

Free to dream

Sean Dorsey Dance tells a story in upcoming performance at the Yard.

By **Abby Remer** July 5, 2023



I am excited about the Sean Dorsey Dance company's upcoming performance at the Yard on Friday, July 7, and Saturday, July 8. Dorsey is clearly a person bursting with creativity. And he did so from a very young age, dancing around the living room in his leotard. "I loved dancing with all of my being from my earliest memories, but it was not even a fantasy or dream that I could be a dancer or choreographer," Dorsey says. "Like so many trans people, I did not grow up at the ballet barre, because there were no spaces that were welcoming of trans bodies and trans dancers."

Although taking some community classes, and some in university, “I was very focused on activism as my life’s calling, and was on track to become a community organizer, but when I started to create and perform my work, I realized that it was actually through dance that I could make my greatest impact,” Dorsey explains. He entered a studio-based program in Vancouver and started dancing with professional companies and creating work himself. He did the same after moving to San Francisco, until starting his own company, which had its first full season in 2005.

This upcoming performance, “The Lost Art of Dreaming,” promises to be a powerful experience. Just watching the short video on the company’s website (seandorseydance.com), you can see the dynamism of the movement, and the dancers’ commitment to the choreography. This new work is a fusion of full-throttle dance, intimate storytelling, intricate costuming, and exquisite queer partnering performed with Sean Dorsey Dance’s signature technical precision, guts, and humanity. He describes the performance as an invitation to embrace expansive imagination and connect to our deepest longing and joy and pleasure ... and ultimately to connect with one another and propel us to work toward expansive futures.

Dorsey’s pieces always stem from his core. “I had never seen myself reflected in dance, and knew that I wanted to insert my body, story, experiences, and communities onstage,” Dorsey says. “Working with queer-spectrum dancers has always been really important to me in terms of embodying and lifting up stories and voices that have been so censored from dance.”

“The Lost Art of Dreaming” is performed by a powerhouse ensemble of five trans, queer, and gender-nonconforming dancers (Sean Dorsey, Brandon Graham, Héctor Jaime, David Le, and Nol Simonse), with a rich, layered score featuring original and commissioned music.

For Dorsey, music and language are integral to his propulsive movement. He relates that the fabulous music ranges from haunting classical string quartets to super-sexy club electronic music. But, for him, language is a third element that is just as profoundly integrated into the dance as the music.

“As a baby choreographer, right away I incorporated text as a sound score, and live speaking. I had seen little to no work like that, but it just came out of me having always been a writer and poet and loving the power of story,” Dorsey says. “All of my full-evening works weave in story, text, poetry, and live speaking while dancing. It is critical for me that language and movement are intricately and intimately woven together so that our breath, our spines, and the stretch of our skin as we move our limbs are both an expression of and in service to the story and language.”

Dorsey works collaboratively with his group to generate characters, ideas, language, and movement, including unexpected and innovative ideas around partnering. He is fully committed to creating a trusting environment to which his dancers can bring not just their physical artistic expertise, but all their personal history and experiences. He describes it as very deeply trust-based work, grounded in “a kinship, family-space model.”

“It’s all about bringing our history and experiences to the studio, arriving as we are, and not leaving our humanity outside the door,” Dorsey relates. “Part of why people respond to the work so much is that we are fully present humans in the work. Not just technicians — our hearts are present as well.”

The visually and emotionally rich performance straddles contemporary dance and dance theater. It is technically exquisite and visually sumptuous. But it doesn’t just appeal to audiences of contemporary dance, but those too, he says, “who feel they hate modern dance because it’s cryptic and inaccessible and makes them feel they don’t get it. All audiences connect to the longing, the joy, the interpersonal connection that is happening onstage. It goes to a really deep

place around the ache and longing we all feel in love or connection and exploring death and grief — and rising up in joy and celebrating pleasure. They are all together hooting and hollering and loving the work.”

“The Lost Art of Dreaming” at the Yard on Friday, July 7, and Saturday, July 8. For tickets and information visit dancetheyard.org/upcoming-events. See a brief video trailer at vimeo.com/799694809.