

performance

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self how he was able to create a project like *Genderfantasy* at all.

"During the rehearsal, I started to think about where I come from, and how it is that I'm able to parade around in fucked-up wigs, and messy but beautiful makeup," recalls Pepper. "How is it I came to be who I am? That led me to really pay attention to my influences and my inspirations, and the bulk of those are dead queer artists."

Throughout preparations for the performance, Pepper developed a keen appreciation for the challenges of a project so much bigger and more involved than his typical solo or group work.

"Doing a project of this size is difficult because not only am I the creative director, choreographer and dancer, and a collaborator with the music and the makeup, but I'm also the project manager," explains Pepper. "It's a lot for one person to do."

And it's been an at-times daunting journey. Pepper says he's faced significant bouts of conceptual struggle as the creation of the piece has unfolded. The organic nature of the performance, and the malleable notions derived therein, compete with each other for both visceral attention and a tangible takeaway. But Pepper says he's more interested in challenging the audience's perception of how they're supposed to feel, and what they're supposed to think about the piece.

"The thing about *Genderfantasy* is that it really is an exploration of evolution and identity," says Pepper of the morphing nature of the show. "I feel that it's always going to be evolving, just like our construction of gender is always evolving, and just like the construction of how we see each other in our own identities, how gender lays on the body, and how I believe that gender in essence is a fantasy."

The final version of *Genderfantasy* is, in fact, still evolving. Three separate satellite performances—essentially early version ex-

cerpts of the finished product—helped inform aspects of the show in the months leading up to its premiere. Up until opening night, it's likely Pepper will be fine-tuning the various cogs of his drag/dance opus. Before that time comes, Pepper has launched a Kickstarter campaign to help fund the final weeks of the project, and to sustain the talented artists he's worked with for the past six months.

The mystery of what this project is telling Pepper—and what it will tell those who see it—is something he says he won't know until the opening.



"I really feel like the mystery is the relationship between the experience of what the dancers experience inside themselves, and then what the audience experiences with them," explains Pepper. "*Genderfantasy* works on the axis of authenticity and entertainment, so I'm working really hard at cultivating a level of realness in our movement, our characters, our presence and our ferocity. But it's also a drag show. I hope people get to live at that intersection."

Genderfantasy opens Thurs., Dec. 1 and runs through Dec. 4 at The Headwaters Theatre (55 NE Farragut St.). Doors open and the *Fliptography* installation begins at 7:30 p.m., show is at 8. Tickets are on a \$10-\$15 sliding scale, and are available via Brown Paper Tickets. For more information, visit genderfantasy.wordpress.com.

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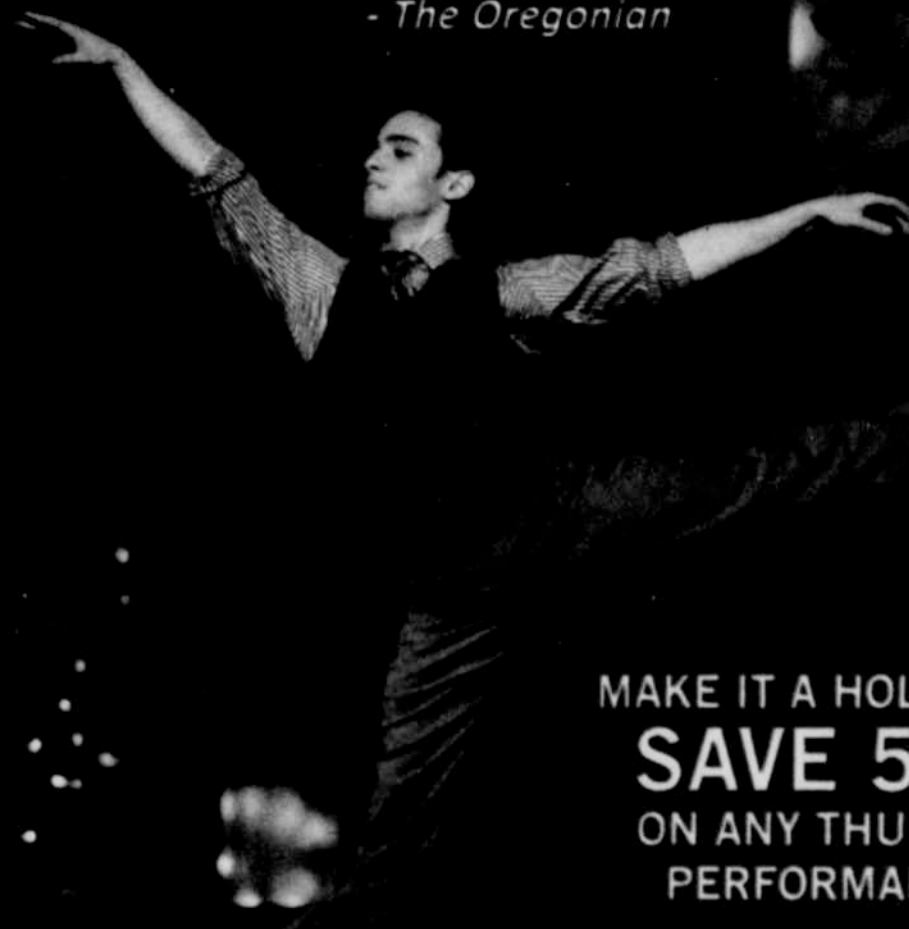
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