

**DANCE
MISSION
THEATER**

APRIL: WE CHOOSE EACH
OTHER



We Chose Each Other

Sean Dorsey Dance

Dance Mission Theater

Choreographer: Sean Dorsey

Dancers: Brandon Graham, Héctor Jaime, Sean Dorsey, David Le, Nol Simonse

By Kristen Cosby

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In *We Choose Each Other*, Sean Dorsey's newest work-in-progress, just before the dancers began to circle together and lift each other, Dorsey's voice-over narration questioned: "Where does grief live in your body? What would it feel like to have those places tended to?" The unseen narrator continued to pose seemingly unanswerable questions that the dancers answered with their bodies.

Grief and how we resist it, accept it, and process it within ourselves and within community is often a central theme within Sean Dorsey's work. That allowed him to superimpose two pieces in this preview of *We Choose Each Other* into a triptych. By book-ending a segment from his 2015 piece, *The Missing Generation*, with two segments of new work, Dorsey invited his audience to see the parallels between the grief, loss, and oppression of the trans community in our current moment, to the narratives from the LGBTQ community at the height of the AIDS crisis. Sandwiching the two works together delivered a clear and staggering message: *we've been here before*. This community has known fear – fear of governmental oversight over their bodies, fear of violence, exile, or death because of their identities.

From the first moments of *We Chosen Each Other*, when the five dancers appeared on stage in tight, brightly colored, lace tops and flowing black pants, that grief was raw and apparent. Each dancer's right arm hooked midair, as if encircling an absent beloved, while the opposite hand reached self-protectively for their own throat. People are missing: the dancers' bodies told us. People are under threat. No bodies shared weight, no one touched. Each dancer repeated those motions of grief, expressing shared fears and anxieties, but not in unison. They feared alone, their gazes set inward, backing away from each other and audience self-protectively in a dark landscape of sorrow and threat.

In the next segment of the piece, the ensemble rotated in and out of a series of duets, their bodies comforted and held each other, even if that holding appeared strange at times, with angular limb gestures and little fluidity, or when dancer Nol Simonse inverted Héctor Jaime such that the Jaime's long ponytail dragged across the floor while his airborne legs appeared seated.

The choreography continued to build towards encircling and touch and the ability to lean into the comfort and sway of community. From the rotating duos, a quartet emerged, in which Dorsey, Graham, Jaime and Le, tried to hold onto Simonse as he's being pulled away by death or grief or both. Within that fight to maintain self, beloveds, and community, against death, despair, and governmental oppression, these bodies created gorgeous and tender connections. The community lifts each other up, one by one, quite literally.

In the final segment of the piece, the thematic material of the opening returned: all dancers now dressed in white lace and flowing pants, giving them an angelic quality. But this time, when the common swaying gestures and the rapid rolling of arms and hands of the opening returned, the dancers circled and place hands on each other's shoulders and shared weight and quite literally lifted each other up. Brandon Graham was the last to be lofted overhead multiple times by the ensemble. Each time his long limbs extend further, into a higher-reaching pose.

We don't know for certain, if this person is being lifted towards the heavens, or if this is the afterlife, or if this is a mortal community lifting someone above their grief and out of the fray. Or all of the above. On stage the audience saw a powerfully resilient community, capable of soul-saving acts of care.

"When the world choses fear, we chose each other," Dorsey's narration told us, echoing a moment from the center of the piece, deep within *The Missing Generation*, in which Graham and Jamie, supported on opposite sides by the other dancers, reached their fingers towards each other in imitation of Michale Angelo's "Creation of Adam", suggesting that its we humans who have the ability to create, save, and find the divine within each other.

The completion of We Choose Each Other will be premiered in April, 2027 at Dance Mission Theater.

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