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## Edinburgh Fringe Interview 2014

### *The Warriors: A Love Story*

Curtis Uhlemann & Erica Gionfriddo

EDFRINGE LISTINGS 2014

**Category** - Dance Physical Theatre

**Genres** - Dance / Multimedia

**Venue** - Zoo Southside

**Date** - 1 Aug - 23 Aug

**Time** - 20:30

**Duration** - 55 Minutes

Searching through his grandmother's trunk after her death, Eliot, a young musician, is transported into the past by the physical mementos he encounters. Moment after fractured moment reveals the intertwined lives of Ursula, a German dancer and survivor of the allied bombing of Dresden, and Glenn, an American philosopher and war veteran.

*An ensemble of dancers, interactive video projections, and live music conjure up an entire universe emerging from a single small trunk.*

#### **Hey Curtis and Erica how's it going, you all set for the Fringe?**

Going great--we're almost already to get on a plane and bring our show over there. Looking forward to being in Edinburgh for most of next month!

#### **This will be ARCOS's Edfringe debut, what does it mean to be bringing the show to the UK?**

This is our EdFringe debut and also the first time we are bringing a show overseas. It has been over a year of intense fundraising to meet the budget demands of a technically heavy show with an ensemble of seven. Fortunately, every member of our cast brought in donations from friends and family and we received support from foundations, including **New Mexico Arts** and the **Rea Charitable Trust** (Midland, TX) to support the production. What performing at the festival means to us is a chance to get what we think is a compelling mixture of dance, theater, and multimedia to an engaged international audience--we can't wait!

#### **Is there anymore tweaking left to do with your show?**

This is a reimagined version of **The Warriors** that we have been constructing over the last year after a workshop of the production last February, and the bulk of the work has been with media. Touring the show meant greatly reducing the original set and the number of performers in the cast, so we've been rebuilding choreographic scenes throughout the year with our dancers and had two weeks of intense rehearsal with everyone together to actually put the pieces together into the new show.

We are extremely fortunate to have access to a theater here in *Austin* that matches the Zoo Venue's dimensions; we can approximate and adjust our tech setup as necessary before arriving.

#### **Tell me a little bit about *The Warriors A Love Story*, how did the show come about?**

Based on the lives of multimedia director **Eliot Gray Fisher's** maternal grandparents, this lyrical multimedia production follows him as he confronts his grandmother's death, and, in the process, much broader questions about humanity's relationships with love and war. Fisher's maternal grandmother, Ursula, was a dancer who studied with modern dance pioneer Grett Palucca in Dresden, Germany, before the war and survived the 1945 Allied bombing of Dresden.

His grandfather **J. Glenn Gray**, who grew up on a simple Pennsylvania farm and received his PhD in Philosophy the same day as his draft notice, died before Fisher was born but left a legacy in his 1959 philosophical memoir, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*, which includes excerpts from his extensive war journals. Those personal writings and phenomenological observations, still sadly relevant about warfare today, serve as inspiration for scenes in the *ARCOS* production, and Ursula's love of movement and beauty made dance a fitting vehicle to tell this highly personal but universal story.

#### **What was the inspiration behind the show?**

Fisher had been seeking a way to artistically interpret this family legacy for years, and when we founded *ARCOS* and delved into the realm of multimedia performance, he brought the idea to the table.

#### **What have been the biggest challenges you've faced with the show?**

The biggest challenge by far has been developing our approach to multimedia performance. In addition to the historical and narrative thematic elements, we are dealing with so many more variables than concert dance, which is the background of two of our directors [**Uhlemann** and **Gionfriddo**]. In addition to music and sound design, costumes, and choreography, our core team has also built sets and incorporated text (dialogue and titles) and of course video projections (with varying kinds of interactivity) into the production, to create a kind of hybrid cinematic-theatrical narrative played out with dynamic contemporary dance.

As we refined our technique, we began to look at each of these elements as a dial, and how we could dial each down or up throughout is what helps build and release tension for the audience, in addition to the more conventional ideas about dramatic action, so there is a constant mix of media happening at each moment.

#### **How did you both meet?**

Curtis and I met in Santa Fe in 2006 when I came out to work with a local company and school and were immediately drawn together by a similar work ethic and highly athletic dance aesthetic. We later moved into directing roles within that company and after five years we took the leap to start our own endeavor, **ARCOS** Dance. I met my husband in Santa Fe shortly after Curtis and drew Eliot into the dance world, where he added and pushed the limits of what Curtis and I were creating.

#### **What has it been like working together on this project?**

This has been our most ambitious project to date and it was initially challenging working with such a personal story--attempting to do justice the stories of real people of whom family members all had varying perspectives presented the same challenges that memoir does. While working and planning to take the show to Edinburgh, we were also in the midst of shifting operations of the company to Austin, so it's been a whirlwind year to say the least.

#### **As a choreographer what are the challenges you encounter when working on a new project?**

**Curtis** confronts these challenges at the start of any new project: *How do I create something different than last time? How do I create and get the performers to execute in a way that makes me want to watch, keep watching, as though for the first time? How do I create something that has meaning?* Every time I create a work I shift my perspective a little -- I have to change, or start from a new place, in order for the work to progress.

#### **How did you get into dance, has this been a passion you've have your entire life?**

We both came to dance relatively late in life, however the performing arts have always had a large role. Curtis began performing nationally at age 11 in the art form of color guard, a background that has greatly influenced his choreographic style. At age 22, his guard director suggested he audition for a college dance program. I was training seriously in opera and while I had taken dance classes to augment my musical theater background, I didn't start formal training until age 16.

*A friend invited me to a ballet class at New England Dance Conservatory and that was all it took--I quit everything else and committed to a professional training track.*

#### **Do you have any rituals before you go on stage?**

More recently, as we have been progressing quickly, our ritual has been to ask each other "do you remember where we were a year ago?"... and that usually sets the tone nicely.

#### **Who have been your biggest inspirations?**

Much of the time our own evolution, and that other of artists around us, drives us to create new work. We relocated to a bigger city to be around other artists who are similarly evolving

for new inspiration. Outside of that a lot of our inspiration comes from other art forms; live theater, visual art, music, or an interesting skyline, tree formation, or the feeling you get at the start of a long road trip.

**What are the best 5 words describe your show?**

Ambitious, intricate, visceral, stimulating, emotional

**What has been the best advice you've been given?**

Let go.

**What advice would you give fellow dancers and choreographers?**

Don't listen to anyone's negativity. Including your own.

**And finally, what do you hope people will take away from your show?**

Hopefully the stories of a couple ordinary people who witnessed and survived some of the most horrific events of the twentieth century and committed their lives to simple acts of beauty can inspire people to rethink the power each of us actually has to change the shape of history.