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Fresh Meat Festival: a celebration of queer and trans performance

by David-Elijah Nahmod | Tuesday June 6, 2023

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Sean Dorsey Dance (photo: Kegan Marling)

For the past three years the Fresh Meat Festival has conducted its annual performances online. Now, with the pandemic tapering off, the festival returns to performing live and in person. Fresh Meat, the brainchild of trans dancer-choreographer Sean Dorsey, will perform at Z Space from June 14-18.

The Fresh Meat Festival will offer three distinct programs. Together they represent a fusion of Afro-Latin dance, bomba dance and music, voguing, opera, aerial dance, stand-up comedy, live music and much more. The performers are trans, queer and gender non-conforming. Dorsey feels that Pride Month is a time to celebrate trans joy and to uplift BIPOC gender non-conforming artists, and to rally around queer and non-binary creativity.

"We're in the midst of a brutal increase in anti-trans hatred and violence," Dorsey, who serves as the artistic director of the Fresh Meat Festival, said in an interview with the Bay Area Reporter. "Not just in red states, but also here in the Bay Area. As trans and queer folks, we must remember to never take our rights and our freedom of expression for granted. This is why this year's festival is especially important."

Sean Dorsey Dance: THE LOST ART OF DREAMING (trailer)



The name Fresh Meat was coined in 2002 by Jessie Bie, choreographer/director of Steamroller Dance. Dorsey and his colleagues felt that this name allowed them to reclaim their power and sexiness, as well as their innovation and audacity as trans and queer performers who create art in a world that demonizes them.

"We honestly keep saying 'pinch me' with the stunning roster of artists we've lined up this year," said Dorsey. "We've got artists from the Bay Area, Seattle, Austin, Portland and more."

According to Eric Garcia, who serves as managing director for Fresh Meat Productions, Z Space is among their favorite places to perform because it evokes a San Francisco that is now gone while continuing to remain a cultural hub for many contemporary artists doing new and experimental works.



Fresh Meat Festival performers include Neve, Charles Peoples III, and Sir JoQ (photo: Alexa Trevino)

The festival has always felt like some sort of red carpet event where the audience and artists show up for each other to celebrate queer excellence," Garcia said. "Hosting it at Z Space completes the fantasy. Big shout out to the staff at Z Space for continued love and support throughout the years."

The show is not just for queer, trans and non-binary people, according to Dorsey. These are performances that

everyone can enjoy.

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"It is so, so powerful when us trans and queer folks get to see our lives, our experiences, our bodies and our full selves represented onstage," he said. "It is literally life saving for us. And yes, the show absolutely appeals to folks beyond the queer and trans community, because the art is amazing and the audiences are overflowing with joy and raucous love."

Dorsey noted that when he books a performer or an act for the Fresh Meat Festival, he looks for innovation and dedication to their artistic craft and practice. He wants people who offer what he calls gorgeous artistry and who push the envelope.

"Bold aesthetics and perspective," added Garcia, "Wearing queerness on the sleeve. Deep connection to community. Courageous efforts. Presence."

This year the festival will take advantage of Z Space's 13,000 square feet and present the artists performing all around the building. On balconies, in the lobby, in the building's nooks and crannies and on the main stage. Because of this, tickets will be limited in order to allow smaller audiences to enjoy an up-close and personal intimate site specific format.

Garcia has a message for those who might be on the fence about attending the festival.

"Just take a second to pause and feel into the greatness and power of showing up in community," said Garcia of the festival. "The 75 minutes you'll spend in the theater witnessing and experiencing truly excellent artistry will likely give you the space to embrace expansiveness, lick some old wounds, tap into lineages and legacy, and be the puzzle piece that completes a moment in queer time."

The Fresh Meat Festival's three programs:

Program A: June 14 and 15, 7:30pm (the 15th with ASL interpretation)

Program B: June 16 and 17, 7:30pm (the 16th with ASL)

Program C: June 17 and 18, 2pm (the 17th with ASL)

Z Space, 450 Florida St. Sliding scale, \$15-40.

[www.freshmeatproductions.org](https://freshmeatproductions.org/) (https://freshmeatproductions.org/)

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