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Alone, Together

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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

Dynamite Sales

By

DAN CASTELLANETA and DEB LACUSTA

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(DYNAMITE SALES)

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Dynamite Sales was originally written and performed by Dan Castellaneta and Deb Lacusta as part of their *Deb & Dan's Show* at The Improvisation Theater, Los Angeles, and subsequently recorded for audio as part of Dan Castellaneta's *I Am Not Homer*. This Zoom adaptation 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 Daniel Stein.

CAST:

SHEILA WARING..... Hailey Turner
WINTHROP BEJOU Varrick Weir
PERSON Frances Domingos

AUTHOR'S NOTE

When asked to submit work for *Alone, Together*, we immediately thought of this piece called *Dynamite Sales*. Although we had performed it as part of a stage show, and as an audio recording, we felt it would work even better in a Zoom format—especially in light of so many people now conducting business and work meetings remotely. A business motivational speaker waits for more people to sign in before she starts her seminar on dynamic selling. But she ends up with only one lone misanthropic student. It's complete miscommunication between the sexes. In writing this for Zoom, we discovered this awkward encounter between complete strangers became intensified. It's the close-up nature of the medium that allows for a wonderful, sometimes hysterical, kind of tension, as this business seminar ends up revealing more about each character than either of them ever wanted to.

—Dan Castellaneta and Deb Lacusta

Dynamite Sales

CHARACTERS

SHEILA WARING: Female, 30s, an attractive professional who's all business all the time. But deep down, she has doubts about where she is at in her career.

WINTHROP BEJOU: Male, 30s, wears out-of-date, ill-fitting clothes and needs a shave. He lacks an understanding of social cues and says whatever comes to mind. And he's a bit depressed about recently losing his job.

PERSON: Either gender, 20s-30s.

(A Zoom meeting. SHEILA WARING sits at a table. Behind her is a whiteboard or poster, upon which is written: "DYNAMITE SALES WITH SHEILA WARING." In another Zoom window is WINTHROP BEJOU. They sit for a long time in silence. SHEILA keeps glancing at her watch hoping someone else will join the Zoom meeting. WINTHROP does the same. After a long uncomfortable moment ...)

WINTHROP. Excuse me?

SHEILA. What?

WINTHROP. It's eight-fifteen.

SHEILA *(thinking to herself)*. Eight-fifteen.

WINTHROP. Shouldn't we get started?

SHEILA. Let's just wait a bit more.

WINTHROP *(waits a moment)*. OK, I waited a bit more. I don't think anyone else is joining in.

SHEILA. Well I expected more students.

WINTHROP. *I'm here.*

SHEILA. I can see that.

WINTHROP. Y'know, I Venmo-ed my fee for this seminar, and you already cheated me out of fifteen minutes of education. I don't think I should be deprived because someone has lame DSL.

SHEILA. Oh OK, we'll begin. *(Clears throat.)* Welcome to—

WINTHROP. Uh excuse me.

SHEILA. What?

WINTHROP. Could you tell me how long it will be before I become a dynamic salesman, or should I say "salesperson?"

SHEILA. Well that all depends on you.

WINTHROP. I'm afraid not. I paid you good money, so now it all depends on you.

SHEILA. Let's begin.

WINTHROP. I don't know what to do. I have no idea how to start.

SHEILA. My name is—

WINTHROP. Sheila Waring. I know your name. It's right there behind your head. C'mon, let's get going. Now, it's eighteen minutes I've lost.

SHEILA. My name is Sheila Waring. I'm the author of—

WINTHROP. *Dynamite Sales.*

SHEILA. Oh you've read my book.

WINTHROP. Yes, and it didn't help. That's why I'm here.

SHEILA. I'm sorry, but maybe you didn't quite catch the principles of dynamic selling.

WINTHROP. Yes, I did. Know yourself. Know your product. Know the customer. So?

SHEILA. Well let's put those principles into action and maybe someone else will join us.

WINTHROP. Don't count on it.

(SHEILA writes on the whiteboard.)

SHEILA. First principle—Know Yourself. Let's start there. Know your strengths and weaknesses. Let's list your weaknesses.

WINTHROP. Right here in front of everybody?

SHEILA. Yes.

WINTHROP. That was a joke.

SHEILA *(pause)*. So what are your weaknesses?

(SHEILA writes on the whiteboard as WINTHROP lists his weaknesses.)

WINTHROP. I have body odor, I have a wandering left eye so I can't look straight at anybody, I can't meet girls, I drive badly, I have a lousy apartment, I don't have a lot of money, I can't resist Hostess Ho Hos, I got a crummy name, my mother hates me—

SHEILA *(cutting him off)*. OK, let's start with your name. What is your name?

WINTHROP. Winthrop Bejou. *(Pronounced: BEE-OH.)*

SHEILA. Oh dear.

WINTHROP. It's spelled B-E-J-O-U.

SHEILA. Isn't that Be-joo?

WINTHROP. No! It's Bee-oh. It's French!

SHEILA. Let's list your strengths.

WINTHROP (*thinks for a moment*). I know my weaknesses.

SHEILA. That's it? That's your strengths?

WINTHROP. Yeah. I just remembered another weakness.

SHEILA. Yes?

WINTHROP. I have a low opinion of myself. Put that on the list.

SHEILA. Well that's gonna change right here and now.

WINTHROP. Good. Go. Change me.

SHEILA. Know yourself. I'm sorry. What's your name again?

WINTHROP. Oh my God, how am I supposed to know myself? You don't even know me. Winthrop.

SHEILA. Winthrop. It seems right now your weaknesses outweigh your strengths.

WINTHROP. Duh.

SHEILA. But that can change. We take one weakness at a time and turn it around. Turn a negative into a positive. Let's start with ... your rudeness.

WINTHROP. I consider that a strength.

SHEILA. Then how about your lousy attitude?

WINTHROP. OK.

SHEILA. Now, what's the opposite of lousy?

WINTHROP. Not lousy.

SHEILA. Or?

WINTHROP. Very not lousy.

SHEILA. Which is—

WINTHROP. The opposite of lousy.

SHEILA. I'll help you out.

WINTHROP. I thought I was doing pretty good.

SHEILA. You were, but I'll just expedite things along here. The opposite of lousy is ... um ...

WINTHROP. I'm telling you—not lousy.

SHEILA. Terrific.

WINTHROP. Thank you.

SHEILA. No, the opposite of lousy is terrific. So you need to feel terrific. Simple isn't it?

WINTHROP. No. I don't understand.

SHEILA. What's the problem?

WINTHROP. I can't feel terrific because I feel lousy spending my money on this seminar.