



COMPLEX HISTORY



EDDIE MOORE/JOURNAL

Members of ARCOS Dance rehearse "The Warriors: A Love Story," a dance drama about World War II.

WAR AND LOVE

■ *Production tells story of a couple's World War II romance*

By **KATHALEEN ROBERTS**
Journal Staff Writer

War's profound destruction can churn horror into timeless acts of redemption

ARCOS Dance addresses this paradox with "The Warriors: A Love Story," a multimedia production choreographed to the memories of an American soldier and a survivor of the bombing of Dresden.

The collaboration chronicles ARCOS multimedia director Eliot Gray Fisher's search to understand his grandparents' complex history before and after World War II. Set in the Muñoz-Waxman Gallery at the Center for Contemporary Arts, the work



Wes and Elle Jansen rehearse "The Warriors," a multimedia dance production about Santa Fe Prep teacher Eliot Gray Fisher's grandparents.

combines theater, dance, video and music with vintage video and audio footage and war propaganda (from both sides) to tell their stories. "The Warriors: A Love Story" runs through this weekend and again from Feb. 15-17.

Fisher never knew his grandfather, J. Glenn Gray. But Gray lived on through the memories of his widow Ursula, a dancer, who died in 2009.

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If you go

WHAT: "The Warriors: A Love Story" by ARCOS Dance

WHERE: Center for Contemporary Arts, 1050 Old Pecos Trail

WHEN: Feb. 8-10 and Feb. 15-17. Performances are at 7:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays; 2 p.m. on Sundays.

COST: \$20/adults; \$15/students

CONTACT: 473-7434

Production Tells of Complex WWII Romance

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A Colorado College philosophy professor, Gray never talked much about his wartime experience, his grandson said. But he penned a 1959 book on modern warfare, "The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle," and he never thought about the so-called "Good War" in black and white terms.

Gray was drafted on the same day he received his doctoral degree from Columbia University. He spent one year in the infantry and another working in counterintelligence. He marched through Italy, then down into North Africa.

"He'd stay after (the battles) to rout out elements of sympathizers because he spoke German," Fisher said.

In his book, "he was explicit about what he did and how it made him uncomfortable," Fisher added.

With the surrender, Gray went to Munich to help set up a university.

The first glimmer of the dance production germinated when Fisher was assigned an oral history project while he was a student at Santa Fe Prep. He decided to interview his grandmother Ursula on tape. Like most wartime survivors, she had avoided talking about the past.

"It was very emotional," said Fisher, who is now a teacher at Santa Fe Prep. "She said she died one death at Dresden in 1945 and had a second life in the U.S. with my grandfather."

Between 22,000 and 25,000 people perished during the massive bombing by U.S. and R.A.F. aircraft toward the end of the war. Most of the victims were civilians. The city contained few military targets and the four raids became one of the war's causes célèbres as historians argued whether or not the bombings were justified. Many residents hid and died in their coal cellars, where they suffocated or were incinerated as the walls collapsed. The bombings ignited thousands of fires.

"They weren't expecting it at all," Fisher said. "When it started, they thought it was a false alarm."

Ursula, her mother and sister headed for the coal cellar. But they could feel the walls buckling as the bombs exploded. They ran out into the streets and into a park, blackened in soot. Then, they realized the Russians were marching into the city. Terrified of being raped, the two sisters stashed their mother out in the country while they



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Choreographer Curtis Uhlemann, right, directs members of ARCOS Dance in a rehearsal of "The Warriors" at the Center for Contemporary Art.

headed west to Munich on bicycles.

"She said the American occupation wasn't that great, either," Fisher added.

Ursula remained in Munich when the war ended, heading a secretarial pool for the university system. It was there that she met her husband. American soldiers were cautioned against fraternizing with the locals.

"All her friends said, 'You're a traitor,'" Fisher said. "They were not supposed to talk to each other."

When Ursula discovered an orange — a rare post-war treat — on her desk, she realized Gray had left it there for her. Thus began their courtship.

Gray had always made a clear distinction between the German culture that he loved and the rise of the Third Reich, Fisher said.

To distill the story into a collaborative dance project, Fisher began with his high school interview and a BBC documentary audiotape interview with the couple recorded after the war.

Dance was Ursula's passion; she had studied with well-known modernist German choreographers in Germany. She taught dance in Colorado Springs well in to her 80s, her grandson said.

In Santa Fe, ARCOS turned

the stage into a snowy canvas for image projection, anchored by a white baby grand piano. It opens with Fisher struggling to compose music for his grandmother's memorial.

ARCOS co-founder and associate director Erica Gionfriddo selected sections from Gray's diary excerpts to choreograph. A scene set in a cave packed with refugees called for claustrophobic

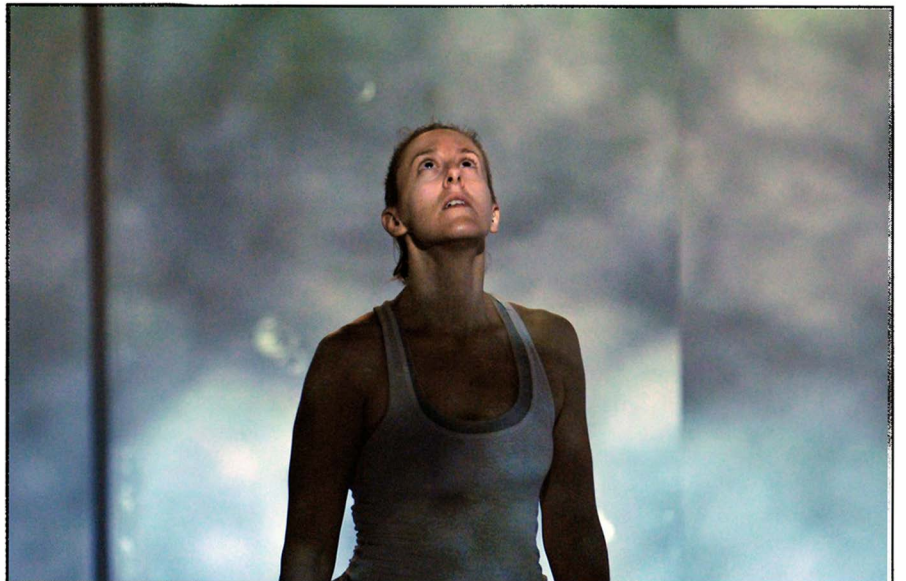
expression.

"I started experimenting with a wall, where I couldn't get away from the wall," she said. Another solo depicts Ursula dancing as a young girl.

"The scenery is done from the projections," Gionfriddo explained. "That's why we have this very minimalist, Bauhaus-inspired set. This is by far our most elaborate and

ambitious show to date."

Drawn from Fisher's own attempts to understand his grandparents' history, "The Warriors" looks at how war shaped their lives and as a result, his own. It depicts the radically anti-war act of falling in love and of using traumatic experiences to spread beauty. Feb. 13-15 marks the 68th anniversary of the bombing of Dresden.



Erica Gionfriddo rehearses on the minimalist set of "The Warriors" at the Center for Contemporary Arts on Saturday.