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# Dancing One Survivor's Story, Nashville Ballet Joins A Chain of Holocaust Memory-Keeper

By [KARA MCLELAND \(/PEOPLE/KARA-MCLELAND\)](/PEOPLE/KARA-MCLELAND) • 1 HOUR AGO

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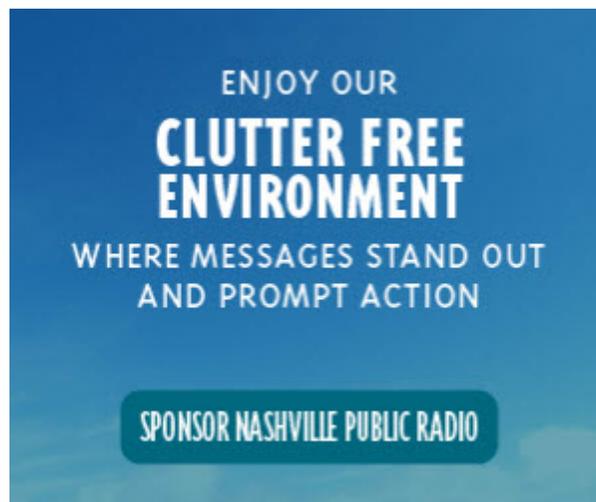
TONY SPIELBERG / NASHVILLE BALLET



When a ballet about the Holocaust was first suggested to Stephen Mills, Artistic Director and choreographer for Ballet Austin, it struck him as the “worst idea ever.” It wasn’t until he met Naomi Warren, who survived three concentration camps while her family did not, that Mills felt moved to create

*Light / The Holocaust and Humanity Project.* The ballet, which centers around Warren's story, will receive its local premiere with Nashville Ballet this weekend (<http://www.nashvilleballet.com/attitude-light/>).

In a 2010 TEDxSMU talk, Mills gives all the reasons he was initially hesitant about the project: he isn't Jewish, he wasn't particularly educated in Holocaust history, and no one close to him served in WWII. "Who am I to co-op somebody else's story, particularly a story as profound as that?" Mills asked. Warren's response was simple: Mills must tell the story because he had the platform to do so.



So Mills threw himself into research by reading, interviewing survivors and travelling to Europe to visit the sites of former concentration camps. When he realized that a single ballet wasn't enough to tackle such a large topic, he teamed up with organizations across Austin to give audiences a variety of ways to access the subject. The result was a combination that included lectures, art exhibits, accounts from survivors of genocide, and finally, the ballet.

Nashville has followed suit with a similar interdisciplinary approach. An exhibit of portraits of Holocaust survivors and liberators living in Tennessee is on display through February 28th at the Nashville Ballet. In partnership with the Tennessee Human Rights Commission, Nashville Ballet has also hosted community conversations and open rehearsals centered around historic and current issues of social justice.

All events are reflective of a city-wide initiative, anchored by Nashville Symphony's Violins of Hope (<http://www.violinsofhopensh.com/>), an exhibit of and performance with instruments played in concentration camps during the Holocaust.

Nashville Ballet Artistic Director and CEO Paul Vasterling recognizes the relevance of Mills' ballet and the conversation it sparks in communities: "*Light* is a timely reminder of the fragility of human rights," he said in statement about the work, adding that it is an "especially poignant example of that as we not only reflect on the past, but also consider the present and our personal responsibility when we see acts of injustice today."

Nashville Ballet's performance will feature Mills' original choreography, set to music by Steve Reich, Evelyn Glennie, Michael Gordon, Arvo Pärt and Philip Glass. Mills, Vasterling, and Tennessee Human Rights Commission Executive Director Beverly Watts will host a talkback following each performance.

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