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Alone, Together

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“Commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the
University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom
Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director.”

Thank you to all the playwrights; directors; actors; designers; dramaturgs; artistic, production and administrative folks; donors; and audiences who have contributed to making LAUNCH PAD a vibrant home for new plays.

Foreword

On March 10, 2020, one week before the end of winter quarter, everyone in the University of California, Santa Barbara community received an email from Chancellor Henry Yang instructing us to move to online teaching as soon as possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The theatre/dance faculty immediately came together to figure out what to do to best serve the needs of our students. Final projects and upcoming productions had to be canceled, and students were heading home for the foreseeable future to take classes on Zoom from their childhood bedrooms! We were all thrown into a bit of chaos: how could we create a remote curriculum for all of our aspiring young artists?

It was at that point that my dear friend, festival co-director and head of the B.F.A. acting program, Annie Torsiglieri, had the vision to say: “Let’s commission playwrights to write monologues and plays that are meant to be performed on Zoom.” Well, I went a little crazy and invited every writer who has ever worked with our new play development program, LAUNCH PAD, over the past 15 years to participate. That was around 30 writers, and 24 answered the call! We gave the writers this prompt: *Alone, Together*. A total of 39 plays were written, 23 directors engaged, 61 actors cast, 5 stage managers, 3 designers, 3 dramaturgs and 10 staff assembled virtually, and, together, we created an all-day, live Zoom festival in four chapters on Saturday, June 6, 2020.

What we couldn’t anticipate is that not only would we be rehearsing during a global health pandemic but also in the midst of a revolution. George Floyd was murdered on Monday, May 25, and it reignited the cry against racism in our country. Our company was composed of students, faculty, staff and professional guest artists from across the country. Many were protesting by day and rehearsing by night. Even today, as I write this, the protests continue. It was important to both Annie and me that all of the artists involved in *Alone, Together* knew (and still know) that UCSB Department of Theater and Dance and LAUNCH PAD stand with our Black communities across the country on this day and every day. BLACK LIVES MATTER. We are with you.

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in a famous letter from the Birmingham jail in 1963: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” We, as artists, are committed to speaking out against injustice.

Xochitl Clare, one of our actors, announced *Alone, Together* on her Facebook page by quoting performance and installation artist Ester Hernandez who said, “We must continue to use our creative skills to give strength to our political, cultural and spiritual struggle.”

Xochitl then continued with her own thoughts: “‘Is making theatre really important now?’ my heart asks. As a young Black artist, struggling to grapple with our world, channeling my energy towards my craft has provided me some solace. Support me as I move forward in virtual solidarity with fellow theatre artists across the nation to do a very simple, yet important thing—to *come together*.” And that’s exactly what we did on 6/6/20. With an audience of 800 people over the course of the day, we all came together.

As theatre-makers, we communicate through the art we create. The 39 plays in this collection reflect many perspectives on life during the early days of the quarantine. They brilliantly offer moments of joy, pathos, insight, hope and comfort knowing we are never really alone.

—Risa Brainin
Artistic Director, LAUNCH PAD

Les Mots Justes, or Hold Your Tongue

By

WILLIAM DAVIES KING

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(LES MOTS JUSTES, OR HOLD YOUR TONGUE)

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Les Mots Justes, or Hold Your Tongue was commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom Festival *Alone, Together*; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director. It was directed by Jack Richman.

CAST:

A..... Sara Neal
B..... Shekinah Bryant
C..... Alyssa Longwill

AUTHOR’S NOTE

I was hesitant about using a French title, but these three words seemed inevitable—“the right words.” *Les mots justes* are not just correct, they are exact, perfect, just what you need. When the virus crisis hit, I did not know what to say, much less write. I felt stunned, thunderstruck, which is what “astonished” literally means. With large gatherings canceled and the Trump administration utterly failing to cope, the social fabric was tearing apart and revealing the cruelties of history as cruelly present as ever. In this damaged environment, the theatre becomes a lens everted to see the affliction as worse than a mere virus. Health is good laughter and love. It’s breathing deeply without constraint—or an infection or a knee. Breathing is spirit. It is what love and laughter celebrate, but together, not alone. Everyone I know is in a search for some fitting expression, yet also trying to avoid *faux pas*—the exact wrong thing. Hold your tongue, but not literally! Speak your piece.
Peace.

—William Davies King

Les Mots Justes, or Hold Your Tongue

CHARACTERS

A: Any gender, any age.

B: Any gender, any age.

C: Any gender, any age.

(The characters are all human beings in remote spaces. Otherwise, whatever. The casting could go many different ways. But be aware: any casting choice will end up telling an incidental story of difference—we're all different—so notice where it takes you.

A, B, and C are in a remote space. The “buzz” is a penalty sound. Could be an actual buzzer. Could be a whistle or airhorn. Could be a finger snap or a red light. Could be different effects at different moments.

Note: the following directions refer to the way Zoom worked in June 2020. If it works differently in whatever digital medium you are using, find a way to adapt. The point is that they are all alone and yet strangely in the same space, so they notice one another, laugh and frown and point at one another, even make eye contact, in a way.

A is alone, looks right, looks left—nothing. A looks up, sees nothing more than a crack in the ceiling, perhaps, nothing important. Sighs. Oppressively bored, needy.

Suddenly, B is there, in the next box, and B is looking directly [through the box, you could say] at A. A quickly notices and looks directly at B, quizzically, hopefully. Beat. B looks back and is glad to see A watching. B gives a little nod of greeting. A nods back. They draw closer to each other.

Suddenly, with a buzz, C is there, in the box below, looking up at them, first one, then the other. A and B both immediately notice C and draw back from each other—to an appropriate distance—and C looks away from them to the camera. All three stare at the camera. Beat. Nothing interesting, nothing important. Who has anything? Anybody? No.

Finally, A gets restless, sighs, looks to B, who doesn't notice, looks to C, who doesn't notice, looks back at the camera. Then B gets restless, looks around. Sighs. Even C gets a bit restless, sighs. Boredom is turning to frustration for them all.

A moans, then looks up and addresses the camera. The others notice. Everything is heard by everybody at all times, and sometimes that's uncomfortable, sometimes welcome.)

A. I have this *urge*—it's a longing, I guess—to social proximate.

B. Prosecute?

A. Proximate.

B. Procreate?

C (*buzz*). That's inappropriate!

(Each time C buzzes, A and B look down at C. But there comes a time when they start [mostly] ignoring C. They enjoy what they have together. C will have to overcome that.)

A. No, not appropriate, not prosecute or procreate. *Proximate*, *PROXIMATE*, and not *approximate*. Cut distance! Get close! Be nigh!

B. Ah! I see. Proximate, in the sense of getting in the proximity of.

A. Or with.

C (*buzz*). That's inappropriate!

B. How about "un-distance"? Antisocial indistance.

A. Counter-distance? De-distance?

B. Desist!

A. Desist and cease!

B. And seize!

C (*buzz*). That's inappropriate!

(Pause.)

A. Synonym.

B. Cinnamon.

A. Sinsemilla!

B. Sin ...

C (*buzz*). ...

B. What????

C. Sin. You know, all of that is just inappropriate.

B. *Sin-cerely*??? (*Laughs.*)

C. You know the rules.

A (*slowly and deliberately*). Syn ... ec ... doche. Synecdoche.

C. I don't know what that means.

B. Part for the whole.