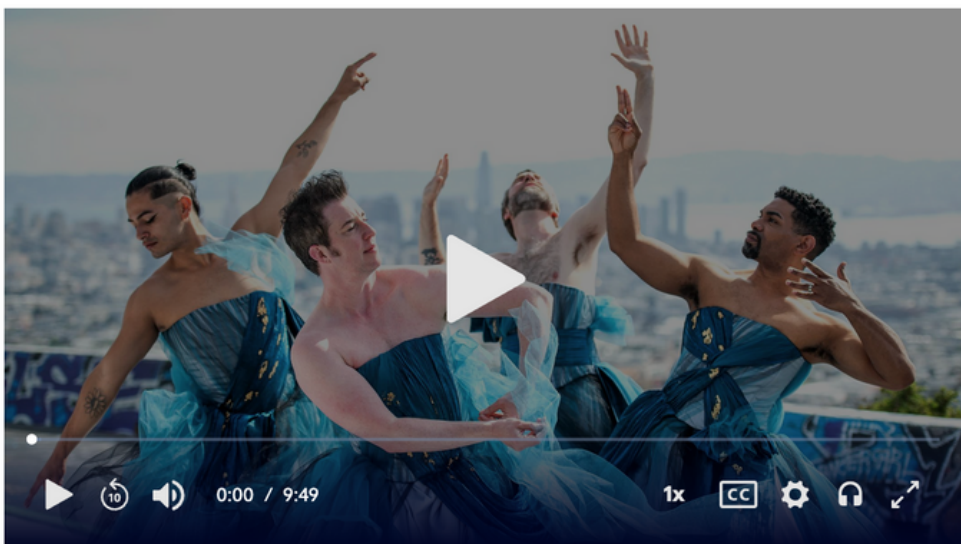
“I thought, ‘This is it, I’m finally going to live in this city and meet the hundreds of other transgender modern dance choreographers who must be living here,’” he recalls. “And there were none. There were trans hip-hop artists, visual artists, musicians, playwrights and writers. But when it came to trans modern dance choreographers or dancers, it was like crickets. And nobody was putting trans artists onstage.”



Sean Dorsey Dance (from left to right): Sean Dorsey, Héctor Jaime, Will Woodward, Nol Simonse. Lydia Daniller.

Dorsey spent the next two decades championing trans and queer performing arts in the city, hand in hand with his life partner, the musician, filmmaker and transgender activist Shawna Virago. Their [Fresh Meat Festival](#) is in its 21st season of showcasing trans and queer performance; Sean Dorsey Dance has toured innovative modern dance to more than 30 cities in the U.S. and abroad; and accolades have arrived in the form of prestigious national awards, commissions and grants.

And while San Francisco has offered Dorsey fertile ground for art-making, and a community hungry to see itself represented onstage, he has returned the favor by enriching the city's awareness of itself. "San Francisco is this incredible epicenter of trans and queer history of resistance," he says. New York City's Stonewall gets all the glory, but it was in the Tenderloin at [Compton's Cafeteria](#) where drag queens and trans women of color first resisted police harassment and rioted for their rights, in August 1966 — nearly three years before Stonewall.



[[Video](#): Watch "If Cities Could Dance: Transgender Dancer Invites Trans & Queer People to Dream Big."]

Dorsey unearthed the city's deep, rich, influential legacy of trans and queer lives in an epic dance-theater trilogy of "Uncovered: The Diary Project," "The Secret History of Love" and "The Missing Generation." Theatrical, humorous, deeply compassionate and beautifully danced, those works made space for people of all identities to gather and truly see each other. "My goal is to make dances that people can relate to deeply and are transformed by in some way," he says. "I want all of us to be breathing together, dreaming together, sharing compassion and story and embodiment."

That sense of hope is at the heart of Dorsey's new work, "[The Lost Art of Dreaming](#)." It's also the impetus for a new, forward-looking phase of Dorsey's artistic life, focused on encouraging trans and nonbinary people to claim their right to a life they love. "So many trans people are told that we won't have a future," Dorsey says. "So many of us are discouraged from dreaming, are discouraged from imagining, finding love, finding community. 'Dreaming' invites us all to imagine expansive futures that are joyful and liberated, and in which we lift each other up with love."



Sean Dorsey Dance (from left to right): Sean Dorsey, Héctor Jaime, Will Woodward, Nol Simonse. Photo: Lydia Daniller.

"The Lost Art of Dreaming" proposes a new paradigm through the embodied, kinesthetic art of dance. Dorsey's modern choreography melds with the expressive dancers, spectacular couture costumes and an uninhibited, enthusiastic embrace of joy. Watching, you can sense the connection among the artists and between them and the city itself. "San Francisco is like a magical sanctuary," Dorsey says. "It whispers to us from all across the country and around the world. Sean Dorsey Dance is by, of and for San Francisco. In this city, I stand on the shoulders of my Transcestors."



Sean Dorsey and his dance company pose with filmmaker Lindsay Gauthier at Twin Peaks in San Francisco on May 12, 2022.
Photo: Beth LaBerge.

Experience Dorsey and members of Sean Dorsey Dance perform excerpts from “*The Lost Art of Dreaming*” in some of San Francisco’s most inspiring settings — Twin Peaks, Hillpoint Park and the Cliff House above Ocean Beach.

– Written by Claudia Bauer

This piece originally appeared on KQED Arts & Culture and has been edited lightly for ALL ARTS.

If Cities Could Dance is KQED Arts and Culture’s award-winning video series featuring dancers across the country who represent their city’s signature moves. Subscribe to their YouTube Channel to never miss a new episode.