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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

Waiting for Now
(a duet on security cameras)

By
JAMES STILL

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(WAITING FOR NOW [A DUET ON SECURITY CAMERAS])

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Waiting for Now (a duet on security camreas) 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 Leo Cabranes-Grant.

CAST:

ESTHER Ryan Hollon
POLLY Alexandra Singleton

AUTHOR’S NOTE

Set in a prison and seen on security cameras, *Waiting for Now (a duet on security camreas)* is written for two incarcerated women who are caught in a disturbing loop of timelessness and middle-of-the-night existential questioning. Inspired by my work in the prison system (with a humble nod to Mr. Beckett), I wanted all of us to remember one of our more vulnerable populations during the COVID-19 crisis.

—James Still

Waiting for Now

(a duet on security cameras)

CHARACTERS

ESTHER: Older.

POLLY: Younger.

NOTE: In the same spirit in which I wrote the play, characters may/can/should be played by actors of any race, ethnicity, origin and other-abledness. In whatever way the play is cast, it will tell the story of two souls.

(They are in separate prison cells, right next to each other. They can hear each other but can't see each other. We can see them both—at the same time, separately. We are watching them on security cameras. The two women look out at us. They don't know if it's night or day. It feels like night. Far away on another floor, in a place where it's allowed, we hear the far-away sound of a song playing on the radio. ESTHER and POLLY listen and can hear Nina Simone singing "Consummation," or something similar. After the song has established—just enough but not too much, the radio is suddenly snapped off.)

POLLY. Hey! Why'd they do that?

(...)

Why'd they kill the music?

ESTHER. They just do.

POLLY (*shouting*). MURDERER!!!

ESTHER. Stop it, you'll get us in trouble. Again.

POLLY. I'm not afraid anymore.

ESTHER. Good for you.

POLLY. Why'd they kill my music?

ESTHER. They kill everything. They kill us if we let them. Always *doin'* things. They're like a verb with too much confidence.

POLLY. What's that mean, a verb?

ESTHER. A verb, you know: action, doing something. It's something you do.

POLLY. Do? What about us? What do we do?

ESTHER. We wait.

(...)

We wait.

(...)

We wait.

(...)

POLLY. What are we waiting for?

ESTHER. We're waiting for ... now ... and ... now ... and ... now. Time. It's time.

POLLY. Time for what?

ESTHER. Time to wait.

POLLY. The blind don't know time, don't know what it is.

ESTHER. You blind?

POLLY. I'm not blind but that doesn't mean I can see. I can't see the past—the now. I can't go on like this.

ESTHER. That's what you think.

POLLY. It's what I know.

ESTHER. It's what you think you know. Let it be. Wait.

POLLY. What are we waiting for?

ESTHER. I just told you—

POLLY. No—what are we waiting *for*? What is there to wait for? I mean, all this waiting ... what if ain't worth it?

(...)

What are we waiting for?

ESTHER. We're waiting for different things.

POLLY. But how can I wait if I don't know what I'm waiting for?

ESTHER. You'll know when you know.

POLLY. But when will that be?

ESTHER. Now but not yet.

(...)

POLLY. I can't go on like this!

ESTHER. That's what you think.

POLLY. What can we do? What verb you wanna be?

ESTHER. (...)

POLLY. Is it morning yet?

ESTHER. It's morning, it's night, it's neither. Don't know.

POLLY. You aren't helping.

ESTHER. That's not my verb.

POLLY. Does morning and night have to feel the same?

ESTHER. In here it's all the same until it's not.

POLLY. I don't like all this waiting.

ESTHER. You don't have a choice. This is not religion. This is not a love story. You don't get to choose your story. This is just ... now.

(...)

POLLY. Has it been years?

ESTHER. Probably.

POLLY. But maybe it's only days. Or maybe we just got here and this is all the beginning.

ESTHER. We've done the beginning. This is not the beginning.

POLLY. Then maybe it's the end of the beginning.

ESTHER. We've been here awhile. I've been here. Probably years.

POLLY. What happens next?

ESTHER. Wait and see.

POLLY. I don't like waiting.

ESTHER. Yeah, you said. But still ...

POLLY. Still. *(Soft sigh.)*

(...)

ESTHER. Stop thinking so loudly.

POLLY. I don't know how to think softly.

ESTHER. Then don't think at all.

(POLLY tries not to think at all. Fails.

POLLY tries again to not think at all. Fails.

POLLY starts to try again to not think at all—)

POLLY. I can't do it! I can't go on like this!

ESTHER. That's what you think.

POLLY. You told me *not* to think.

ESTHER. Then don't think and it won't be what you think.

(...)