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Alone, Together

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Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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ISBN: 978-1-61959-253-7

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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

Pick Me Up

By
LINDA ALPER

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(PICK ME UP)

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Pick Me Up 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. Luan Schooler was the dramaturg.

CAST:

CHEFDaniel Herrera

AUTHOR’S NOTE

Why write for a Zoom Fest? It’s what we do—try and stop us. We all need to tell, share and take in stories. I also want there to be useful material for young performers, directors and designers to explore, so they can continue to practice and refine their talents.

And lastly, in dark times, I seem to cling to what’s absurd, funny and occasionally sweet—maybe my way of coping and forging ahead.

—Linda Alper

Pick Me Up

CHARACTERS

CHEF: Any gender.

(A CHEF separates eggs, performing for a camera.)

CHEF. *Amici! Carini! Benvenuti a tutti!*

(Egg yolks plop into a bowl.)

This is my first virtual feed ... food feed ...
From the one, the only ... Bistro Dolce Vita!

Let's celebrate our collective *vitas* by making a famous *dolce*, beloved by
my diners for its many fine qualities—sweet, silky, spongy ...

The Pick Me Up ...

Tiramisu!

(Throughout the monologue, CHEF demonstrates: measuring, mixing and tasting.)

To begin, we blend egg yolks with a quarter cup of sugar.
Beat vigorously, until tripled in volume.

(Whisks.)

Come on, baby. Puff up. Expand. Go, go, go ...

(CHEF steps back, exposing an empty kitchen.)

Usually it's elbow-to-elbow in here. But for the foreseeable future ...
Welcome to my private gondola.

Don't you wish we really were on a gondola? A crowded gondola.
Or wading across the Trevi Fountain, hounded by paparazzi.

Alas.

We are not in Rome.

We are not in Venice.

Italy.

We're not even in Venice, California.

But we are in *Naples!*
At the Montebella Senior Estates ...
In Naples ... *Florida!*

The gondola that never goes anywhere.

Usually, my cucina would be bustling at this hour.
Aneesh and José chopping.
Keisha and Usman setting up.
Mei Ling, Carlos and Fatima. Mihn and Marisol.
And Chaz.

(CHEF looks around, spooked by the empty space.)

Not that we get here early to make sauces. Our diners don't go in for spice.
Not much sugar. And salt?! Nothing crispy, chewy, stringy or tough.
Bake and boil. That's what my horde goes for.

I guess I think of my diners as a horde.

All of them calling out, "The meat is too pink." "Give me the dressing on the side!"

According to Mei Ling, the word "horde" comes from the Mongol invaders—who swept their way across Asia. She says we probably all have a little Mongol horde in our DNA.

Not hoarders—but that's a whole other thing.

(Finishes whisking.)

In China, Mei Ling also tells me, they honor this horde. This horde would be having home-cooked meals. In a real home.

Same in Mexico, according to Carlos.

But as head of the kitchen, I can vouch for Montebella's "variety of home-cooked food, prepared by an international chef."

That's me.

I took a cooking class in Rome.

The real Rome ... not the one in Texas.

Hey, at least this job comes with health insurance.

Anyway. I'm here extra early today—in *anticipo*—which means early, but I think of it as "in anticipation," because I have that heart-beating-fast, touchy stomach that feels like anticipation ...

(CHEF struggles to remain calm and sets out a second bowl.)

Because I have to make a special birthday dessert.

For Ed.

Ed is one of my demanding diners. And last night, Ed demanded a tiramisu.