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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

LOL OL

By
SHERI WILNER

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(LOL OL)

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LOL OL 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 Stefan James. Liz Engelman was the dramaturg.

CAST:

DOT Sierra Hastings
PARTICIPANT #1..... Hayley O’Toole
PARTICIPANT #2..... Emilianis Torres
PARTICIPANT #3..... Harut Simonian
PARTICIPANT #4..... Emma Cardoso
PARTICIPANT #5..... Celine Khuu
PARTICIPANT #6..... La Jae Johnson
PARTICIPANT #7..... Ethan Kim

LOL OL received its world premier production at Alleyway Theatre, Buffalo, N.Y., Chris J. Handley, Artistic Director, in November 2020.

AUTHOR’S NOTE

I didn’t want to write a Zoom play. To be honest, I was angry that all of the material artists were creating for Zoom at a time when in New York City, where I live, the world was ending. I spent my days reading about ventilators being shared by four patients at a time and the unnamed dead buried daily on Hart’s Island. I was terrified about my 80-year-old father in Boston and about my own mental health living alone during an apocalypse. So email invitations to write or watch Zoom plays were immediately deleted. Even the one to write this play. But then Risa Brainin and Annie Torsiglieri each asked me again. Ever since Risa directed and Annie starred in my play *Kingdom City* for LAUNCH PAD in 2010, they have both helped me so much personally and professionally, I could not say no. And so I decided to write a Zoom play that expressed all of my ambivalence about writing a play that would not be shared with a live, assembled audience. What was better, I wondered—to write for a platform that to me is the exact antithesis of the theatre, or to stop sharing work until theatres could reopen? Instead of dealing with the question directly, I chose to write about a laughter yoga class, which, like theatre, really only works when it is a shared group experience. Should such things cease during this time, or should we attempt to recreate these experiences “alone, together”? I hope this play poses that question, which I’m eager to debate with you, ideally in person.

—Sheri Wilner

LOL OL

CHARACTERS

DOT DARCY: 35 to 55. A laughter yoga instructor. She is physically fit, exudes lots of energy and is a consummate professional. She runs a very successful laughter yoga studio and is terrific at her job. But she's lonely. And sheltering in place alone has intensified her sadness.

LAUGHTER YOGA STUDENTS: There are six to nine of them. Any race, age, or gender*. Individual companies performing this play are encouraged to have fun creating the characters, their settings, their circumstances and their reasons for participating in the class. There are some specifics the text asks you to fulfill, but with these few exceptions, who and where the characters are should be determined by the directors and actors. Just please, no broad, sitcom-style portrayals. All of these people have dignity, intelligence and a genuine human need to connect. Actors should also create profile names they would use on a dating site rather than use their actual names. If they refer to each other in the script, they should also use their dating names. Nothing raunchy please. Everyone on the site is looking for a long-term relationship. Given the shelter-in-place order, no one is looking for a one-night hook-up!

* The script will refer to each character as “they” rather than “she” or “he,” since any gender can perform any of the characters. When you see “s/he” in the script, please choose either “she” or “he” depending on the gender of the actor.

For a terrific sample of a Zoom laughter yoga class, as well as instructions on how to do the exercises mentioned in the play, here's a very helpful YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPWa1RRS6y&t=831s>

SETTING: The, by now, very familiar interface of a Zoom meeting.

TIME: Any time, beginning two weeks after a town's shelter-in-place order has been issued, to a later time when the shelter-in-place order is still in effect.

(A Zoom meeting is about to begin. Among the participants is DOT DARCY, who will be leading the class. The other participants are also present and in the familiar Zoom “Brady Bunch” formation. Who the participants are, their genders, where they are Zooming from, their reasons for attending this class and their personalities can be determined by the company. Some characters

are invested and enthusiastic, some are skeptical, some are desperate for interaction and are deeply depressed. The specific things that must happen though are:

PARTICIPANT 1: Organizing this event was all their idea, and so now they are the anxious host hoping everyone is having a great time. Although they appear to be enjoying the class, underneath all of their behavior is an urgent need to find relief for deep loneliness.

PARTICIPANT 2: Has their cellphone close and anxiously checks it whenever it “bings” with a new notification. The bings happen just occasionally at first, but then become very frequent where indicated. It should be clear from their reactions that the calls and messages are about a loved one’s dire health crisis.

PARTICIPANT 3: Begins the class feeling very irritated/angry. They drink beer throughout the class.

PARTICIPANT 5: Should look unwell and have a persistent cough. They cough only once in a while at first, then much more frequently where indicated.

In addition, the characters should encounter typical Zoom problems—frozen video, connectivity issues, etc.

With these exceptions, please have fun creating the characters, their dating names, settings and circumstances. Different ages and races should be represented. I just ask that the tone and characterizations avoid being overly broad and silly. The humor should come from the situation and the inherent irony and not through any silliness or “jokiness.” DOT is fantastic at her job, runs a successful business, and unreservedly believes in the benefits of what she does, as much as any seasoned professional. After all, there are actual and confirmed benefits of laughter yoga.)

PARTICIPANT 1. Hello everybody! This is (*Dating site name.*), the event organizer of tonight’s special (*Your city’s name.*) Singles Meetup group!

(PARTICIPANT 1 and some of the others cheer.)

PARTICIPANT 1 (*cont’d*). I’m excited you guys could be here after such a horrible month. And I hope tonight ... you know, know, this class ... helps. It’s actually ... something I’ve wanted to try long before any of this craziness began, and so when I found out someone was doing it on Zoom, I thought it would be a really cool way to restart our group. I mean ... I don’t know about you guys, but I haven’t seen anyone, in person, in over a month. I thought being single was bad before this, but ... (*S/he sighs.*) Have you all been alone this whole time?

(All of the participants, including DOT, nod and/or respond by saying “yeah,” or “sure have.”)

PARTICIPANT 1 (*cont'd*). Well ... it's great to see you guys, and I think this might help.

PARTICIPANT 6 . Thanks, (*Dating site name*.)!

PARTICIPANT 7. Yeah, thanks.

PARTICIPANT 1 (*to PARTICIPANT 7*). Hey, you're engaged. You can't be in a singles group anymore!

PARTICIPANT 7. S/he broke it off.

PARTICIPANT 1. Oh God. / I'm so sorry—

PARTICIPANT 2. PARTICIPANT 3. PARTICIPANT 6.
Oh no! Sorry dude. Damn!

(The other participants might add similar condolences. PARTICIPANT 7, overcome with sadness, turns their video off.)

PARTICIPANT 1. Shit! OK. Um ... so ... to those of you new to (*Your city's name*.) Singles Meetup, welcome. We hope you're only with us for a really short time and you meet someone amazing really soon.

(Maybe they cross their fingers and hold them up.)

PARTICIPANT 1 (*cont'd*). OK. So now, I'd like to introduce our Laughter Yoga instructor, Dot Darcy. She's going to lead us through some really fun exercises to get us laughing. Thanks for being here, Dot.

DOT. You're very welcome, (*Dating name*.)—very fun name by the way. Well, like s/he said, I'm Dot Darcy and I'm the founder and owner of LOL Yoga, located in beautiful downtown (*Nearby city or town*.). LOL Yoga of course stands for Laugh Out Loud Yoga. For those of you brand new to laughter yoga, it's a whole-body wellness practice consisting of guided exercises that initiate prolonged voluntary laughter. It's based on research that says voluntary laughter provides the same amazing health benefits as spontaneous laughter, which gives us a big DOSE of happiness.

(She holds up a sign with the word "DOSE" printed in big letters. Printed near each of the four letters are the words "dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin, endorphins.")

DOT (*cont'd*). That's right. Laughter serves us that feel-good chemical cocktail of dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin and endorphins that improves our mood and helps us think more positively. Raise your hands if you could use some help with *that* right now.

(All participants raise their hands. PARTICIPANT 7 turns their video back on. They look horribly sad.)

DOT (*cont'd*). Welcome back! Now what I've done for you all today is adapted several exercises we typically do at LOL Yoga specifically for the Zoom format. I'm guessing by now everyone here is familiar with Zoom.

(All of the other participants respond verbally or nod.)

PARTICIPANT 3. Yeah, and I hate it. I had six hours of meetings today on this piece of shit / platform—

DOT. Well we're all getting used to this new world. Speaking of which—full disclosure—this is the first time I'll be using Zoom to teach laughter yoga, and so ...

(She bows her head and places palms together.)

DOT (*cont'd*). Namaste. Or, I guess now it's Nama-*stay-at-home*, right? So anyone here ever try laughter yoga?

PARTICIPANT 2. My ex just got certified to teach it.

DOT. Really?

PARTICIPANT 2. Yeah, at "Laughter Yoga University."

DOT (*arm raised*). Class of 2016 in da house!

PARTICIPANT 3. Ha! Their mascot must be a hyena!

(PARTICIPANT 2's phone "bings" with a text alert.)

PARTICIPANT 2. Oops! Sorry!

DOT. That's OK. (*To everyone.*) It reminds all of us to make sure our devices are turned off and some place we can't see them.

(Maybe PARTICIPANT 2's phone bings again?)

DOT (*cont'd*). Give yourself this time to forget about everything other than your own well-being, OK?

(PARTICIPANT 2 has covered their mouth, as a reaction to some alarming personal news. Everyone looks at them expecting them to say something but they turn off their video and audio. Beat.)

DOT (*cont'd*). OK. Um ... So Laughter Yoga was designed to be done in groups because laughter's so contagious. But since something even more contagious is out in them thar hills, I've adapted the exercises we typically do at LOL studios in a variation I call LOL ... OL. Laugh out loud ... *online*. These exercises are designed *specifically* for us singles who were alone even before the pandemic began, and I'm guessing ... might be alone after it's over too. I mean nothing kills your dating life more than a virus, right? ... So we need to learn how to