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Music

BASETRACK

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CALEB WERTENBAKER

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Actors Ashley Bloom and Tyler LaMarr and musicians Kenneth Rodriguez, Daniele Cavalca, Mazz Swift and Trevor Exter take part in BASETRACK Live.

BASETRACK Live

What: multimedia performance experience

When: 7:30 p.m. Wednesday and Oct. 23

Where: Alice Jepson Theater, University of Richmond

Contact: (804) 289-8980;
modlinarts@richmond.edu

By ANNE TIMBERLAKE Special correspondent

Violin, cello, helicopters, gunfire. ...

It's not your usual quartet, but then, BASETRACK Live, a "multimedia performance experience" coming to the Alice Jepson Theater at the Modlin Center for the Arts Wednesday and Oct. 23, is not your usual concert.

BASETRACK Live uses elements of theater, music, visual art and videography to convey the experiences of United States Marines during and after the war in Afghanistan.

"The music is really very much like a strand or a fiber that's woven through this tapestry," said Ed Bilous, BASETRACK Live's creator, and co-composer. "The music, the text, the videos all are different fibers ... sometimes one of those elements

comes to the forefront and sometimes one of them moves to the background.”

“We felt that this was an important story to tell,” Deborah Sommers, the executive director of the Modlin Center for the Arts, said via email. “BASETRACK spotlights experiences that we as civilians often take for granted: the burden and sacrifice experienced by military families.”

BASETRACK Live had its genesis as journalism. Bilous recounted attending an exhibition of photographs by Teru Kuwayama, Balasz Gardi and Tivadar Domaniczky, photojournalists embedded with the 1st battalion, 8th Marine Regiment in southern Afghanistan in 2010-11. In addition to the exhibit, the journalists had set up a website and Facebook page on which Marines could share their experiences with family members.

Bilous, who directs the Center for Innovation in the Arts at The Juilliard School, saw an opportunity to create a new kind of artwork, one tailor-made for our hyperlinked lives.

“There’s a famous quote of (French composer Claude) Debussy in which he says, ‘The age of the airplane needs a music of its own.’ And I think that’s really what we’re experiencing here is that our age of media and Internet and interconnectivity is developing an artistic language of its own.”

Working with a slate of collaborators, including producer and experimental theater veteran Anne Hamburger, Bilous intercut the journalists’ images and the Marines’ own words with music, video and theatrical elements.

“The photos and the text are verbatim work ... the images are the actual photos taken from Afghanistan,” Bilous said. “The original part of the show is the musical score that provides a kind of emotional underpinning and glues the project together.”

Musical director Michelle DiBucci was responsible for assembling the score, which includes pre-existing compositions, some by Bilous, original music by Greg Kalember, and the sounds of war: guns cocking, helicopters lifting off.

Like its music, BASETRACK Live is a tough show to pigeonhole.

But it does have a story to tell.