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# Alone, Together

Edited by

WILLIAM DAVIES KING

Foreword by

RISA BRAININ

Written by

LINDA ALPER, KATIE BENDER, JAMI BRANDLI,  
DAN CASTELLANETA, DEB LACUSTA,  
LEO CABRANES-GRANT, MIA CHUNG, YUSSEF EL GUINDI,  
ANNE GARCÍA-ROMERO, IDRIS GOODWIN,  
ENID GRAHAM, ARLENE HUTTON, LILA ROSE KAPLAN,  
WILLIAM DAVIES KING, JENNY MERCEIN, BRIAN OTAÑO,  
LYNN ROSEN, CHERI STEINKELLNER, JAMES STILL,  
ALISON TATLOCK, ANNIE TORSIGLIERI, JOHN WALCH,  
CHERYL L. WEST and SHERI WILNER.

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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

# Safety Net

By  
CHERYL L. WEST

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(SAFETY NET)

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*Safety Net* 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 Riya Sahasrabudhe.

CAST:

LUCILLE.....Shaunyce Omar

AUTHOR’S NOTE

The pandemic infects many but apparently is killing more Black folks. Why is that? The character Lucille posits, “It’s gonna kill more Black and brown folks ’cause we ain’t got enough tools to fight with or enough people in power to fight for us.” As a Black woman at risk, I too wonder whether anyone would strive to save my life or will I become just another marginal—a mere statistic much like my character Lucille?

—Cheryl L. West

# Safety Net

## CHARACTER

LUCILLE

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*(Lights on LUCILLE, 40ish, listening on speaker phone. She listens to the cacophony of recorded sound beginning with the obnoxious drone of a busy signal. And then ...)*

UNEMPLOYMENT PHONE RECORDING. Your call is important to us ...

LUCILLE. Hello? Hello?

UNEMPLOYMENT PHONE RECORDING. Due to enormous volume, we are experiencing record delays ... Please try again later ... We're sorry, we're experiencing an extremely high volume of calls at this time ... We recommend you hang up and go to www ... ”

LUCILLE. This don't make no sense. I been calling this damn unemployment office every day ... 100, 200 times a day ... And every time I think I'm getting through and get a little hope, I hear ...

UNEMPLOYMENT PHONE RECORDING. Please try us at another time ... Goodbye.

*(And once again the obnoxious sound of the busy signal.)*

LUCILLE. But I'm running out of time. Tomorrow's the first of the month. Everything comin' due. Oh yeah, boo, I'm in more than a mood today. See, first they cut my hours, that's after they had us cleaning everything with this new stuff so strong it was making me break out in rashes, had my eyes watering like they was raining. But I didn't complain, too happy to still have a job. Went every day, cleaning up whatever COVID nasty somebody left behind, praying on the hour not to get infected myself.

But I tell you, anything that's killin' Black *and* white folks while getting blamed on the Chinese, shoot, that's some powerful shit. But you watch, in the end, just like AIDS, it's gonna kill more Black and brown folks 'cause we ain't got enough tools to fight with or enough people in power to fight for us. You think I'm lying? Look how they wanted to hurry up and open the country when they found out it was mostly folks that looked like me who was the ones dying. Yeah, I might not be educated, but I know enough to know there's a reason it's called the White House.

My brother, see he ... he book smart but dumb as a box of rocks. He say, "Lucille, brains always more important. The brain tells the heart what to do and operates every system in the body."

He talk all crisp like. Hammerin' every sound on every letter. "Sysstems." And I told him well a brain with no heart ain't a brain I wanna meet ... I believe that's why we got this COVID mess. And I'm not just talking about the virus, I'm talking about all these promises, folks on the news talkin' about we in this together. Well, I can't tell. Like I said, too many brains with too little heart.

But, anyway, today I'm feeling a little desperate. If I have to, I'ma call every agency in the city until I get me some damn help.

But first, let me try this unemployment office again.

*(She punches in "last call." Once again the busy signal drones on. She picks up a piece of paper.)*

OK, I got me a list of numbers here. Let's pray I don't get somebody that talk all crispy, I just need some help ... when you live paycheck to paycheck ...

*(In Mag's mock cheer voice.)* "Housing, Health and Human Services. This is Mag. Good morning, with whom am I speaking?"

"Lucille Brown."

"Well, how might I help you? And Lucille I want to assure you we will get through this together."

Hmph. First off, I bet she don't call no white women by they first name.

"Mam, well, see I've been calling the unemployment office ..."

"Let me stop you right there, Lucille. We are not the unemployment office."

"I know that ..."

"But I'm happy to provide you with that number."

"I have the damn number, that's why I'm calling you ..."

"Excuse me?"

"I've been calling unemployment all times of day and night ..."

"Yes, the backlog is immense ... millions are trying to access service ..."

"Yep, yep, that's why I'm calling you ..."

"Have you tried applying online ...?"

"Yeah, but I can't understand ... Look, I needs me a live voice ... I need things explained ... I get error this, error that ... I ... I ... don't do so good with ..."

"Lucille, let me ask you something, do you have a safety net?"