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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.

Alone, Together

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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

But Here I Am

By
LYNN ROSEN

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(BUT HERE I AM)

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But Here I Am 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 Sara Rademacher.

CAST:

CHRIS.....Alexandra Singleton
TAYLOR..... Navnoor Singh Kahlon

AUTHOR’S NOTE

But Here I Am was written in the midst of the pandemic as I was longing for connection with all the people I could no longer see—even the people I had trouble getting close to. *Please note:* The scene should be energetic, funny and crisp—but a shared grief for their late mom, their love for each other, and a need to connect is bubbling beneath the surface. But don’t sit in the sadness about the mom or about the pandemic that’s occurring. The scene won’t work if the momentum sags. Instead, think about how the siblings are striving to come to an understanding. Although Chris and Tyler are like oil and water, they never give up on trying to get along. Slashes (/) are interruptions.

—Lynn Rosen

But Here I Am

CHARACTERS

CHRIS

TAYLOR

NOTE: Chris and Taylor are ideally played by two men, but any gender for either part is fine. Feel free to change pronouns as needed.

(Night. A Zoom chat between siblings. There is love, yet they can't seem to connect. Help always feels like criticism and love feels like judgment. CHRIS is more emotional, a cosmetician at Sephora, bright PJs, a fast talker. TAYLOR is stoic, impatient, a spy novelist, plaid PJs. CHRIS does his own makeup as they talk, but he is fully present. TAYLOR is futzing with something as he sits. They're very distracted.

TAYLOR starts flipping through a book.

NOTE: Slashes represent interruptions.)

CHRIS. It's all so crazy, right?

TAYLOR. So so crazy.

CHRIS. The people across from me never turn their lights off. So annoying.

TAYLOR *(distracted)*. Wow. Weird. Annoying.

CHRIS. Maybe they're scared of the dark. Evening feels the most normal to me. I watch something alone, I eat alone—normal, you know? Day and nighttime are the freaky time when—Hello? Taylor!

TAYLOR. What? I'm/ listening.

CHRIS. What are you looking at? / Stop that.

TAYLOR. I'm listening! I'm here. I accepted your Zoom invitation, it's two a.m., but here I am.

CHRIS. Are you mad I woke you up?

TAYLOR. Nope.

CHRIS. You seem mad.

TAYLOR. I said nope.

CHRIS. Now you seem madder.

TAYLOR. Do you *want* me to be mad? I can do that for you / if you want me to.

CHRIS. No, I do not want / that, obvi.

TAYLOR. Cuz you're pushing me there, Chris. You looove doing that. Ever since we were kids.

CHRIS. I don't think so.

TAYLOR. Look—

CHRIS. "Look." Always a good way to start / a sentence.

TAYLOR. Look, I can have a different feeling than you, that doesn't mean it's any less valid.

CHRIS. Oh, you have feelings? I mean I see them in your books, but in real life—

TAYLOR. Are we done? Cuz now it's 2:04 a.m. and I have a book due to an editor in the morning.

CHRIS. Lucky you.

TAYLOR. Yes.

CHRIS. Lucky, lucky you, that you can still work and make money during all this CRAZY-ASS CRAZINESS!

TAYLOR. Quiet! Jesus! Amber is sleeping. *You* can work too, you know.

CHRIS. How so, Taylor? I do people's makeup. I need humans. I need cheeks and lips and eyelids. I need people asking me to make them look beautiful, and I do it very well P.S.

TAYLOR. I don't doubt / that.

CHRIS. I need humanity to survive. I'm not like *you*, writing *Justin Penumbra* crime bomb spy thrillers all day alone in my attic. I hate being alone.

TAYLOR. I think my *Justin Penumbra* series is more literary than that but / whatever.

CHRIS. I am a dream maker! And I don't have that anymore.

TAYLOR. You could.

CHRIS. Oh, I could? How's that exactly?

TAYLOR. You could come up with a creative way to ply your trade, Chris—

CHRIS. It's not a "trade," I've told you—

TAYLOR. Your "calling," fine. Offer tutorials on YouTube. That's a plan! Call clients and offer private consults via Zoom. That's a plan! You could start a business plan for the salon you've always dreamed of but never do anything / about.

CHRIS. Here we go! I'm such a disappointment.

TAYLOR. I'm just trying to sharpen your / focus.

CHRIS. Thanks for reminding me of my many shortcomings in the midst of a pandemic. / Nice!