

## Stories for the Homefront

How do military parents stay connected to their young children from afar? Ask Travis '96 and Alia Blau Reese '95.

By Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

WHEN **TRAVIS '96** AND **ALIA BLAU REESE '95** welcomed their first child, Emma, in 2002, they both knew that Travis would be absent for long periods during Emma's earliest months and years. When the family settled in Camp Lejeune, N.C., a month after Emma was born, Travis was required to spend one to three weeks at a time, at regular intervals, in Virginia Beach, preparing for deployment to Afghanistan as part of the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit. The deployment came when Emma was 18 months old.

"I'll never forget," says Alia, of the day the postman rang the doorbell two weeks after Travis's departure. "Emma comes running down the stairs—'Daddy, Daddy!' She was attuned to Travis coming home every two weeks, so she thought it must be him."

"Another guy in a uniform with his name on his shirt," Travis sighs.

Emma was crushed. But over time, due to deliberate steps both Travis and Alia had taken, she would have a chance to shift her focus from her father's physical absence to the ways in which she and he remained connected.

Many of those steps involved pictures and stories. Before he left on his deployment, for example, Travis had recorded himself reading 25 of Emma's favorite

**"The majority experience is that dad goes somewhere far and works very hard, or mom goes somewhere far and works very hard, and then they come back."—Travis Reese '96**

bedtime stories. When Travis was away, Alia says, "Emma and I followed along with the books while we listened to Travis read."

Alia and Travis also ensured that Emma would have plenty of pictures of her father—and not just any snapshot, but pictures of him engaged in his work. Pictures, in other words, that Alia could point to and talk to Emma about what her father did. Travis and Alia repeated these routines when their second child, Samuel, was born in 2009 and Travis continued on regular deployments.

Late last year, Alia became, as she calls herself "an accidental entrepreneur." After earning a master's degree in psychology and working to help other military families, she created Heart Star Press and released the first two books in its American Hero Books Series: *My Daddy Is a Marine* and *My Mommy Is a Marine*.

The books grew seamlessly out of the scrapbooks she'd created for Emma and Samuel. They contain simple images and text. An "insert your own picture" format allows young children to superimpose pictures of their parents over the books' stock images. In September, the Military Writer's Society of America awarded *My Daddy Is a Marine* a Gold Medal for Best Children's Book. Alia says her American Hero Series will eventually include books for each of the military service branches as well as civilian first responders such as police, fire, and rescue personnel.

While the books honor the work of military mothers and fathers, that's not their only intent. Their ultimate purpose, says Alia, is to maintain a bond between a small child and a parent who is absent for stretches of time. And as both Alia and Travis emphasize, to say that the books are about connection is no minor point.

Both have found that many books for the children of service members focus on separation.

"We know on a daily basis when he's not there. We don't need a reinforcement of the

common experience," says Alia. "It actually furthers a negative emotion."

Travis emphasizes that death or injury "is not the majority experience. The majority experience is that dad goes somewhere far and works very hard, or mom goes somewhere far and works very hard, and then they come back."

"The main concept," says Alia, "is what does mommy or daddy do every day?"

Alia and Travis met in a River Campus dining hall. Alia was on the rowing team, and Travis was in the NROTC program. "We were the only groups ever in the dining hall in the early morning," says Alia.

They shared a circle of friends, but never dated at Rochester. It wasn't until two years after Alia's graduation when, as she lingered over lunch with another Rochester classmate, Travis's name came up. On a whim, they gave him a call. Alia and Travis talked, emails followed, and then visits.

"It turned out we liked each other better as professionals and grownups than we did in school," Travis says.

With Travis away as often as he is, their challenge is not just to keep him present in the lives of their children, but to be a constant presence in each other's lives as well.

The Reeses now live in Fredericksburg, Va. They have a routine of their own. And, like the ones they kept with their children, it's age appropriate.

"When I come home off deployment," says Travis, "we spend basically two weeks in a honeymoon mentality. Third week, we argue for a week straight as I'm reacclimating to life here and Alia is reacclimating to having me back at home."

Alia is used to being on her own. "When he comes back into the house and he sees the kids doing something or me doing something and he thinks it should be done a different way," she says . . .

. . . "that's a source for dialogue!," Travis bellows, laughing. 

**AT HOME:** The Reeses pose on the front steps of their Fredericksburg, Va., home, where Travis spends weekends. During the week, he's at Camp Lejeune, N.C., with the 2nd Marine Logistics Group.



# A Musical Coming of Age

Collectors and musicians, Catharina Meints '66E and her late husband helped revive a baroque instrument, giving it a new heyday.

By Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

WHEN **CATHARINA MEINTS** '66E AND HER late husband, James Caldwell, began teaching at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in the 1970s, the viola da gamba might reasonably have been described as instrumental music's version of an endangered species. A fretted, bowed string instrument, it was popular in the royal courts of Europe from the 16th to the 18th centuries. After that, interest in the baroque instrument was sustained largely as a rarefied hobby of a relative few.

James Caldwell, an acclaimed oboist, was among those few. In the fall of 1966, when he and cellist Meints met as colleagues in the Chamber Symphony of Philadelphia, the viola da gamba was one of his several side interests. He owned six of the instruments. They weren't collectors' items (that would come later), but rather, instruments he acquired and loaned out to entice others to play.

"Our first date was his showing me his gambas and teaching me to play a little bit," recalls Meints. They were married five months later, in February 1967.

It was the beginning of a 40-year partnership during which Meints and Caldwell became leaders in a revival of the viola da gamba or, in English translation, the viol (pronounced VYE-ole). They spent summers in Europe studying the instrument together.

They established the Baroque Performance Institute at Oberlin to help build a new generation of players. And they built one of the most significant private collections of viols in the world.

This year, Meints released *The Caldwell Collection of Viols: A Life Together in the Pursuit of Beauty* (Music Word Media Group). A book in print and iPad editions, the work showcases the more than 20 viols, from 250 to 400 years old, in a collection that she and Caldwell built over the course of their marriage, through travels and dogged pursuit.

Meints, who performed with the Cleveland Orchestra from 1971 to 2006, the same year that Caldwell died, is now an associate



professor of viola da gamba and cello at Oberlin. She says that her interest in the viol "had more to do, frankly, with the literature written for it than with the instrument itself."

Music for the viol is often polyphonic, which is to say that it involves several viol parts, all of which are relatively equal in importance. Each of the parts may be technically simple, says Meints. But when you put them together—up to five or six

**IN HARMONY:** Over their 40-year marriage, Meints and her late husband, James Caldwell, grew as students, masters, and collectors of the popular baroque era instrument, the viola da gamba. Their collection is regarded as among the most significant of its kind in the world.



parts—“they are as complex as a Mahler symphony.”

That also makes the music “conversational,” says Meints. “It’s music written for the pleasure of the players themselves.”

Meints and Caldwell built their collection with musical conversation in mind. “We decided that as we got to know more about instruments and the music we were playing, that we really wanted to have two English instruments and two French instruments and two German instruments, because there was a lot of music for two viols from each of those countries and we wanted to play together,” says Meints.

*The Caldwell Collection of Viols* features audio supplements of Meints playing each of the instruments in the collection solo. It’s bittersweet. But Kenneth Slowik, artistic director of the Smithsonian Chamber Music Society, and a musician who played many times with Caldwell and Meints, says Meints “brings tremendous cello virtuosity to the viol.” And her solos on each of the instruments make a valuable contribution to musical history.

“Hearing them is important for understanding the difference from one school to the next,” he says, referring to distinct English, French, and German viols and viol music.

The book includes photographs, musicological notes, and notes by a contemporary viol maker on each instrument, as well as Meints’s personal story of each acquisition. Slowik, who first met the couple in the early 1970s, describes the book as “an homage”—an homage by Meints to Caldwell and to their joint quest, as described in the book’s subtitle.

Their “life together in the pursuit of beauty” wasn’t just significant to Meints and Caldwell, but to the revival of the viol itself. Meints can take pride that the viol enjoys a higher stature among serious musicians in the United States today than it did 40 years ago.

“There was an active community of amateur players” a half century ago, Slowik says. The growth of professional players is a more recent development, and “the [Baroque] Performance Institute counts among its alums most of the professionals in the early music community.

“Or I should say a certain generation of professionals,” he adds. “In the ’60s and ’70s, there was a real sense of pioneering. Now we’re to the point where a number of younger players can benefit.”



**BIG TIME:** The classically trained bassist Levin (left) is the preferred bass player of Gabriel (right) among other rock legends. The October concert in San Jose, Calif., was part of a tour to mark the 25th anniversary re-release of Gabriel’s album *So*.

#### IN THE NEWS

## So... On Tour with Peter Gabriel

For 30-plus years, Peter Gabriel, the British art rock master who became a megastar in the 1980s with the release of the platinum album *So*, has consistently relied on bassist **Tony Levin** ’68E.

This fall, Levin joined Gabriel on his “Back to Front” tour, which accompanies a 25th anniversary remastered edition of *So* (Geffen Records). The album melded catchy pop melodies and rhythms with stirring Wolof vocals from Senegalese singer Youssou N’Dour, Levin’s signature “funk-fingering” bass-playing technique, and other flourishes that were strikingly new in 1980s pop.

Levin, whose first major gig was with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, has released six solo albums, several of which feature his work on the Chapman stick, an instrument consisting of a long, wide fretboard with 8, 10, or 12 strings, named for its creator, jazz musician Emmett Chapman.

Levin has worked with many celebrated popular musicians in addition to Gabriel, including John Lennon, who nicknamed the shorn and mustached bassist “Kojak” during the recording sessions of what would be his final album, *Double Fantasy*, written and recorded with Yoko Ono in 1980.

Levin has returned to Rochester several times over the years, including to visit the Eastman School. He returned to the school most recently in June 2007 to perform with **Chuck Mangione** ’63E, **Steve Gadd** ’68E, the late **Gerry Niewood** ’70E, and several other original performers in a re-creation of the 1970 “Friends and Love” concert that helped launch Mangione’s career.

This month, in the wake of his tour with Gabriel, Levin is in Europe with his band, the Stick Men. He keeps an up-to-date “Road Diary” on his website, [www.papabear.com](http://www.papabear.com). —Karen McCally

# Orchestrating Stravinsky

Emil Kang '90 spearheads a yearlong celebration of the composer's infamous *Rite of Spring*.

Interview by David Menconi

**EMIL KANG '90** HAS ALWAYS THOUGHT BIG, but "The Rite of Spring at One Hundred" would still be a huge undertaking by anyone's standards.

Orchestrated by Kang, who's the first executive director of the arts at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, it's a 15-show performing arts series commemorating the century anniversary of the masterwork by Russian-born composer Igor Stravinsky that was dissonant enough to cause a riot during its performance debut but is now part of the 20th-century musical canon.

The series runs through the 2012–13 academic year. Among the artists premiering commissioned multimedia works are choreographer Bill T. Jones, cellist Yo-Yo Ma, pianist Vijay Iyer and puppeteer Basil Twist. It's quite a gambit for Kang, who majored in economics at Rochester before embarking on a career that would take him to administrative leadership positions at the Detroit and Seattle symphonies. He arrived at North Carolina in 2005. In May, President Barack Obama nominated Kang to the National Council on the Arts, a group that advises the chair of the National Endowment for the Arts.

## What did you think of *The Rite of Spring* the first time you heard it?

Actually, I thought it was the most obnoxious piece of music ever. It was at Avery Fisher Hall in New York, and I was in the fifth grade. I was wearing my plaid polyester jacket and clip-on tie, expecting Mozart, and it was nothing like I expected. That response has stayed with me forever.

## You've obviously come around on it.

Obviously. It's an incredibly important piece of modern music. Talk to classical,

pop, jazz musicians, and they'll probably rank it among the top five of the 20th century. It still sounds new to me, even today, which I think is the mark of something truly great—that you can hear it 20 times over and still get something new out of it. It's not something you put on headphones and listen to on your iPhone. It's something that has to be experienced live.



## Why did people react so viscerally to the piece in 1913?

As humans, we like being able to predict the next note. We expect resolution. Stravinsky wanted to turn that on its head where you couldn't predict anything, from the beginning notes of the opening bassoon solo.

▲ **SOUNDS & FURY:** Stravinsky (above) ignited a cultural firestorm in 1913 with the premiere of his dissonant ballet, *Rite of Spring*. Emil Kang '90, executive director of the arts at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has organized a centennial celebration of the now canonical work.

The whole piece is a series of unexpected moments, in terms of what people knew about ballet and classical music. That's at the heart of what's fascinating about this. I think we all spend too much time trying to figure things out. For some reason, everything has to be tidy—something you keep in a box or hang on the wall. What Stravinsky did in 1913 was to blow that up, and here we are revisiting it 100 years later.

## What sort of interpretations are the artists in the series doing?

We asked the artists to use *Rite of Spring* as a metaphor rather than play it note for note. This gives artists opportunities to reflect on an incredibly important moment in art, politics, culture, and sociology, through their own eyes and ears and hands. There are obvious nods to the past, but we hope it leapfrogs into the future.

## How does the series fit in with your overall mission as an arts presenter?

We're trying to get people to see and hear things in different ways. I teach a freshman seminar, so I'm always talking with students about the distinction between what we like and what's good. It's a lifelong journey to teach people to value

quality and excellence, even if they don't understand it. Otherwise, all anyone wants to hear is what they already know. That's a slippery slope, where you end up knowing fewer and fewer things. That's not a world I want to live in. With anything, there are pressures. But as my yoga teacher says, "Find your edge." That's what I try to do, even if my wife accuses me of taking a free-fall off the edge on purpose. **B**

For more on "The Rite of Spring at One Hundred," visit [www.theriteofspringat100.org](http://www.theriteofspringat100.org). David Menconi is music critic at the Raleigh (N.C.) News & Observer.