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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

Rosebud

By

DAN CASTELLANETA and DEB LACUSTA

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(ROSEBUD)

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Rosebud was originally written and performed by Dan Castellaneta and Deb Lacusta as part of their *Deb & Dan's Show* at The Improvisation Theater, Los Angeles, and subsequently recorded for audio as part of Dan Castellaneta's *I Am Not Homer*. This Zoom adaptation 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 Maria Zelaya Santillan.

CAST:

GEORGE Jonathan Buhrer
RENE Alyssa Longwill

AUTHOR'S NOTE

A couple has been dating for only three months and then COVID-19 hits. Their relationship goes online, and the romantic bloom is off the “Rosebud,” so to speak. *Rosebud* has had various incarnations over the years. It was performed in a live theatre show and as an audio recording. Each time, the format informed our characters in different ways. It's amazing how Zooming online can actually reveal more about a person than being in the same room, or on the same stage, with them. All you have is the screen to gaze upon. So each facial tic, each eye roll, each pause, reveals what is left unspoken. And since the play deals with the film *Citizen Kane*, the cinematic quality of the Zoom format also allows us to play with some techniques of cinema. As writers, setting *Rosebud* in a Zoom world let us more closely examine the idea of communication between couples, and how one person's film obsession can devolve into the ridiculous and absurd—which pretty much reflects the world we now find ourselves living in.

—Dan Castellaneta and Deb Lacusta

Rosebud

CHARACTERS

GEORGE: Male, 20s-30s, comes off as a pseudo-intellectual film snob. He's in a relationship with Rene.

RENE: Female, 20s-30s, doesn't get George's film obsession at all.

(GEORGE and RENE, each in their own Zoom windows in their respective homes, are in mid-conversation. We catch RENE giggling a bit too long about something.)

RENE *(giggling)*. So did you see that video I sent?

GEORGE. Not yet.

RENE *(still giggling)*. It was *so* funny. No matter what that Roomba did, the cat never fell off! You gotta watch it.

GEORGE. Uh huh. Great. So did you watch *Citizen Kane*?

RENE. Yes, I watched it on Netflix.

GEORGE. So wasn't that something?

RENE. What, George?

GEORGE. The ending of the movie.

RENE. I didn't get it.

GEORGE. What do you mean? You saw the ending, right?

RENE. Yeah.

GEORGE. What was the ending?

RENE. There was a fire. And there was a sled. And that's the ending of the movie.

GEORGE. Yes. Amazing, right?

RENE. What did the sled have to do with anything?

GEORGE. Rene, it was the only thing in the world that meant anything to him.

RENE. Then why did he burn it?

GEORGE. He didn't burn it. He's dead.

RENE. Well who burned the sled then?

GEORGE. It doesn't matter who burned it.

RENE. Then why was it in the movie?

GEORGE. Rene, he was rich. He owned everything. But his last words were "Rosebud."

RENE. That was the blonde in the lace outfit.

GEORGE. No, it was a sled.

RENE. And it was worth millions of dollars.

GEORGE. Didn't you see "Rosebud" written on the sled?

RENE. I paid attention.

GEORGE. Well, then what happened?

RENE. Uh, there was, uh, a bald guy in glasses and a bunch of dancing girls and um, a guy was running for mayor and someone lived on a farm.

GEORGE. He ran for governor.

RENE. Oh, and there was an opera.

GEORGE. What was the movie about in one sentence?

RENE (*pause*). A man who loved a sled.

GEORGE. That wasn't even a sentence. You remember in the snow?

RENE. There were these big, fat lips and then he said, "Rosebud." I remember that.

GEORGE. No. When he was a little boy. He was in the snow, he was playing with the sled.

RENE. So what was the deal with the big, fat lips?

GEORGE. He was saying his last words—"Rosebud."

RENE. His last words were a sled? I would think he'd have something better to say.

GEORGE. It reminded him of his childhood. He was young, he had the sled, and that was the only time in his entire life he was ever happy.

RENE (*pause*). That's pathetic.

GEORGE. That's the idea.

RENE. What a dumb story.

GEORGE. Dumb! How is it dumb?!

RENE. A rich guy dies unhappy 'cause he misses his sled. Boo hoo. He could afford another one.

GEORGE. He didn't need another one.

RENE. Then why did he burn it?

GEORGE. He didn't burn it!

RENE. Well somebody did!

(*GEORGE lets out an exasperated sigh.*)

RENE (*cont'd*). Y'know, they left too many loose ends to be tied up in this movie.

GEORGE. Are you kidding? This is one of the most important movies in cinema history.

RENE. I did not know that. Then how come it's so boring.

GEORGE. It's not boring. It's an acquired taste like fine wine.

RENE. At least wine isn't in black and white. Well, it is in white. (*Giggles at her joke, then.*) What?