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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

Zoom Audition

By

JAMI BRANDLI

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(ZOOM AUDITION)

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Zoom Audition 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 Katherine Hamilton.

CAST:

EMILYSheila Correa

AUTHOR’S NOTE

With this monologue, I wanted to explore the tricky “new normal” of virtual auditioning—especially while we’re still in the middle of a pandemic. It takes a lot of guts for Emily to audition for a production that may not happen while she’s still processing how different her life has become due to the pandemic.

Special thanks to Risa Brainin and the LAUNCH PAD crew for this unique opportunity.

—Jami Brandli

Zoom Audition

CHARACTERS

EMILY: early-to-mid-20s, determined but wrestling with a darkness.

(EMILY appears in the Zoom pane. She is fresh and polished on the outside, but she's wrestling with an internal darkness that both distracts and frustrates her.)

EMILY. Hi, my name is Emily, and I'll be performing Emily from Thornton Wilder's brilliant play *Our Town*. Which of course you know is brilliant because you're directing it. So "Emily." Crazy, right? Or ironic. Or maybe it's kismet. Who knows! I guess I'll find out when we're able to go outside again!

(Beat.)

Whenever that will be.

(EMILY wrestles with her darkness for a moment ... Then she snaps out of it with a determined smile.)

And whenever *will* be soon—ish. Because this production is still going up in the fall, right?

Of course it is, because that's why I'm auditioning for you, right now. A five-minute Zoom audition, which, of course, is an amazing opportunity.

So thank you. Just gotta stay positive. Gotta stay hopeful. Because we are all in this together!

Right.

Setting my timer now.

(EMILY sets her timer and takes a brief moment to center herself, really center herself. It's a bit of struggle. As she speaks, she looks at various things somewhere in her room and says goodbye, but the goodbyes don't really feel like goodbyes.)

"Good-bye. Good-bye, world. Good-bye, Grover's Corners ... Mama and Papa. Good-bye to clocks ticking. And Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths ... and sleeping and waking up ..."

(EMILY knows she's supposed to start crying a bit here, but she's having trouble. She's frustrated but pushes on.)

“Oh, earth. You're too wonderful for anybody to realize you.

(Then looks directly toward us, really trying to cry.)

Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it”—?

(Can she finally cry? Alas, she cannot.)

I can't cry.

Fuck! Shit. Sorry. I just need. I just need ...

Look.

I know what you're thinking. Didn't you take the time to prepare since all you've had is TIME because you've been quarantined for like EVER?

Yes. I had time. I had SO much time.

But.

(Frustration builds.)

I keep getting ... I keep getting ...

(EMILY wrestles with her darkness for a beat. Then she forces herself out of it and turns businesslike.)

I know I only have five minutes, BUT as you can see from my resume, I'm classically trained, experienced, and I take my craft very seriously. I love theatre. And I want to play all of the roles over the course of my lifetime. From Emily to Hedda to Lady Macbeth and everything in between. I want to play them all, but especially Emily, because that's what this audition is all about. I actually took a shower this morning, and I haven't showered in over a week, so you know I REALLY want this part ...

But.

(Frustration again.)

I keep getting ...

(A quick battle with her darkness, then returns to business.)

I understand that I'm supposed to stay positive and take all of this “free” time to work on myself. Meditate on my professional goals. Learn a new skill from all those “free” online seminars, like crocheting and clowning. And of course memorize my lines and feel—*deeply* feel—the emotion of every single word spoken.

Buuuuut ...

(Frustration, then finally.)