

## Some of Nashville's most accomplished musicians pay tribute to members of the military past and present in the Alias Fall Concert

**By Russell Johnston**

published: November 05, 2009

Details: *Alias Fall Concert 8 p.m. Nov. 11 at Turner Recital Hall*



Trust Nashville's eclectic Alias chamber ensemble to come up with a program where a Stravinsky piece seems like the old standby. The all-volunteer group's cooperative structure allows players to choose pieces that interest them, which helps to account for both the unusual repertoire and the powerful conviction of their performances. After all, nothing beats good musicians who really believe in what they're playing.

This fall's Alias concert features a Veterans Day theme, a world premiere from a world-renowned composer, and further selections in an ongoing series of old and new music by female composers. Oh, and that comfortingly familiar Stravinsky, of course.

Pulitzer winner Paul Moravec recomposed his "Always, Always" especially for this concert. Alias violinist and artistic director Zeneba Bowers says she was looking for high-caliber works to fit a Veterans Day theme, and she came across Moravec's 1997 *Songs of Love and War*, a work originally scored for chorus, strings, trumpet and baritone solo, which draws texts from soldiers' personal correspondence during various American wars.

Bowers contacted the composer, who agreed to create a chamber version of the movement based on a Civil War major's letter to his wife. "It's truly incredible," Bowers says, "that a group the size and age of Alias is performing a world premiere by such a major composer. We are thrilled."

Also on the Veterans Day theme, the concert features *An Unlikely Suspect* by guitarist/composer Jason Sagebiel, who also served as a Marine sniper in Iraq. The piece itself has no overtly bellicose leanings, but strives for lyrical expressiveness even while smuggling in some highly abstract compositional approaches.

Alias also continues its Emerging Voices series, devoted to works by both living and historical female composers. Amy Beach was the first female American composer to be successful in large-scale forms, including symphony, concerto and opera. Her career straddled eras, stretching from the 1890s almost until her death in 1944, though her work is generally Romantic in character.

The concert includes two songs from early in Beach's mature output, and two from her prime. Her 1892 "Ecstasy" sold enough copies to fund her purchase of land for a small country house where she could work in peace. By 1924, Beach was recognized as a leading American composer, and she became a founder and the first president of the Society of American Woman Composers. Her *Two Songs for Voice, Violin, Cello, and Piano*, Op. 100 appeared in a festival concert of the newly formed society.

Nancy Galbraith's 1996 String Quartet No. 1 is the first of three works the composer has written for the Cuarteto Latinoamericano. Galbraith serves as chair of composition at Carnegie-Mellon. Her music reveals some minimalist influences—particularly in its proclivity for polyrhythm—but an emotionally demonstrative aesthetic makes her much more than just a follower. Alias cellist Matt Walker says the piece seems deliberately less specific than many modern scores in its dynamic and interpretive markings, leaving much room for performers to shape the work's expressive character.

And yes, Stravinsky's 1932 *Suite Italienne* may sound familiar even if you've never heard it before, since the composer drew its material from his neoclassical landmark *Pulcinella*. He worked with the great cellist Gregor Piatigorsky to rework parts of the 1920 ballet into a showpiece for cello and piano.

As always, proceeds from the nonprofit ensemble's concert will go to a local charity. For this performance, the benefiting organization is Next Stage, which provides assistance to homeless veterans—a fitting cause for a program that honors their sacrifice.