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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

Do Not Go, My Love

By

ENID GRAHAM

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(DO NOT GO, MY LOVE)

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Do Not Go, My Love 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 Andres Blanco.

CAST:

SUE Sara Neal
CHRISTOPHER Aaron Arpon

AUTHOR’S NOTE

When I first heard from Risa Brainin about writing a short play for *Alone, Together*, my first thought was, “I can’t do that.” I live in New York City, and we had just begun our quarantine. My husband and I were both out of work with our projects “indefinitely postponed.” My three children were suddenly being homeschooled, and I was desperately afraid for my family and neighbors. Our life had been turned upside down, and our beautiful city was beginning the horrible upward climb on the COVID-19 new cases graph that is, by now, too familiar. I couldn’t imagine writing anything. But, after a few weeks, I began to think about the wonderful UCSB students I had the good fortune to work with in the LAUNCH PAD program in 2019. I felt very sorry that these talented young people were having their school year so disrupted—many of them in their senior year. So, I sat down at my kitchen table to try to write something to contribute. And in trying to help keep the students’ creative spark alive through this crisis, I was able to reconnect with my own creative life. *Do Not Go, My Love* is a small play about humans connecting in hard times and the hopeful dream of a better future when we can all be together again.

—Enid Graham

Do Not Go, My Love

CHARACTERS

SUE: A young woman, maybe 30.

CHRISTOPHER: A young man of about 20.

(A Zoom window is open, showing a woman, SUE, waiting. SUE wears comfortable, at-home clothes and maybe a cardigan. Her hair is in a loose ponytail. She has been waiting a long time and is doing the kind of things one does while alone on hold, maybe eating something or singing to herself or yawning and scratching. Suddenly, another Zoom window opens, and CHRISTOPHER, dressed in a button-down shirt, appears. He speaks with the flat voice of someone who has had to repeat the same thing a million times.)

CHRISTOPHER. TeleGov Financial helpline, hello I'm Christopher. How may I assist you today?

SUE *(jumping up, surprised)*. Oh hello! Hello, hello! Finally, a person! Hello, hello, hello! *(She laughs.)* I can't tell you, I've been . . . I've been waiting for like, for like forever! So hello to you! Wow, so glad to see someone's face. Hello, person! Wow!

CHRISTOPHER. How may I assist you?

SUE. Did you know—now I know this isn't your fault so I'm not saying that— but I wonder if you know how long the wait is to get through on this line? It's like, I mean, like hours a day. By which I mean hours for several *days*. Now, like I say I know this isn't your fault—Christopher, right?—but I just thought you should know in case you have some kind of meeting with, you know, higher-up types and then you could maybe mention that you are killing people out here with the waiting! I started on Thursday of last week and was on hold for several hours but on that day I had to get off because I got a delivery. Anyway, after I disinfected the box and then disinfected myself and all that, it was pretty close to five so I thought, "Tomorrow!" And the next day, Friday, well I got kind of a late start cause on Thursday I couldn't sleep, plus I had a wee little cocktail and I—too much information!—anyway, suffice it to say I got a late start on Friday and couldn't get through again. Then on Monday I got up nice and early and called right away, and after about twenty tries I got through to being on hold, and there I waited until about three when suddenly a recorded voice came over the thing and

said, “We are sorry. Due to increased activity, we are unable to process your call at this time. Please try again later,” and it disconnected me! And on the screen, it changed from the holding page thing, you know with the logo, to this small animated piece of fruit, like a cherry with a stem, but the cherry had a face with a little half-smile and eyes with eyebrows going up and one little gloved hand making this “oh well” gesture. Just like, “sorry!” I would love to know who designed that, who thought that, after holding for five hours and then getting cut off for no reason, it would somehow make it better to show a shrugging piece of fruit. Like, as if someone who had just wasted half their day and still wasn’t any closer to getting their money that they desperately need for their rent or for *food* or whatever would see this little cherry-man and be like, “Oh haha! What a cute fruit. I’m so hungry, but it makes me feel better to see that cute little guy.” And that night I got pretty depressed, started thinking about everything and how crappy it is and just that there’s no hope and even when it gets better it’s still going to be crappy and there will still be people that think they can control the masses with a cute, little cherry-man and that they are probably right and I had a couple more wee little cocktails and it was a bad night. BUT, I woke up and it was a new day. And I decided to have a new attitude. So today I was like, on a mission to get through, like this was my calling in life, like I was a Jedi in training and that little cherry-man was my Yoda, “Call again, you will,” and nothing was going to deter me, every time I saw that little cherry fucker I was just like, “Again!” and I’d try again right away and then finally, at long last, *your face!* Oh my God, I can’t believe it!

CHRISTOPHER (*small pause*). How may I assist you?

SUE. Right! Oh right. Down to business. Got it! (*She shuffles around a large stack of papers.*) OK, so I called, I need help with ... let’s see ... (*She laughs again.*) It’s so good to have you here! Let me just gather my thoughts ...

CHRISTOPHER. We have a high volume of calls on hold, so if you could get to your question.

SUE. Oh really? Well, those folks can just get to know little cherry-man like I did. “I can’t get through ’cause some lady is talking too much.” (*She makes the cherry-man face and gesture.*) “Oh well!” (*She laughs at her own joke.*)

CHRISTOPHER. Your question?

SUE. OK, OK, sure. So ... when I applied for my 492968B I seem to get through all the windows fine until the confirmation page. Then every time I get a code that says, (*Reads notes.*) “File un-owned. Please contact server.”

CHRISTOPHER (*typing as he speaks*). I see. Did you register your LTM code?

SUE. Yes.

CHRISTOPHER. In both places?

SUE. Yes, I believe I have the confirmation number somewhere here ...

CHRISTOPHER. Sometimes people think they've completed both registrations but they didn't respond to the verification email and then enter the temporary code that they received there. In which case the registration attempt is voided in seven days and they have to start over.

SUE. I did that, though.

CHRISTOPHER. You did?

SUE. Yes.

CHRISTOPHER. For both?

SUE. Yes, I did! I think.

CHRISTOPHER. You did or you think?

SUE. I did ... ?

CHRISTOPHER. Because if you didn't, then all you need to do is go back to the website, choose *Register My LTM Code*, choose option 6A from the drop-down menu, click the begin button in the lower left-hand corner, and fill in the registration—

SUE. I did that! I did it!

CHRISTOPHER. You did?

SUE. Yes! I think.

CHRISTOPHER. OK, my suggestion is that you go back and re-register your LTM code in both places and see if that solves your issue. Thank you for calling the TeleGov helpline, please stay on the line to answer a brief survey—

SUE. Wait! Wait! Don't hang up!

CHRISTOPHER. Most issues are ones of incomplete LTM code registrations, so I'm confident that you will be able to resolve this problem by properly completing the—

SUE (*overlapping*). No, no, NO! I've been trying to reach someone for days. I need help. I need that money, OK? And I need help to get it, and this is the fucking HELPLINE and you are supposed to help me!

CHRISTOPHER (*calmly*). My suggestion is that you re-register your LTM code in both—

SUE. You already said that! You already suggested that, Christopher!

CHRISTOPHER. OK.

SUE. But if we hang up and I try your "suggestion" and it doesn't work then I have to wait on hold for days again and another week goes by and I don't get the money and I really, really need that money—

CHRISTOPHER. Please calm down.

SUE. It's easy for you to say, "Calm down," when you're sitting there at your