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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

King Zoom

By

KATIE BENDER

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(KING ZOOM)

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King Zoom 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 Julie Fishell. Liz Engelman was the dramaturg.

CAST:

DON KING Sean O’Shea
SOPHIA KING Hailey Turner
VERNESSA KING Lana Spring
JAKEY KING Ethan Kim
TINA KING Daniel Stein

AUTHOR’S NOTE

By way of Zoom, King Lear meets *Arrested Development* meets the American dynasty whose last name rhymes with Lump!

—Katie Bender

King Zoom

CHARACTERS

DON KING: patriarch.

SOPHIA KING: wife.

VERNESSA KING: oldest dependent.

JAKEY KING: middle dependent.

TINA KING: smallest dependent.

PLACE: A Zoom meeting mostly at the King estate. April 2020.

(A family Zoom meeting. DON sent the invite; he sits at an executive desk in his office. He is fully dressed and all business.

SOPHIA is in her bedroom, dressing; mostly we just see her décolletage, as if she doesn't want us to see her face.

VERNESSA is on a treadmill in the rec room, full makeup, probably pearls.

JAKEY has a background up, some iconic image from WWII. He's shirtless.

TINA is only an icon on the screen, or some weird dark corner of the house.)

DON. Hello, is this thing on?

Can you hear me?

JAKEY. Dad, stop shouting.

SOPHIA. We hear you, darling—

VERNESSA. Something's wrong with your screen, Mom.

SOPHIA. Honey, don't yell.

VERNESSA. Are you, like ... ? I think your robe is covering the camera?

(She removes her robe and hides a martini set up—)

SOPHIA. I'm getting dressed for the—

DON. Are we all met?

JAKEY. Whoa, Tina showed up. That's a first.

VERNESSA. What the—?

SOPHIA. Jakey, are you ... ? Is that ... ?

VERNESSA. So creepy.

SOPHIA. What is that behind you?

JAKEY. It's like the most iconic WWII image.

It's like Normandy.

SOPHIA. Where are you?

JAKEY. Oh my God.

I'm in my room.

Obviously.

It's just like—

VERNESSA. Must we really be exposed to your weird hairless boy chest.

It's so gross.

DON. Is something wrong with your face, Sophia?

SOPHIA. What? No.

DON. Well, I'd like to see my wife's face.

SOPHIA. I'm flossing.

VERNESSA. Oh my God.

Can't you floss at literally any other time?

There's like twenty-four hours in a day.

JAKEY. Don't be a cunt, Vernessa.

DON. Do you need to be flossing right now?

SOPHIA. Keeping a schedule is important for mental health.

And my mental health—

DON. This is a family meeting—

SOPHIA. As you well know.

My mental health, Don—

VERNESSA. Aren't we all having dinner tomorrow?

JAKEY. We are?

VERNESSA. Didn't you get the invite?

DON. Enough.

JAKEY. No, I didn't.

DON. I SAID ENOUGH.

(Silence.)

DON *(cont'd)*. I have some terrible news.

VERNESSA. Oh God, is Uncle Jack the molester coming to dinner?

SOPHIA. Vernessa!

DON. Vernessa!

SOPHIA. Uncle Jack is not a molester.

VERNESSA. You know nothing, Mom.

DON. He was acquitted.

VERNESSA. The charges were dropped.

For a small fortune.

That's not an acquittal.

JAKEY. Dad, were you abused as a child?

DON. What?

SOPHIA. Jakey!

VERNESSA. More psycho babble?

JAKEY. I've always wondered.

DON. No!

I was very poor, and I worked very hard but—

JAKEY. Two out of three psychotic narcissists were abused as children.

You exhibit all the tendencies:

One, a need to control all conversations—

DON. Will you shut up?

JAKEY. Check.

DON. If you don't be quiet I'll withhold your mutual funds—

JAKEY. Two, a need for others to be reliant on you.

Check.

DON. I'm dying, people.

That's why I called this meeting.

I have all the symptoms.

I'm dying.

SOPHIA. Oh, darling, that's terrible.

DON. Will you please stop flossing!

SOPHIA. Oh, Don.

Here I am.

Bright and beautiful.

(She poses before the screen.)

DON. Thank you!

VERNESSA. Are you sure?

SOPHIA. Oh, Vernessa.

DON. Of course I'm sure.

JAKEY. It's actually pretty implausible.

VERNESSA. You haven't left the house in weeks.

JAKEY. Did the staff bring it in?

SOPHIA. Oh my God, do you think?

VERNESSA. I fucking knew we should have fired them sooner.

SOPHIA. Dad wanted his shirts pressed.

VERNESSA. And now he's dying.

DON. Silence!!!

(Silence.)

DON (*cont'd*). Now, obviously, the bulk of my estate—debt, stocks in fake meat and cryptocurrency, as well as my corporeal being—will go to my wife, Sophia, whose lifelong ability to make something out of nothing has always astonished ... I mean just look at the children ... so big ... so ... um ... real.

(A moment as he considers his real children.)

DON (*cont'd*). But the rest of the estate I need to divide between you three, and I need your help figuring out who deserves what and why.

VERNESSA. I'm sorry, the three of us?

DON. Now obviously Tina is my favorite.

She is beautiful and very quiet.

VERNESSA. Oh my God.

DON. Thank you for showing up today, Tina. It's a huge step forward in our relationship. Huge.

Do you have any words for us, Tina?

(Silence.)

DON (*cont'd*). Any words at all?

SOPHIA. Oh, Don.

(Silence.)

DON. I'll come back to you.

I'll give you each three minutes to state your case: how much you love me, what merits you bring to the family, and how you'd best serve the fortune, et cetera. Does that make sense?

VERNESSA. OK, so, you want us to pitch our love and accomplishments in order to access the piece of your fortune most appropriate to us as individuals?

Oh totally, makes total sense.

And actually, it's pretty brilliant.

And super fair.

I salute you, Dad.

SOPHIA. Is this really such a good idea, Don?

I mean ... couldn't we just wait?

Sleep on it?

Maybe wait for an actual diagnosis?

DON. No no, don't speak, Sophia.

The dependents need to know how to fight for their own interests for a change.

VERNESSA. I'll go first.

Hold on, let me slow down the treadmill.

(She does. Eye roll from SOPHIA.)

SOPHIA *(under her breath)*. Here we go.

VERNESSA. Oh my gosh.

I'm a little nervous.

This moment means sooooo much to me.

Thank you for the opportunity, Dad, really.

I want to start out by saying nothing is more important than family.

In these unprecedented times, literally when there is no actual president, it is love that brings us together and lets us spread our wings and soar to great heights together—

JAKY. You're such a cunt.

VERNESSA. Go fuck a marmot, ass hat.

Spreading my wings and flexing my muscles as our head of marketing in overseas investments, I have been able to soar our profit margins to greater heights, relying on my love for pharmaceuticals, natural resources, and luxury branding. We continue to be the face of luxury, reaching seven point eight billion followers who like our stuff. Also I run the charity which, total coincidence, Dad—can I call you Dad?—just bought this beautiful portrait of you. I'll show you some other time when I'm not on the treadmill.

So I would like to go big and say that all properties, businesses, and overseas investments should be willed to me. Thank you for the opportunity.

(Tears.) And let me just say,

You're a great cook, Dad.

I'll miss your omelettes

And you make a great whiskey neat.

Just the right amount of neat,

That's the secret.

And I've always liked your beard.

Oh Dad ... I'm overcome.

DON. That was very moving, Vernessa—

VERNESSA. Thank you—

DON. Though a woman named Maria has always made our omelettes, I do, on occasion, offer pointers.

VERNESSA. Thank you, Dad.

DON. Jakey, you are up.

JAKY. Ummm, yeah, OK, so Dad, I'm gonna be straight with you, I'm not gonna sugarcoat this like some people—Vernessa—excuse me.

You've always been like a father to me, and I'm—

VERNESSA. He's literally your father—