

The **BAY AREA REPORTER** *Serving the San Francisco Bay Area LGBTQ community since 1971*

Sean Dorsey Dance 20th anniversary concerts return by popular demand

[David-Elijah Nahmod](#), Tuesday, April 1, 2025



Sean Dorsey Dance company performs at a recent concert. (photo: Kegan Marling)

For the past twenty years Sean Dorsey Dance has been thrilling audiences with their groundbreaking and exciting moves. This past September the company celebrated its 20th

anniversary with a sold out run which featured excerpts from three of the most innovative pieces Dorsey has created and choreographed across the years.

Dorsey and his dancers now return to San Francisco for an encore performance of the 20th anniversary show. Dorsey, who is a transgender man, couldn't be returning at a more critical time, what with Republican lawmakers ramping up their attacks on the trans community.

Yet Dorsey remains undaunted, proudly wearing his gender identity on his sleeve as he presents dances which celebrate trans history. The performances will take place one weekend only, April 11-13, at Dance Mission Theater.

As he prepares for the weekend, Dorsey took a few minutes to chat with the Bay Area Reporter about the encore show, his recent tour, and the importance of trans visibility.



Choreographer Sean Dorsey (photo: Lydia Daniller)

David-Elijah Nahmod: When you first started Sean Dorsey Dance, did you ever think it would last twenty years?

Sean Dorsey: Oh gosh, I don't think I ever looked that far into the future. You know, so many trans and queer folks just don't. For so many generations it was hard for us to imagine a

future where we would thrive because we didn't have any role models like that.

But I'm smiling ear to ear as you ask that question, because it feels absolutely amazing to be celebrating this milestone, in spite of all the challenges and isolation and barriers I faced as a trans person in dance. And I'm so grateful to my partner Shawna Virago, my, beloved tiny but mighty staff family, and my beloved dancers and collaborators.

Can you say something about the importance of being visible given the current political climate?

This is an incredibly important time to be proudly, loudly transgender and queer, which me and my company are. Get your tickets now, folks, because this is the artistic medicine you're probably needing right now. Trans folks are experiencing a state of emergency right now, our most basic civil liberties, our bodily autonomy, our freedom of movement, passports, and our freedom of speech are all under attack. beloved tiny but mighty staff family, and my beloved dancers and collaborators.

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I think people are really needing and craving to be with community right now, and so it feels really powerful to be offering up this 20th anniversary performance as a raucous, unapologetic, joyous declaration of the worth, beauty and power of our communities.

How did your recent tour go?

Right before we started prepping for this 20th anniversary home season show, we finished a 13-city international tour of our show "The Lost Art of Dreaming." The tour was extraordinary. We took the show to large cities and small communities, from super urban to super rural. And in every single city after every single performance, we were met with a torrent of love.

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The audience response to that show was so deep, so emotional, so personal, I think people felt really nourished by the work itself, as well as by our presence in their community. People want to see gorgeous dance theater that centers trans lives and queer bodies, stories and aesthetics.



Sean Dorsey Dance's 'Lou' (photo: Lydia Daniller)

What's it like to celebrate two decades of making dances?

Our twentieth anniversary home season is super special. For the first time in our entire history, we are revisiting and restaging audience favorites from the last two decades. We'll perform excerpts from a trilogy of works I created between 2008-2015, which are all based on oral history interviews I recorded with trans and LGBTQI+ elders, and archival research. These works reveal incredibly important parts of trans history and queer history, like our secret histories of love in decades past, or our experiences and resistance during the early AIDS epidemic.

Explain the significance of the piece “Lou” and who Lou Sullivan was.

Lou Sullivan (1951-1991) was a trailblazing gay transman activist, but because he lived and died before the internet, most folks today aren't learning about him. So much of the richness of trans lives today exists because of Lou.

He did some of the first ever research and publishing about trans history, he started the first support groups for trans-masc folks, he fought a long battle with the medical community so that queer-identified trans people could get access to gender affirming care, the list goes on. And he corresponded with letters of support to literally hundreds of trans people around the world, long before the internet, cell phones or any real support for our people.

Before Lou died of AIDS complications, and because he knew he was dying soon, Lou worked hard to organize and bequeath his lifelong diaries to the GLBT Historical Society. I spent a year reading and transcribing these extraordinary diaries, and then recorded a soundscore where I read Lou's own words. And then I choreographed a suite of dances following Lou's incredible life.

The piece “The Missing Generation” has a special significance.

I created “The Missing Generation” as a love letter to a forgotten generation, survivors of the early part of the AIDS epidemic. To create the show, I spent a year travelling the US to record 75 hours of oral history interviews with LGBTQI+ long time survivors, folks who lived through that excruciating time. We hear survivor's own words and stories, from heartbreaking to sassy to hilarious. And more than anything, how illuminating for us today to remember and learn from the resistance, resilience and fierce activism of these folks.

Please tell me about the piece “The Secret History of Love.”

I recorded oral history interviews with the most amazing trans and LGBTQI+ elders, asking them, “tell me about your first crush,” and “tell me how you managed to meet lovers, or find community in decades past, when it was literally illegal to gather in public?” We hear these elders' voices and remarkable real-life stories, and we dance to them.

What do you hope the audience will take from these performances?

Well, this show is seriously gorgeous. It's full-throttle, deeply human, technically precise, beautiful dance. And trans and queer beauty is resistance.

Sean Dorsey Dance: 20th Anniversary Home Season, April 11 and 12, 8pm; April 13, 4pm, (Sunday performance includes ASL interpretation). Dance Mission Theater, 3316 24th Street, \$5-\$50, sliding scale. KN95 masks required and provided. Wheelchair accessible, all gender restrooms.

www.dancemissiontheater.org

www.seandorseydance.com