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## ALIAS tunes up to honor veterans

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The tough thing about playing Bach these days? He's pretty hard to get in touch with if you have questions. Not so with some of the composers in the ALIAS chamber ensemble's new season, which kicks off on Veterans Day with a charity concert for homeless former soldiers.

In fact, the concert was shaped by conversations with the composers through Facebook. Zeneba Bowers, artistic director of ALIAS, used the social networking site to get up-to-the-minute advice on the music from the people who wrote it.

"Facebook has seriously made a major difference in the programming because it puts you in contact with people," she said. "It's ridiculous. I can't even believe it."

"I just friended Steve Reich today!" she added, cracking up.

Reich, the fabled experimental composer, has plenty of peers on Facebook. Bowers used the site to sound out a group of composers for music honoring veterans that wasn't the usual fare. They led her to Jason Sagebiel, a New York-based composer, guitarist and former Marine Corps sergeant. She played clips of his music to her ALIAS cohorts, and they wound up not only picking one of his pieces to play, but inviting him to the concert as well.

Bowers also used Facebook to correspond with Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Paul Moravec, who re-arranged an older piece of his for ALIAS to debut. It's a big coup for the ensemble because Moravec's star has risen quickly since he won his Pulitzer in 2004, the same year ALIAS last played one of his pieces.

"This is really huge for any group, really," said Bowers.

### Honoring veterans with music, donations

For the first concert of the new season, Bowers wanted to play music that would show respect for veterans without glorifying the wars they fought. She also didn't want any kooky stuff.

"A lot of the stuff I was finding was written by people who appeared to be stalking soldiers' families," she said.

That's when she sent out her Facebook ping to 15 composers. Soon she found Sagebiel, who studied the oud, an Arabic stringed instrument, while he was deployed in Iraq.

The piece of his that ALIAS will play is a meandering, thoughtful work for cello, harp, oboe and violin. It's called *An Unlikely Suspect*; Sagebiel wrote it in part to disprove an old composition professor who used to say that anyone who didn't write conventional, tonal melodies was "suspect."

"I don't feel the need to have to write the music of the past to be validated today, and so the premise of the piece was to write the most beautiful melodies I could, using the most highly structured and serialized mathematical backgrounds to the music," he said.

The Paul Moravec piece is part of a suite he wrote in 1997 called *Songs of Love and War*, which took letters to and from the fronts of four American wars and set them to music. ALIAS will play a piece built around a letter from a Union major to his wife in the early days of the Civil War.

"There are some pieces that are designed to be public," said Moravec. "Certainly this work falls in that category . . . I want it to be useful to people."

ALIAS will donate proceeds from the concert to Next Stage, a local nonprofit serving homeless veterans.

### Waving the flag for women composers

The other half of the concert continues ALIAS' Emerging Voices series, which puts the spotlight on women composers. Amy Beach, who became the first significant female composer in America in the late 19th century, and Nancy Galbraith, a postmodern composer based in Pittsburgh, are on the bill.

"What's compelling to me is that we were finding huge amounts of (women) composers from the Baroque era, from the classical era, and people didn't really know about that," said Bowers. "And not just that they existed, but they were writing really great stuff." Rounding out the bill is Stravinsky's *Suite Italienne* for cello and piano.

Emerging Voices will continue in February with a pair of pieces written more than 300 years apart by Bianca Maria Meda, a Benedictine nun in 17th-century Italy, and Belinda Reynolds, who sometimes creates modern music to be performed on baroque instruments.

The series will wrap up in May.