

AMERICAN THEATRE

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Tyler LaMarr performs in 'BASETRACK Live' from En Garde Arts (photo courtesy of En Garde Arts)

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'BASETRACK Live' Marks Reboot of En Garde Arts

BY DIEP TRAN

NATIONWIDE: To many people, Anne Hamburger's decision to step down as executive V.P. of Walt Disney Creative Entertainment to produce Off-Broadway theatre may seem a little unusual. Or, in her own words, "It was so insane!"

For eight years at Disney, Hamburger overlooked the stage shows, parades and general entertainment programming for Disney theme parks worldwide. One day, after she had launched the 50th anniversary programming at Disneyland—which included a nighttime fireworks display called "Remember... Dreams Come True," in which Tinker Bell flew over Sleeping Beauty's castle—Hamburger was sitting on Main Street in the park. Suddenly, a thought came to her, "More people are seeing the results of my creative work on this day than have seen the creative work of my entire artistic career!" In retrospect, she says, "There was something so wonderful and so depressing about that."

Her previous career was high-profile in its own way, if not as widely exposed. From 1985 to 1999, Hamburger ran En Garde Arts, a company she founded to focus on [site-specific productions](#), from Jonathan Larson's *J.P. Morgan Saves the Nation* on Wall Street to Reza Abdoh's *Father Was a Peculiar Man*, performed throughout New York's meatpacking district. After that, she briefly served as artistic director of California's [La Jolla Playhouse](#), then took the job with Disney.

After leaving Disney, she returned to New York City and rebooted [her nonprofit](#). Her first new production, though not site-specific, is boundary-breaking in its own way, and fulfills one of her company's main goals: community engagement. *BASETRACK Live* is a documentary multimedia theatre piece about Marine veterans coming home from war. It incorporates real-life photographs taken by Marines, videos and interviews with veterans. The project takes its name and inspiration from [Base-track](#), a citizen journalism project created by Teru Kuwayama, designed to give Marines a platform to document their experiences and showcase photos from the front. Composer Edward Bilous saw the photos and decided to adapt it into a multimedia piece; Hamburger saw an early workshop version of Bilous's work at Juilliard, and approached him about developing it into a full-length touring piece. She brought on writer/director Seth Bockley and playwright Jason Grote to adapt the Basetrack material. The writers also took the work further, conducting original interviews with more than 100 veterans and their families and incorporating material from than 500 pages of transcribed text into the piece.

In *BASETRACK Live*, two actors (Tyler La Marr and Ashley Bloom) portray real-life Marine AJ Czubai and his wife Melissa, following their journey as a couple from his tour in Afghanistan to his battle with PTSD and his readjustment to civilian life. "His story is complicated and hopeful," says Hamburger. "He's a young guy when he goes to war. He's naïve, as many of these guys are." He was also away when she gave birth—or as present as he could be: "There's a part in the piece where he tells her to 'push' over the phone."

Intertwined with their story are videos and photos of real-life Marines, with original music composed by Bilous (who co-directs with Bockley), Michelle Dibucci and Greg Kalember. The show has been touring the country since its premiere in Austin on Sept. 11, and its upcoming dates include engagements at [University of Richmond](#) and [Brooklyn Academy of Music](#) (a complete tour schedule is below).

One concern Hamburger had when touring the show was how veterans would react. "There's a lot of nervousness. These guys have been through such awful things. Is it going to bring them down? Is it going to be cathartic?" Early reports have been positive: "They are so flooded with relief. This one guy just started weeping afterwards, talking about how meaningful this was for him."

She hopes it will have a similar impact on non-veterans, as well. "Part of what's been a driving force for me in my entire career is bringing people together who aren't normally in conversation," she says, noting that the military and theatre are "strange bedfellows" who don't usually mix. "That was the instinct behind the original En Garde Arts and what I'm doing now." Mission accomplished.

UPCOMING BASETRACK TOUR DATES:

Kansas State University (Oct. 14, 2014)

Lied Center of Kansas (Oct. 15, 2014)

Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts (Oct. 18, 2014)

University of Richmond (Oct. 22–23, 2014) in Va.

Penn State Center for the Performing Arts (Oct. 29, 2014) in Pa.

University of Maryland (Nov. 1, 2014)

University of North Carolina–Wilmington (Nov. 6, 2014)

Virginia Tech (Nov. 8, 2014)

Brooklyn Academy of Music (Nov. 11–15, 2014) in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Bucknell University (Nov. 18, 2014) in Lewisburg, Pa.

Adelphi University (Nov. 20, 2014) in Garden City, N.Y., and

Purchase College (Nov. 22, 2014) in Purchase, N.Y.

Krannert Center for the Performing Arts (March 18, 2015) in Urbana, Ill.

MDC Live Arts (March 21, 2015) in Cutler Bay, Fla.

Westbrook Performing Arts Center (March 26, 2015) in Portland, Maine.