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Sean Dorsey brings untold stories to light in 'Secret History of Love'

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PERFORMING ARTS **eXtra!**

Dancers shedding light on secret histories

By Lauren Gallagher
S.F. Examiner Staff Writer

San Francisco choreographer Sean Dorsey likes stories.

With his company Sean Dorsey Dance, his most recent projects have mined personal histories from the LGBT community, including "The Secret History of Love," which returns to Dance Mission Theater on Thursday.

"I became passionate about uncovering, documenting and sharing stories that get lost from mainstream history and fall between the pages of family albums," Dorsey says.

An outspoken transgender choreographer with an activist background, Dorsey spent two years working on the National LGBT Elders Oral History Project, hearing from people who were forced to maintain clandestine love affairs out of fear of discrimination and persecution.

The stories he recorded and transcribed form the basis for "The Secret History of Love."

"There is just so much incredibly rich, juicy, inspiring history in

IF YOU GO

The Secret History of Love

Presented by Sean Dorsey Dance

Where: Dance Mission Theater, 3316 24th St., S.F.

When: 8 p.m. Thursday-Friday, 4 and 8 p.m.

Saturday-Sunday; closes March 31

Tickets: \$10 to \$25

Contact: (800) 838-3006, www.brownpapertickets.com, www.seandorseydance.com



COURTESY PHOTO

our community," Dorsey says. "And it's not just about surviving, but thriving too, and finding love."

Animated and often comic, the dance suites are accompanied by musical performances by transgender performer-activist Shawna Virago.

A minimal cast of four dancers

— Juan De La Rosa, Brian Fisher, Nol Simonse and Dorsey — keeps things tight, showcasing Dorsey's elegant, lucid and refreshingly accessible choreography.

"I will admit that modern dance has tended to be very inaccessible, even elitist," Dorsey says. "Sadly, I think a lot of modern dance has

alienated a lot of audiences. They feel like they don't get it, and don't connect with the work."

Using a sound-score that incorporates text — stories he transcribed over two years — Dorsey's choreography verges on dance-theater.

His conscientious attitude toward communication has paid off. "The Secret History of Love" has toured nationally, and the company has had multiple requests to perform it in far-flung places, locales not known for plentiful or vocal LGBT communities.

Last year, just before the presidential election, the troupe was booked to perform the work in Whitewater, Wis. — staunch Republican territory, and packed with Mitt Romney signs.

To Dorsey's surprise, more than 500 people showed up, and not just the LGBT community.

"A lot of people came up and said they don't really get to see dance there," Dorsey says. "It opened their minds. I think when you present work in an honest and vulnerable way, and use humor, people are more open to receiving the work and emotions than just hearing it on the TV or at a rally."

lgallagher@sfexaminer.com

TINA FEEL