

## Edinburgh Fringe 2014

### *The Warriors: A Love Story*

FringeReview  
**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED  
 SHOW**

A bespectacled young man is trying to Skype his mother – the call breaks up, it's frustrating. We are all at the mercy of technology. She says it was good that he was able to speak with his grandmother before she left – she's not sure how much she heard or understood, but that she is grateful. This is the beginning of the unpicking of a long journey that takes us from World War Two, the bombed out ruins of Dresden and the Allies push through Italy, to the present - from the analogue world to the digital.

The young man in question is Eliot Gray Fisher and the story he tells is about how his grandparents met. Based partly on the war journals of his grandfather, Glen, an American soldier at the sharp end of the conflict in Italy and the stories of his grandmother, Ursula, a dancer and survivor of the firestorm that engulfed Dresden, this is much more than a love story, it is Fisher's and Arcos' richly-textured and complex inter-weaving of dance, physical theatre, live music, projection and sound.

A box onstage contains the random collection of objects that provide the catalyst for some of the scenes – a dress, an orange, a rifle, an air-raid siren amongst them. As the box is opened and the performers acquire these props and experiment with them, they begin to unwind the tale, taking on different characters, with Fisher narrating, playing the keyboard and sometimes operating live projection onto various surfaces. The dancers move easily between contemporary dance, cabaret spoof and silent observers.

Glen and Ursula, brought together as the Americans help the German people to rebuild their country, are initially forbidden to speak – each side still views the other as the enemy – but Glen sidesteps this and signals his affection for her by leaving an orange on her desk. This gift, so rare in wartime, ignites this rich relationship.

We hear from both of them, Glen's encounter with an Italian farmer who is completely unaware that the war is actually happening despite the artillery raining down in the valleys below to Ursula describing her running away from the bombs and finding herself stride for stride with an escaping ostrich, ironically liberated from its cage in Dresden Zoo.

These stories are echoed and re-told in dance and visual images – and for me, most successfully so when there is a clear focus. The dancers conjuring up the panic, looking fearfully to the skies, capturing the moment when the firestorm leaves victims in cellars physically untouched but suffocating, as the air is sucked from their lungs is graphically poignant, yet it is achieved with only a background of the air-raid siren's wail and some simple projected hand-drawn images suggesting the bombers overhead. The dancers' bodies communicate these horrors with staccato gesture and tortured body shapes. Elsewhere, a moment where Glen nearly shoots at himself when he sees his own image in a mirror in a crumbling building, seems to hold the story up as that moment is replayed across five screens. Where the elements work best is with the accent on the dancers, supported by the multi-media rather than dominated by it and this is successful for the majority of the production.

“You didn't live through it – you died through it” observes Ursula, as she and Glen struggle to find elements of redemption to help rebuild the shattered buildings and humans in Dresden. The invitation at the beginning to consider whether the stories are danceable gets a resounding yes from me – and the choreography from Curtis Uhlemann and Erica Gionfriddo is excellent - but the projection isn't always successful and a couple of times, briefly, there's too much sensory overload. That said, there are many beautiful moments in this slightly fragmented piece, which is well worth watching. Ultimately it is the power of the performers that really connects and resonates - and it is their sheer skill that leaves you breathless.