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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

First Date

By

ANNIE TORSIGLIERI

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(FIRST DATE)

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First Date 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 Annie Torsiglieri.

CAST:

EDWINA..... Ryan Hollon

First Date

CHARACTER

EDWINA: Female or nonbinary, any race, any age.

(EDWINA has done her best to create the intimacy and romance of a cute café, including mood lighting and wine.

Mid-Zoom date. Headphones on, so we do not hear her date's replies.

This must be played with absolute truth.

It is a play about loneliness.)

EDWINA *(toasting)*. To you!

What are the odds?! No seriously, OK ... if you like were gonna figure it out with true numbers and things. *You* like water without ice, *I* like water without ice. *You* like Animal Planet, *I* like Animal Planet. We both watch Nick at Nite ... we BOTH like the old Darren.

I never dreamed we'd have so much in common.

.....

Susie never mentioned you were so quiet!

I mean I love ... quietness ...

.....

Susie said, "I promise you'll love him—he's so cute and smart ... " but she never mentioned quiet!

.....

"Is this thing on?"

.....

What do you do again, George? ... Oh, right. That's right. That must be interesting.

My *dentist* is an accountant.

.....

Do they let you use a calculator or do you have to do it all in your head? ... Oh, well I'm sure that makes a big difference. Yeah, because, you know, why not? I mean this isn't high school right? It's not a test! ... (DO they test you? ... Right, right.)

.....

Do you love what you do?

.....

I love what *I* do.

MOST of the time.

I mean well I love it, but I hate it too.

What I love is that I can use myself ... my image and my, you know, my face and my body, my HAIR (of course ... yeah, it gets me a lot of work. It does.) I can really use my whole persona, really to, you know, get behind products that I believe in. I mean you can see it. You can see it in my eyes. When I really believe in a product ... Did you see my Puppy Chow spot? Right ... Yeah well it was mostly in the Midwest ... But if you saw that you'd know. I mean how do you lie about something like that? You can't. You can't. It can't be done. (Well SOME people can but ...) I mean I *LOVE* dogs. Dogs are like people. Or like tuna ... They play. They use tools. They're VIABLE and ... (Did you read about that dog that helps that guy with no arms fly a plane?) I mean, you see what I'm saying then. The COURAGE.

But so, so how could I ever look into that camera and say to those dogs in this country (or Europe ... I think they maybe show it there too) how could I say to those dogs that they should just run right out and buy Puppy Chow!!!! ... if I didn't really BELIEVE it's a *really* good product for them to eat. (It's actually pretty delicious actually.) (Crunchy and just a lllllllittle bit salty.)

(And then, off his look.)

I mean ... for DOG food.

Anyway, that sincereness comes through in my persona it really does (let me tell you.)

I just have too much respect for the power of my persona to use it in any kind of lieful way. THAT'S why, *(She tries to calm herself down, but it is difficult.)* that's why I got so mad about the whole Tampax thing. You know? I mean, I don't know if you're at all aware of the whole Tampax controversy. (It's not just Tampax either, let me tell you something. No. That's really just the speck of the iceberg.) But it almost got me blacklisted. Really! (You know what that means don't you? Yeah, it's a whole communist thing.) Anyway, I stood up for what I believed in on that issue, let me tell you ... and with all the tears, with all the betrayal, the outrage, I'll tell you what ... I would do it again tomorrow if I had to. I would and that's not just hero-ness talking. Have you SEEN those Tampax commercials?! I mean, BLUE INK? You know?! Who do they think we are, stupid? I mean I'm a woman, right, and I think I know a thing or two about woman-ness and those things. So when you try and sell me a line about blue ink, coming out of my persona,