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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

Zoom Baby

By

LEO CABRANES-GRANT

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(ZOOM BABY)

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Zoom Baby 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 Frances (Yizhou) Sun and designed by Kaede Kogo and Allison McSwain.

CAST:

MARCOS.....Cyrus Roberts
ABIGAIL Blake Thonpson

AUTHOR’S NOTE

When LAUNCH PAD announced this initiative, I saw *Alone, Together* as an amazing opportunity to offer support and hope to my community during troubled times. I wanted to join this collaborative effort, not only to stay in touch with my colleagues and friends but also to explore how art confronts a moment of fear and uncertainty. Theatre is a form of dwelling, a way of belonging to a particular place—in this case, we are dealing with the highly mobile, mediated and unpredictable space of online communication. Being a hybrid of television, hand-held filming and stage setting, Zoom provides its own pleasures, challenges and limitations. The indispensable fact about Zoom is that it combines, in uncanny ways, the effects of intimacy (close-ups, close quarters, proximity between object and body) with the possibilities of distancing (we are both here and there, but not exactly). To a certain extent, the medium itself is so self-referential (so Brechtian) that the phone and the computer become characters in their own right. In *Zoom Baby*, I wanted to ponder how a cisgendered couple manages—or not—the pivotal decision of their marriage in the alone-togetherness of Zoom, while the unfolding realities of a pandemic are starting to change everything they take for granted. As their relationship faces a crisis, so does their country. They are not aware of this yet—but we are.

—Leo Cabranes-Grant

Zoom Baby

CHARACTERS

MARCOS: A Puerto Rican born in New York, 36 years old.

ABIGAIL: A white American born in New York, 30 years old.

(On the screen we see MARCOS. The space behind him is evidently a hotel room. He is getting ready to send an invite. He wears a good shirt and tie.

Now on the screen, we see ABIGAIL responding to his invite. The space behind her is evidently a small apartment main living room. She is wearing casual clothes.

It's early February. The winter of 2020. He's in Seattle for a conference. She's in Brooklyn, where they live.)

ABIGAIL *(she looks tense, and cautiously smiley)*. Oh, hello.

MARCOS. Yes, hello, hello—my pretty honey bee. We're Zooooooming!

ABIGAIL. I don't like it. I'm sure I look awful—with this bad lighting.

MARCOS. I wanna try it. *(Sensually)*. *Te ves muy bonita. Siempre.*

ABIGAIL *(tense)*. *Muchas gracias, sweetie.*

MARCOS. No more FaceTime. Zoom is the substance now.

ABIGAIL. It will pass. *(Unable to smile.)* How did your presentation go?

MARCOS. My paper was well received, I guess—but—I could have done better.

ABIGAIL *(she looks tense, but controlled)*. You're never satisfied with your work.

MARCOS. My panel was not well attended. Everybody's doing digital. I'm still doing literature.

ABIGAIL. Don't worry about it. You just got tenure. *(Staring at the screen, tense.)* I have something to tell you.

MARCOS *(while taking his tie off, not listening)*. Have you heard anything new about that flu?

ABIGAIL. Not today. But I think they're starting to be quite concerned about it.

MARCOS. Yeah, it sounds serious. The president just restricted the entry of travelers from China.

ABIGAIL. I haven't listened to the news since the morning.

MARCOS *(while unbuttoning his shirt)*. Seattle had some cases already. Maybe I should wear a mask.

ABIGAIL (*abruptly*). Marcos—stop rambling. Listen to me.

MARCOS (*listening, at last*). Yes—I'm all ears.

ABIGAIL. I had to go to the doctor yesterday.

MARCOS (*truly alarmed*). You? Did you have an accident?

ABIGAIL. The *fertility* doctor.

MARCOS. Is the baby OK?

ABIGAIL. There's been a mistake.

MARCOS. What kind of mistake?

ABIGAIL. Some labels got messed up. It was not your sperm.

MARCOS. What?

ABIGAIL. The sperm they used for us came from a different client.

MARCOS. Whom?

ABIGAIL. It's not clear yet.

MARCOS. That's not possible.

ABIGAIL. Unfortunately—it was.

MARCOS. Shit.

ABIGAIL. Lots of it.

MARCOS (*quietly angry*). Those assholes—I'm gonna sue that clinic until they fall dead—how could they make such a stupid error?

ABIGAIL. We have to find a lawyer. This has to be litigated—it's completely unacceptable.

MARCOS. And they'll have to pay for the abortion—and all the expenses related to this. And the emotional distress—this is so upsetting.

(*ABIGAIL looks at MARCOS—she is extremely serious.*)

MARCOS (*cont'd*). Hey. (*Neutral.*) We're not keeping that baby—are we?

ABIGAIL. I'm afraid it's too late.

MARCOS. Late for what?

ABIGAIL. An abortion.

MARCOS. But it's not our baby.

ABIGAIL. It's not *your* baby.

MARCOS. Are you telling me that you're willing to have *that* baby—without my sperm?

ABIGAIL. They're still my eggs.

MARCOS. You must be kidding.

ABIGAIL. I'm almost at the end of my first trimester.

MARCOS. You knew about this yesterday—and you waited until today to inform me?

ABIGAIL. You were reading your paper this morning—You’re so anxious before those things—and I needed some time—to think things through—to figure things out.

MARCOS. There’s nothing about this you should be figuring out without me.

ABIGAIL. I was in shock. How can they be so clumsy? What a bunch of morons—

MARCOS. You should have called me as soon as they contacted you.

ABIGAIL. Well—I didn’t. (*Dismissing his complaint.*) Do you really want me to have an abortion?

MARCOS. C’mon—I’m sure you thought about that too.

ABIGAIL. It crossed my mind—I can’t deny it.

MARCOS. There we go.

ABIGAIL. But it’s not an option. It isn’t. Not for me.

MARCOS. So—you’re planning on choosing—this guy’s baby—over me.

ABIGAIL. That’s too simple, Marcos. I knew you were going to react like this—

MARCOS. You bet.

ABIGAIL. I don’t want to be here when you come back.

MARCOS. And where exactly are you going?

ABIGAIL. I’m staying with my mother—for a few days.

MARCOS. Don’t tell me you’re hiding in New Rochelle again.

ABIGAIL. Mom suggested it.

MARCOS. Of course she did.

ABIGAIL. She thinks I should be with her right now.

MARCOS. And what about your husband? What about me?

ABIGAIL. This is a *woman’s* issue, Marcos. And I don’t want to fight. You know how this place is—thin walls and eager neighbors.

MARCOS (*ironically*). We can take long walks along the promenade and admire the skyline while we talk.

ABIGAIL. Ah—imagine all the Brooklyn joggers turning their heads, gawking at the mad couple.

MARCOS. Who cares.

ABIGAIL. We have to be reasonable.

MARCOS. Easy for you to say. You wanted your own child—and so did I. That’s why we discarded adopting one. But now that you have *your* baby—you’re taking me out of the picture. I’m sure this is one of your goddamn mother’s ideas—

ABIGAIL. Don’t get nasty, Marcos—please, don’t. You’re quite good at verbal basketball. I don’t want one of your lectures.