

The Warriors: A Love Story on Radio Café
Audio Transcript

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: I'm very happy to welcome now to the Radio Café Eliot Fisher, he is multimedia director of ARCOS Dance, and Erica Gionfriddo, who is associate artistic director of ARCOS. And they, along with the whole of ARCOS dance, are presenting *The Warriors: A Love Story*. It opens this weekend and runs for two weekends at the CCA here in Santa Fe. Welcome.

Erica Gionfriddo: Thank you.

Eliot Gray Fisher: Thanks.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: Now, this is a really interesting performance. It's not only dance, it's kind of multimedia and includes theater and video and film and music and all kinds of things. That is based on a very interesting legacy that you, Eliot, have been dealing with for quite a while.

Eliot Gray Fisher: Right. Yeah. I never knew my grandfather. He died before I was born—in 1977. But I grew up hearing about him. He was a Philosophy professor at Colorado College and had written a number of notable books. And his best known was called *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*. And it was based on a journal that he wrote while he was in the war, after he had received his doctorate in Philosophy.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: And this is both, I mean, this book is both a kind of memoir and a work of academic inquiry and philosophy, right?

Eliot Gray Fisher: Right. He was friends with Hannah Arendt, and sort of a philosophical comrade of hers. They had a number of similar ideas about how technology and the other trappings of the 20th century were affecting humanity, and our relationship with each other and with the world. So yeah, he used his personal experiences and kind of confessed to what soldiers do in a way that many don't like to do.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: Right.

Eliot Gray Fisher: And used these sort of concrete real world examples to illustrate larger points about the direction that we were moving. We are moving still.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: Meanwhile, your grandmother, the woman he married, was a German artist who lived through the bombings in Dresden.

Eliot Gray Fisher: Right, right.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: In 1945.

Eliot Gray Fisher: Yeah. And, and he dedicated the book to her. And he says, and we use this dedication in the show “to Ursula, my wife, formerly one of ‘the enemy,’ in quotes, you know, and he examines the idea of how the image of the enemy is constructed. And yeah, they married after she escaped the bombing of Dresden. She ended up in Munich, and he returned after the war to help with educational reconstruction. He was helping rebuild the university system in Munich, and de-nazify it. And she was a secretary there. And so they met, and eventually laws got, lax enough for Americans and Germans to actually speak to each other. And they realized that they, you know, were interested in each other and eventually got married, and he took her back to the States.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: So this is something that you have carried with you. What was it like? I mean, you didn’t know your grandfather, but you did know your grandmother quite well.

Eliot Gray Fisher: Yeah. Well, it was—I didn’t think about it, obviously, when I was a lot younger, but she was German and, you know, had an accent. Had experienced things that I wasn’t familiar with until about high school, when I did an oral history project and interviewed her about Dresden. My mom suggested that it would be an interesting project to do about the World War II era that I had in my own family. So really when I was growing up, the thing that I knew about her most was that she was this woman who danced. That was the primary identity that she had before the war and after the war. Before the war in Dresden, she danced with a number of these modern dance innovators in Germany, Mary Wigman and Gret Palucca. And then the war was this sort of interrupting horror. And

afterwards when she came to the States with my grandfather, she started teaching dance classes. And, she did it, you know, I was alive when she was still teaching. I was born, you know, in '83, and she was still teaching well into her mid-seventies.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: And so this legacy of war, and dance, and bombing, and philosophical questioning about war and technology and all of that is something that you have decided to work with as an art piece. What has it been like to kind of work this stuff out through art?

Eliot Gray Fisher: Well, I've been wanting to tell this story in some way for a long time. And then in the past year with ARCOS Dance, we've been experimenting more and more with the idea of multimedia performance. Not just dance performance or a theatrical performance or video, but really integrating all of these different forms in a way that creates a compelling experience for the audience. And with this story, it seemed like the perfect theme to attempt another multimedia production in that way. Because, like you said, it's dealing with philosophy and words and text, and it's dealing with dance. And all of the imagery and archival footage, from that really started to boom in World War II. I mean, I think that's one of the reasons we have so—that it's still so present with us today, is that that was the time when all of a sudden there was sound film, you know. And this wave, this swath of media was created, which is one of the things he was talking—my grandfather was talking about in his book.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: Right, right. So you, Erica, are a dancer in this performance, and you also have been participating very much in it.

Erica Gionfriddo: Mm-hmm.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: How have you kind of internalized this whole other era in history to bring it into the work?

Erica Gionfriddo: Well, obviously Eliot's grandmother Ursula was of the biggest interest to me in the whole story, and her legacy with Modern Dance. And...

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: Do you play her, so to speak?

Erica Gionfriddo: I don't actually. There's another dancer portraying her in a very abstract way at the beginning of the show. But her story and I—my meeting with her in 2009, we went up and visited her for a few days in Colorado. Meeting this woman who shared the studio with these modern dance greats that I learned about in college and wrote papers on. And she had stories about them. Later in life, when she was teaching at Colorado College. She also danced with Hanya Holm, who was another, you know, modern dance figure in my history. So she was, of the most interest to me. So I kind of delved into that from the very beginning and how can we bring that aspect of her young dance life to the stage in some sort of interpretation. And we do kind of a modern dance homage piece where we try to recreate the feeling of modern dance and blend it with contemporary movement and bring it into the present day.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: The feeling of modern dance, although—I mean, it's called modern dance, but it feels kind of dated at this point.

Erica Gionfriddo: It does, it does. It was modern at the time, and there's a lot of, not controversy, but a lot of conversation over what modern dance is today, in 2013. And the word contemporary is thrown around, but it's really going through another evolution. So taking a look back at Modern Dance in its early stages has been a very interesting process.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: Yeah. I mean, what does it feel like now? I remember when I first moved to Santa Fe, probably about 20 years ago, the Martha Graham Dance Company...

Erica Gionfriddo: Mm-hmm.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: ...came and performed here in Santa Fe, and I couldn't wait. I mean, Martha Graham was already gone by then, but her company lived on, and they did some of the pieces for which she was the most famous. And I went to it, and I was excited and I watched it, and it was like watching archeology. It was just so incredibly dated, and I was not enjoying myself. And I thought, okay, hang on. It is 1946. I just put myself in that mind space.

Erica Gionfriddo: Exactly.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: I am watching this for the first time. We are dealing with the nuclear bomb and all of that. And then suddenly it got really good. But you had to shift your head.

Erica Gionfriddo: Exactly. Exactly. Well, the interesting thing about Ursula is that, you know, when we think of modern dance and especially German expressionist modern dance, it's very angsty, and very much dealing with the political flavor of the time. And Ursula's tendency was not towards that at all. She really loved the beautiful side of it. That's why she was more attracted to Gret Palucca who was dancing for the love of beauty, and the love of movement. And that's really what we tried to pull through in this show is that—the show itself is very dark and very intense at times. But for this one scene, we're trying to really capture that part of the joy of movement is just beauty, and just expression through the body.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: We're talking to Erica Gionfriddo and Eliot Fisher about *The Warriors: A Love Story*. Now, in this multimedia performance, you have not only dance and theater, but also like home movies, archival footage, still photographs.

Eliot Gray Fisher: Yeah, there's a wide range of visual images that are projected onto our set. The set is—was designed by Chad Everett, in town here. And it's all white, to enable the projections to really pop when they happen. Very minimalist, kind of Bauhaus inspired. And the images that we project on there, yeah, there's a wide variety. I incorporate some digitized home movies from my childhood. There's propaganda cartoons that were made by both the Germans and the Americans. We've got still images that, digital composites that were made by my father Rick Fisher, who taught for many years at the College of Santa Fe. And there's a scene that's inspired by a little moment in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, that shows a scene of a bombing—a film about bombing, running backwards. So yeah, there's—as much as possible, we try to see how the live performers can interact with these projected images and videos. It's really all about integration, you know, as opposed to sort of, we're watching dance, and now we're watching a video, and now we're watching

a theatrical scene. They all sort of overlap and are running constantly, just at different levels throughout the show.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: Very interesting. And then when all is said and done, you come back to the present and back to the question, what does this horrible war and this horrible period in history mean to us, especially in the context of all the wars and genocides that have happened since then?

Eliot Gray Fisher: Right. Yeah. Yeah. It's, it's sad that my grandfather's book is probably more relevant today than when he published it in 1959. He kind of foresees the technological evolution and the continued alienation, that we are experiencing in our, in warfare today, you know. We're so much more disconnected. He talks about a little bit about the distancing that a bomber pilot might feel from the actual impact of what they're doing on the ground and the, the human lives that they're affecting. Today—and we actually incorporate a little bit of news footage from a couple years ago about drones. You know, the drones are flown remote controlled. They're done here in the United States, and the people go home in the evening after a day's work, you know?

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: Right. A day's work of moving little knobs around that probably looks something like a video game.

Eliot Gray Fisher: Right, right.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: Killing any number of people.

Eliot Gray Fisher: Yeah. So one of the challenges that we've had trying to put this show together is how to communicate the vehemently peaceful messages and lives and actions of my grandfather and grandmother, in a piece about war. I mean, you know, he acknowledges in the book how the two are intimately connected, you know, that they can't exist without each other. War and peace. And, you know, that there is something compelling about war, extremely compelling to many, many people. So we've been trying to get at the question of how, how do we get to a point where it's less compelling? You know, that's what he was trying to approach. And he

and my grandmother, in the way that they lived their lives, and the values with which they raised their daughters, was an example of that.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: The piece is called *The Warriors: A Love Story*, and the performances are this weekend and next weekend at the CCA. Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30, and Sundays at 2:00 in the afternoon. You can find out more at arcosdance.com. The number for tickets is 473-7434. You can also look on the website of ccasantafe.org. 982-1338. Eliot Fisher is multimedia director, and Erica Gionfriddo is Associate Director of ARCOS Dance. And we want to thank you so much for being here. We will see you this weekend and next week. I want to say that this Muñoz-Waxman Gallery, which is the side building to, on the outside of the regular CCA building where the cinematheque is a fantastic space. And there's a wonderful exhibition going on in the front of the...

Erica Gionfriddo: Yes.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: ...of that same space where you guys are dancing in the back.

Eliot Gray Fisher: Yeah, definitely. A couple, a few hundred, watercolors by Michelle Blade...

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: Michelle Blade, who we had on the air. She did a painting every single day of the year last year.

Erica Gionfriddo: Mm-hmm.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: Those are all on display.

Erica Gionfriddo: She did. They're beautiful. They're very, very dark and take a very interesting look at the whole year of 2012. And it's a really nice complement. We got to spend some time with her when she was here.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: Excellent.

Eliot Gray Fisher: Yeah, it'll be fun for the audience to be able to see that exhibit on the way in. Yeah.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: Right. Okay, good. Well, thanks again for being with us on the Radio Café.

Erica Gionfriddo: Thanks.

Eliot Gray Fisher: Thanks Mary-Charlotte.

Mary-Charlotte Domandi: And we're going to go out with a little bit of actual footage of Eliot's grandparents talking to one another in an interview.

[tape hiss]

J. Glenn Gray: Curiously enough, in my journals, I often felt that I would marry a German girl.

Ursula Gray: Glenn had been in the war, but he came as a military government officer. I never knew him as a soldier.

J. Glenn Gray: ...an education branch of...

Ursula Gray: And he opened the university...

J. Glenn Gray: the military government.

Ursula Gray: ...of Munich.

J. Glenn Gray: She was our chief secretary.

Ursula Gray: I was in charge of German personnel. We were strictly forbidden not to fraternize.

J. Glenn Gray: It happens in every war that many marriages between former enemies take place,

Ursula Gray: Americans and Germans were not supposed to talk to each other.

J. Glenn Gray: My wife feels, however, that she never was an enemy of mine.

Ursula Gray: He found destructive business of war was too much. He wanted to come and do something constructive.

J. Glenn Gray: And I dedicate my book to her. It runs to Ursula, formerly one of the enemy.

Ursula Gray: So we didn't talk, but I found one orange on my desk.

J. Glenn Gray: It never occurred to me that one shouldn't do this, that this was inappropriate.

Ursula Gray: And this was the first sign of attraction or getting together.

J. Glenn Gray: And I fell in love with her and married her.

Ursula Gray: My friends, when they heard I married an American, they were very angry. They said, "How can you? You are a traitor. How could you? The Americans bombed Dresden, and here you marry an American?" And I lost many friends.

J. Glenn Gray: And I think of, uh, the old Greek myth of the marriage of love and war. One of their children was named Harmonia.

Ursula Gray: Glenn was a human being, and so fine, and so sensitive, and so it made no difference what nationality.

J. Glenn Gray: And I fell in love with her and married her. I fell and married her and married her. I fell and married her and married her.