

## **ELIOTT CHERRY**

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### **Author/Performer of *A Finished Heart***

#### **Bio:**

Elliott Cherry is a performing artist and LGBTQ activist who works to instill empathy as the most important agent of social change.

Originally trained as a composer (BA, Leonard Davis Center for the Performing Arts, City College of New York) with concurrent study as pianist and cellist, he was active as a freelance musician and teacher in Portland, Maine for nearly thirty years. Elliott also developed a passion for helping people support emotional and physical health. He studied to become a licensed massage therapist and maintained a private practice for thirteen years.

In 2009, Elliott combined his dedication to wellness, artistic expression and social justice by creating his one-man show, *A Finished Heart*. The 65-minute piece weaves together storytelling, dialogue, poetry and a musical score. Elliott has focused exclusively on performing this work since its inception.

*A Finished Heart* brings people to empathize deeply with two men in love who are navigating the most critical time in their lives. As audience members are immersed in this intimacy that is real, they see and feel how same-sex marriage is normal and beautiful. Elliott has a four-point vision for this work: 1) increase and protect full acceptance of LGBTQ lives; 2) model and help people strengthen compassionate communication and care; 3) inspire relationships by sharing the universal, human experiences of love and loss; and 4) create profoundly welcoming and affirming environments for LGBTQ people at venues ranging from schools to military bases.

Elliott is available for performances in Europe as well as the United States.

#### **Relevant Experience & Background:**

In the 1990s with his husband, Chris Chenard and the Maine Speakout Project (MSOP), Elliott co-founded the annual *Walk With the Ones You Love* in the city of Portland to bring visibility and safety to same-sex couples walking hand-in-hand through neighborhood parks. In 2007, the Walk was declared by the mayor as a vital, community-building event. Elliott served as president of the board of MSOP, which trained LGBTQ volunteers to engage audiences throughout the state with stories of their lives. He later worked as an organizer with ground-breaking marriage equality campaigns in Maine, New Jersey and Oregon.

Elliott and Chris shared their lives for sixteen years before Chris developed pancreatic cancer with three months to live. As Chris died, Elliott cared for him at home and kept a detailed journal of their tender and often humorous conversations. He also wrote extensive poetry after Chris' death. Elliott created his one-man show, *A Finished Heart*, to perform these dialogues and poems combined with a narrative of care that, as an audience member writes, expresses "the absolute

essence of what it means to be committed to love." Elliott composed music for the piece that helps individuals enter into a world of reflection and intimacy. Current productions utilize a recorded version of the score, allowing for a solo performance. The 65-minute performance is followed by Q&A and discussion, during which audience members are invited to share their own stories, thoughts and feelings.

## **Credits:**

*A Finished Heart* has been presented in collaboration with universities, non-profit organizations, high schools, libraries and municipalities. It has received support from many state and regional granting organizations in both New England and Oregon. *A Finished Heart* has been utilized for clinical continuing education approved by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). With great educational value across many academic disciplines related to healthcare, education and human development, aging, psychology, communication and the arts, the show provides unique, collaborative opportunities to build student audiences and assist with performance funding.

There have been forty-two productions of *A Finished Heart*.  
University shows (seven) are indicated in bold:

### *Vermont:*

- May 19, 2018: Chandler Center for the Arts, Randolph
- May 18, 2018: Shelburne Town Hall
- May 17, 2018: Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Norwich

### *Oregon:*

- May 4, 2018: SE Uplift Neighborhood Coalition, Portland
- September 26, 2017: Clinton Street Theater, Portland
- May 7, 2017: Abbey Arts, Portland
- April 6, 2017: 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue Peace House, Portland
- February 14, 2016: Art Haus Theater, Portland
- December 6, 2015: Art Haus Theater, Portland
- November 12, 2015: Q Center, Portland
- November 5, 2015: Hillsboro Public Library
- November 1, 2015: Art Haus Theater, Portland
- August 27, 2015: Q Center, Portland
- April 30, 2015: Portland City Hall Auditorium
- September 25, 2014: Columbia Ecovillage, Portland
- May 25, 2014: First Unitarian Church, Portland
- April 13, 2014: Q Center, Portland
- March 23, 2014: Integrated Healing Studio, Portland

### *Washington:*

- November 16, 2014: Congregation Kol Ami, Vancouver

### *New Jersey:*

- October 20, 2013: Private Home Performance, Bedminster

### *Maine:*

- July 14, 2013: Chautauqua-by-the-Sea, Ocean Park Association, Ocean Park
- April 8, 2013: The Community School, New Gloucester
- March 7, 2013: Auburn Public Library
- November 15, 2012: **University of New England, Portland**
- October 11, 2012: **Holocaust & Human Rights Center, University of Maine, Augusta**
- September 29, 2012: **University of Southern Maine, Gorham**
- May 10, 2012: Rockland Public Library
- April 27, 2012: **University of Southern Maine, Portland** (New England Consortium on Life Stories)
- March 16, 2012: Congregation Bet Ha'am, South Portland
- February 22, 2012: **University of New England, Portland**
- October 19, 2011: **University of Maine, Orono**
- June 23, 2011: High Street Congregational Church, Auburn
- June 17, 2011: Unitarian Universalist Community Church, Augusta
- April 13, 2011: **University of Southern Maine, Portland**
- February 21, 2011: Private Home Performance, Topsham
- January 22, 2011: First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church, Portland
- November 10, 2010: Private Home Performance, Falmouth
- June 12, 2010: Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church, Portland
- May 5, 2010: Private Home Performance, Portland
- January 22, 2010: Private Home Performance, Gorham
- October 17, 2009: Private Home Performance, Brunswick

### *Massachusetts:*

- November 14, 2011: Cambridge Public Library

### **Major Clients & Supporters:**

**University Performances:** University of Southern Maine, Portland (2); University of Southern Maine, Gorham; University of Maine, Augusta; University of Maine, Orono, New England University, Portland (2); **Maine Organizations:** Maine Arts Commission; Maine Humanities Council; Maine Community Foundation; American Association of Critical Care Nurses, Southern Maine Chapter; Chatauqua-by-the-Sea, Ocean Park; Cancer Community Center, Portland; Center for Grieving Children, Portland; Hospice of Southern Maine; Cancer Care Center of York County; Holocaust & Human Rights Center; L/A Arts, Lewiston; Beacon Hospice, Auburn; Edward Little High School, Auburn; Auburn Public Library. **Oregon Organizations:** AARP Oregon Chapter, Regional Arts & Culture Council, Portland; City of Portland; Multnomah County; North Portland Neighborhood Services; Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Coalition, Portland; Clinton Street Theater, Portland; The Dougy Center, Portland; Basic Rights Oregon, Portland; Q Center, Portland; Milepost 5, Portland; Compassion & Choices, Oregon Chapter; **Others:** Simmons College Graduate Program in Primary Health Care Nursing, Boston; Patient Choices Vermont; JSL Foundation, New York; Susan Fife Davis; Carol Ayres.

## Website:

[lgbtqempathy.afinishedheart.com/diversity](http://lgbtqempathy.afinishedheart.com/diversity) is a page at [www.afinishedheart.com](http://www.afinishedheart.com) specifically for colleges; videos are shown for the college market; an additional **video for agents** is listed below under "**Videos.**"

Interview with Elliott Cherry and Holly Pruett, LGBTQ Equality Consultant / Life-Cycle Celebrant:  
<http://deathtalkproject.com/a-finished-heart/>

## Videos:

- **Agents** who wish to view excerpts without any comments from audience or author can visit this link for a 7' video: <http://vimeo.com/afinishedheart/agencyclip>
- For college event planners, the following videos are available by clicking [lgbtqempathy.afinishedheart.com/diversity](http://lgbtqempathy.afinishedheart.com/diversity):
  1. Short Promo (2') - quick performance clips without comments
  2. Audience Remarks (1') - brief comments with no performance excerpts
  3. Showcase Demo (7') - longer scenes with brief author comments

## References:

### *Most recent performances:*

Betsy Walkerman, President, Patient Choices Vermont:  
(802) 899-4641 [Betsy@headwatersstrategy.com](mailto:Betsy@headwatersstrategy.com)

Holly Pruett, LGBTQ Equality Consultant / Life-Cycle Celebrant:  
(503) 348-0967 [hollyjpruett@gmail.com](mailto:hollyjpruett@gmail.com)

### *Additional References:*

"powerful, rich and raw - absolutely mesmerizing from start to finish" [\[read more\]](#) - Susan Kocen, Senior Community Coordinator, Q Center, Portland, Oregon: (503) 234-7837 [susan@pdxqcenter.org](mailto:susan@pdxqcenter.org)

"To be able to laugh in the face of dire circumstances is a gift, and you provided that for us amidst eloquent poetry, beautiful music and pithy dialogue." [\[read more\]](#) - Wil Kilroy, Actor/Director: (207) 415-1687 [wkilroy@nmsu.edu](mailto:wkilroy@nmsu.edu)

"The level of raw emotion shows Elliott's ability to connect with any audience." [\[read more\]](#)  
- Karen Pierce Stewart, Executive Director, Cancer Care Center of York County, Maine

"Working with Elliott was a wonderful experience -- he was a consummate professional and cared deeply for every aspect of the event. I cannot say enough about his devotion to his art and to this piece. I recommend both the art and the man behind it with the warmest regard and appreciation." [\[read more\]](#) - Professor Susan B. Sepples, University of Southern Maine