

# New musical invites audience to 'see homeless people as people'

BY SUZANNE ZALOKAR  
STAFF WRITER

We are thick in this city with a wonderful glut of talented, passionate artists. Alan Alexander III is one of them.

Alexander is a multi-instrumentalist, singer, composer, producer and playwright who grew up in St. Louis and has called Portland home since 1984.

*Alan Alexander III will debut his new production, 'Homeless (the musical),' at Portland's Fertile Ground Festival*

In 1988, he became one of the founding members of Dub Squad, a racially and sexually integrated musical performance sextet who toured with UB40; performed with Ziggy Marley, Third World, Jimmy Cliff, Judy Mowatt,

Burning Spear, Toots and the Maytals, and David Lindley; and headlined their own tour of Japan as part of the World's Fair Expo '90.

In tandem with the success of the band, Alexander founded a music publishing company created to publish and produce the band's original music – Dub Squad Music. Today, over 25 years since its inception, Dub Squad Music publishes and produces original music for recording artists, film companies, video producers and performance artists.

Alexander has composed source music and original scores for several film and television productions, including "Hear No Evil" (20th Century Fox), "Alien Invaders" (National Endowment for the Arts) and "Stuff" by director Larry Johnson. Alan recently completed the script and score for "Alan's Confectionery (the musical)," which debuted before a sold-out audience at the 2015 Fertile Ground Festival.

Last month, Alexander was awarded a grant from the Regional Arts & Culture Council to fund a public performance of his latest production, "Homeless (the musical)." RACC awarded \$733,608 in grants to 92 area artists and 52 nonprofit organizations for artistic projects that will take place in 2017.

"Homeless (the musical)" will be performed at this year's Fertile Ground Festival. Performances will be held at 7 p.m. Jan. 27, 28 and 29 at the Clinton Street Theater, 2522 SE Clinton St.

The Portland Area Theatre Alliance launched Fertile Ground in 2009 so Portland theater companies could showcase their new work. The festival runs 11 days – Jan. 19-29 – with more than 45 producers putting on shows at 44 Portland-area venues.

**Suzanne Zalokar:** *A musical about homelessness – how do music and homelessness complement each other conceptually?*

**Alan Alexander III:** Musicals are



Alan Alexander III, a founding member of the band Dub Squad, is the creator of "Homeless (the musical)." PHOTO BY SCOTT DOCHERTY

popular because music is associated with emotion. If you are sad and you break into song, you are really sad. If you're angry and you break into song, you're really angry. Feeling joyous? You guessed it. That's the function of music in musical theater: It accentuates and amplifies the emotional content.

**S.Z.:** *Where did the idea, or motivation for this musical come from? What is the content that you hope to amplify with this musical?*

**A.A.:** There are a lot of people involved – cast and crew. We hope that when people leave the theater, they will have more of a personal connection to the next homeless person that they see. A bit more empathy and see homeless people as people.

When we started this, I did a survey on

Twitter. We got about 170 responses. The basic questions was, "If you see a homeless person on the street, what are you most likely to do?" And the four choices were: give them money, give them food, refer them to services and the last one was ignore them.

Half of about 170 respondents said they would ignore them.

**S.Z.:** *Wow.*

**A.A.:** That was on Twitter, a blind Twitter survey. I did that back in June. It was my way of finding out what the general feeling was.

**S.Z.:** *I wonder what the response would be if we did that survey now, in light of the cold*

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