

The Boston Globe

For ex-Marine at center stage in ‘Basetrack Live,’ war was no act

By **Terry Byrne** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MARCH 25, 2015

When Tyler La Marr graduated from Marymount Manhattan College last year, he was, like most theater majors, just hoping to get a foothold in the business. But when he heard about a war-related theater piece called “Basetrack Live,” he knew he had an edge over the competition: La Marr is a US Marine veteran who served two tours of duty in Iraq as an analyst.

“Basetrack Live” is a work of documentary theater that uses interviews with one Marine and his wife before, during, and after his deployment to Afghanistan, and combines those interviews with photographs taken by journalists embedded with the First Battalion, Eighth Marines, as well as videos and music. The play was developed by En Garde Arts from materials gathered from “Basetrack,” a social media platform that allowed servicemen and servicewomen to stay in contact with their



BASETRACK LIVE

Tyler La Marr and Ashley Bloom in “Basetrack Live.”

families and serve as online citizen journalists. The production, which began a national tour last fall and arrives for one performance on Friday at the Carling Sorenson Theater at Babson College, has been hailed for its honest and gritty depiction of the impact of war on ordinary people.

The Globe spoke to La Marr by phone while he was in Florida on one of the tour's stops.

Q. How did you land this role?

A. I feel like the universe was telling me I was on the right track. You don't come right out of college and get a leading role in a national tour, but I am a Marine, and I knew I could tell the story. It was as if one of my boys was telling my story.

Q. What elements of your own military experience do you bring to the production?

A. The play focuses on the impact of war on infantrymen, specifically AJ Czubai and his wife, Melissa, and although I didn't serve in the infantry, I was in Iraq, in Fallujah in 2006-2007, and then in Fallujah and Ramadi in 2007-2008. I know how it feels to struggle with reentry to civilian life. My transition was not as severe as AJ's, but adjusting back to everyday life, where it's so quiet, is hard.

Q. As a Marine veteran yourself, do you think the play accurately represents the infantrymen?

A. There are so many details in the show that accurately portray the Marine culture. Everyone has tattoos — I mean everyone. I have five myself. And there are a lot of photos of food, because they say when you come out of the Marines you're either benching 300 pounds or weighing 300 pounds.

Q. Did you have any suggestions as the creative team put the piece together?

A. Everything Ashley [Bloom, who plays Melissa Czubai] and I say is verbatim from the interviews with AJ and Melissa. Our contribution as actors involved shaping the arc of the play, but [adapter] Jason Grote did a great job.

Q. What makes this play different from other war-themed plays?

A. These are not fictional characters; they are real people, telling visceral stories of experiences most people don't even talk about. In the early rehearsals we worked hard to keep that honesty up front. The greatest thrill I had was having AJ Czubai in the audience when we performed in Austin [Texas]. He said he was proud of us, and that meant so much to me. I think this show also provides a different perspective on war and the people who serve. Everyone has such limited exposure to what's really going on and what kind of an impact it has on families. I think this adds another dimension.

Q. What's next for you?

A. I also run a nonprofit called the Society of Artistic Veterans, to help veterans who want some guidance with becoming an artist, a writer, an actor, singer, or dancer. We have already had a gallery showing and a showcase at NYU, and we hope to get the word out to vets and the arts world about what veterans bring to the table.

Interview was edited and condensed. Terry Byrne can be reached at trbyrne@aol.com.

Basetrack Live

Carling-Sorenson Theater, Babson College,
Wellesley 866-811-4111.
<http://www.babsonarts.org>

Writers: Edward Bilous, Jason Grote, Seth
Bockley

Director: Bockley

Other Credits: Adapted by: Anne Hamburger

Performing company: En Garde Arts

Date of first performance: Friday

Ticket price: \$25