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A New Normalcy? A Look into the Future of Collaboration: An Examination in Online, Digital Theatre

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A New Normalcy? A Look into the Future of Collaboration:
An Examination in Online, Digital Theatre

An honors thesis presented to the
Department of Music & Theatre,
University at Albany, State University of New York
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in Theatre
and
graduation from The Honors College

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May 2021

Abstract

Beginning in March 2020, live theatre and entertainment has been on furlough due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. The pandemic has inspired individual artists to create and revolutionize the theatre industry by implementing new styles of origination such as online theatre. Online theatre grants opportunities to playwrights, directors, stage managers, actors, and designers to collectively formulate a show with a virtual experience. Over the course of the years 2020-2021, productions have been using various software programs to stage full-scale shows, which makes theatre more accessible than ever before. This paper documents the evolution of theatre through the pandemic, affecting the changing roles of collaborative theatre artists. Qualitative data was collected from first- and second-hand interviews and from observing virtual productions ranging from classical plays to new works. Based on the observations and analysis of interviewees' accounts, I have applied the skills for online theatre to my own practical experience as a dramaturg, actor, and director in multiple digital productions. In conclusion, the study explores the unique and innovative ways that the audience's new position allows for participation and engagement. Globally, digital theatre has allowed many artists to recognize new opportunities as a result of the pandemic, whereas live theatre may limit international participation. The experience and skills that collaborators have learned will be an asset rather than a detriment for when live theatre returns.

Keywords: *Online theatre, digital productions, virtual audience reception, Zoom platform, Covid-19*

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor, Kathryn Walat, for her expert guidance and unwavering support as this all helped in completing my research. Thank you for all the hard-work and dedication you have provided for me over the past year. I would also like to acknowledge the Head of the Theatre Program, Eszter Szalczer for checking in and supporting my process as an honors student. To my other professors, Kimberly Stauffer, Chad Larabee, and Angela Ledtke; thank you for formulating me into the theatre artist I am today. Due to your support and optimism over the years, I have been granted opportunities both in performance and production that I will cherish for the rest of my career. To my peers who have taken part of the various online productions during my experience in 2020-2021, you have all inspired and allowed me to adapt on my skills as an artist; thank you. Special thanks to my good friend, Ryan Buchholz, for allowing me to direct his play as part of my experience for my thesis.

Thank you to Kelly Smith, a tutor from the University at Albany's Writing Center, for helping me every Monday with revisions on my thesis over the past few months. Also, special thanks to Sarah Kim, the Honors College graduate assistant, for working diligently with me on my format revisions.

I would also like to acknowledge how supportive and immensely helpful Dean Chang has been throughout my four years. Your thoughtful words and encouragement will always resonate with me for the rest of my life.

Lastly, I would like to express my acknowledgment to my wonderful family and friends. You have all been my rock through the stresses of my career, while being my number one supporter, always. I would like to sincerely thank my parents for going above and beyond always. Mom, Dad, I don't know where I would be without you. With deepest gratitude, thank you for allowing me to pursue my passions and dreams. Thank you for never letting me give up, even when times can get hard. I love you both, forever and always.

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Introduction

Actor Willem Dafoe once said, "With theatre, you have to be ready for anything" (Rose). Due to the loss of jobs during the pandemic, artists discovered new methods of producing theatre. The pandemic heavily affected the nation in March 2020, which resulted in the theatre district closing until May 30th, 2021, at the earliest ("Broadway Shows to Remain Shut Down Through May 30, 2021"). The theater district initially set the theaters to open back up in April 2020, a month after the shutdown. However, the dates were pushed back on multiple occasions due to the severity of the virus. Similarly, 103 years ago, the 1918 H1N1 flu affected over 500 million people (Canning). The 1918 flu forced most of the theatre district to shut down at that time as well. The virus spread amongst World War I soldiers, which led to a global-wide concern. In 1918, the theatre industry was divided as a result of the shutdown; some closed while others kept their theaters open for the "sake of keeping everyone calm" (Canning).

There are major differences between the effects of the virus in 1918 and 2020. Firstly, the H1N1 virus had prominent flu-like symptoms, unlike the coronavirus which may not present any symptoms. Another major difference is that the Covid-19 pandemic has offered artists a "collective opportunity to remember the uncertainty and fears of this [virus] as well as understanding why things unfolded the way they did, and help [prevent this from] happening again" (Canning). The Covid-19 pandemic became a catalyst for theatre artists to produce new work based on events that occurred between 2020 and 2021, as well as adapting a new methodology called online, digital theatre. This platform could be defined and called either online, digital, or virtual theatre. Online theatre reconstructs performances using various streaming sources to grant easier access for artists and audience members worldwide. Online theatre does not diminish the importance of live theatre,

but enhances the skills set and connections when creating a piece of work. The effects of working remotely can even lead to in-person jobs in the future once live theatre returns.

This paper will introduce the changing roles of professional playwrights, directors, stage managers, actors and technical designers. This study will provide the examination and process on how online productions were assembled. Qualitative data was collected from first- and second-hand interviews and from observing virtual productions ranging from classical plays to new works. This helps illustrate the experience, challenges, and success of digital theatre. This paper will also include practical, first-hand experience as a dramaturg, actor, and director. Online theatre has impacted the participation and engagement of audience members through various segments of production. Though live theatre is the preferred method, the goal of online theatre is to continue producing entertainment for the audience and keeping performers employed. In order to ensure all safety protocols are met, the integration back to live theatre has been progressing slowly. Most importantly, the common factor between live and online theatre is said by Broadway star, Chita Rivera, "It's communication...that's what theatre is all about" (Garcia).

The Changing Roles in Online Theatre

The Playwright's Experience

Online theatre has granted the opportunity for many theatre artists, including the playwright, to continue their creative process. The changing role of the playwright may require a shift in the writings of current and future online productions. Playwright Qui Nguyen transformed his 2011 play, *She Kills Monsters* from a stage play to an online production. In an interview with the playwright, Nguyen stated that the catalyst for this new edition occurred from the pandemic shutting down in-person theatrical performances. Theatre companies emailed Nguyen requesting

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the possibility for *She Kills Monsters* to be performed on a digital platform. While in pandemic lockdown, Nguyen began working to "shorten the play, cut all the overlapping dialogue — internet lag time doesn't allow for characters to cut each other off" (Tran). This version of Nguyen's play was workshopped in May 2020 and published on Concord Theatricals for purchase. This became one of the new adaptations of online theatre by playwrights.

In the live production, *She Kills Monsters* ordinarily incorporates "a large cast, fight choreography, and puppetry" (Tran). To fit this adaptation into an online platform, virtual backgrounds such as Snapchat filters and green screens were used as alternate solutions to stage productions. In addition, the role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons became a model for Qui Nguyen's fight scenes in this online version. In Dungeons & Dragons "a dungeon master narrates the fight scenes in detail. The character [DM Chuck] does the same thing in *She Kills Monsters* (for example, "She punches Orcus in the stomach.") (Tran). Rather than performing the fight sequence, characters in *She Kills Monsters* narrates the original stage directions aloud. Virtually, *She Kills Monsters* has provided more opportunities for programs to utilize resources and spaces that may not have been originally possible to do in-person. Qui Nguyen quotes, "It opens doors for actors that could never do my plays before, and if you want to work with people outside of your community, you can still put the show together" (Tran).

Tony Award—winning playwright and librettist Richard Nelson adapted to the online platform in order to create a new series of plays. Nelson's work was inspired by the pandemic and the events of 2020, which many viewers can relate to. Some past plays of Nelson's revolved around historical anniversaries such as the September 11th attacks, the John F. Kennedy assassination, and the 2012 Presidential election "which provided fodder for conversation and [gave the] audience a sense of intimate immediacy" (Marius). Nelson is currently known for being the first

playwright to produce an original play during quarantine; Nelson wrote a three-part series that continued his original works regarding the Apple family (Marius). During an interview with Alison Stewart, the podcast host of "All of It," Richard Nelson explained his creative process:

> Once the theaters closed, I started to think of different ways and different things to do … I remember the conversation I had when I was working on the first Apple play in 2010 with Oskar Eustis, the artistic director at the Public Theater. I said to him, I have a situation here that if anything happens in the world that we want to react to quickly, maybe this is something I could pursue. (Richard Nelson's Pandemic Plays 01:19–02:28)

The first play of the trilogy titled, *What Do We Need to Talk About?* covers topics such as the "COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Cuomo, and the dire state of the Broadway closure" (Marius). This premiered in April hosted by the Off-Broadway theater, The Public Theater. Nelson received inspiration from Boccaccio's piece titled, *The Decameron*. *The Decameron* were a collection of stories about people quarantining during the Black Death (McHenry). However, he used the structure of storytelling from *The Decameron*, but did not want to have all context of his play revolve around a pandemic. Nelson used relatable events through the four middle-aged siblings to spark more interest. (McHenry). Nelson commented that all three plays "have the characters asking personal questions to their siblings … [creating] a very vulnerable world that we live in and all its concerns and questions we may have" (Richard Nelson's Pandemic Plays 07:40–08:10).

The setting of all three plays takes place on a Zoom call. The use of Zoom calls is relatable to the current life situation of many people: a family, gathering via an online platform. In Stewart's interview with Nelson, she questioned how online theatre has impacted his pieces:

> I have actors who are isolated in their own homes, so as a playwright I had to structure the storytelling based on that. Two actors, Tim, and his girlfriend Jane, don't live together… The story that I write has to have them apart …whereas the other two actors, Maryann Plunkett, and J.O Sanders are married. Since they live together, I have put their characters together in the story. [Online theatre] has heavily influenced the writing and the basic storytelling of the place. (Richard Nelson's Pandemic Plays 08:26–09:24)

Actors from the original Apple Family continued their roles in this three-part virtual series, forcing them to quickly adapt to the Zoom format and "work through the material from their homes" (McHenry). Nelson was active in the rehearsal process, attending Zoom calls to keep actors' morale high during these different times. According to the actors, the online rehearsals provided a similar atmosphere to in-person rehearsals because "notes were given and jokes were made throughout the process, feeling like they were all together physically" (McHenry). Online theatre has provided a way to normalize the pandemic by maintaining this creative outlet.

During rehearsal, actors Plunkett and Sanders had to transform their West Village apartment into Barbara Apple's suburban home in Rhinebeck, NY (New York). They received guidance from the Public Theater's technical team for optimal light and sound, to ensure actors were seen/heard and planned for any broadcasting complications. Plunkett stated that the Public Theater had prepared for any livestream malfunction, "The night before the show, the cast gathered

for a formal dress rehearsal, which the Public taped just in case of any tech issues the night of the performance" (McHenry).

In addition to being the playwright for the trilogy, Richard Nelson was also the director. Though Nelson was uncertain in the beginning, he later found online theatre's integration to be a seamless transition. Nelson states:

> In terms of directing, we work about 10 days—and that's fine; the plays are just an hour. But it's interesting—there are some things that you'd never think of. Like, how do you cue a character? Will a stage manager have to call him on the phone? It's an interesting, complicated medium, because it has its own rules that you bump up against. (Marius)

Over the last few months, online theatre has progressed by solving questions that existed at the beginning of the pandemic. At the conclusion of Stewart's podcast, Nelson claimed that his three-play experience created "opportunity for theatre artists to get together, even on Zoom, and try to create something to make some kind of theatre … It's an effort to do something which I think has some value of hope … We are lucky to have a platform that allows us to do this" (Richard Nelson's Pandemic Plays 10:31–13:18). Don Zolidis, an up-and-coming playwright, began focusing on a similar concept to Richard Nelson's inspiration.

Don Zolidis created a new piece during the lockdown that focuses on the struggles of different people during the pandemic. The play is made up of a series of monologues called, *10 Ways to Survive Life in Quarantine.* Zolidis wrote this play in only 96 hours (about 4 days). Within days of the play being available for licensing, over 150 companies were requesting the rights due to how prevalent and new the topic was (Tran). According to Zolidis, knowing the actors would

have the responsibility of forming a set and designing their own costumes, he did not want to create a play that was too rigorous to perform. Zolidis' goal was to make the actors more comfortable with using their own space to perform in, "The show takes place over a conference call, as a host reaches out to different people to see how they're holding up at home. Zolidis's monologues make use of what an actor might have on hand. He even wrote their pets into the show, so it's not a boring monologue" (Tran). Similarly to Don Zolidis, Joy Zurzolo, a playwright whom I interviewed, adapted to this innovative style of theatre. Conducting this interview allowed me to observe and analyze Zurzolo's perspective on digital theatre.

Joy Zurzolo wrote *Singing With My Demons* under the guidance of Milan Stitt, Drama Desk Award—winner and professor at Carnegie Mellon in 1999. She stated that she readapted this version to fit the virtual stage. I conducted an interview with her and asked about the combined efforts during the creative process of the digital adjustment. Zurzolo stated:

> I felt a great sense of immediate intimacy and a collective agreement to "trust" the process and my colleagues. We had a non-verbal agreement to suspend any sense of distrust and to work to "overcome" the limitations of working through a tech only platform. Our collective desire to communicate and engage inspired us to effectively focus our talents through a different medium. (Zurzolo)

Without the playwrights' contributions to online theatre, there would not be new plays to discover and perform while the theatre industry is currently shut down. Digital theatre is "best for focusing on the words, developing a script, and being able to create more opportunities for folks who have never written before to develop their work" (Boland).

The Director's Experience

The role of a director in the theatrical field is someone who oversees and controls the visual presentation of a show. A show would not be possible without the input of the director's artistic vision. This vision is a compilation of the contributions from the playwright's storyline, the actors who follow the director's guidance, and the technical design team who creates the visual settings. In digital theatre, the goals for producing a show are no different than those of live performance; the process of reaching that goal is what makes online theatre unique and challenging. Online theatre shows how well directors can adapt to change in directing technique. Leigh Wolmarans, the director of Silhouette Youth Theatre, a company based in Northampton, United Kingdom, gave advice for rehearsal fatigue saying, "Stay creatively connected, we constantly talk about this concept that our young people have to be creatively connected" (Farmer 00:09–0:20). The theatre industry is ever changing, and this includes how a director must approach a play virtually.

When evaluating the beginning of a director's process in an online setting, changes are needed when it comes to casting actors for a show. Some preliminary requirements for casting are having the essential tools necessary for rehearsal and performances. Some tools include: a green screen, an adequate internet connection, a qualifiable camera/microphone set, a space to set up ring lights and props, and if in a different time zone, the eligibility to rehearse at those times. This has not been something to consider or question in live theatre, but virtually these requirements have become of high importance.

As a director, it is important to go over technological features during the first few rehearsals. For example, Zoom Theatre, a company that has been affiliated since March 2020 to produce free live productions suggests in their "What We've Learned So Far..." webinar that the

first day should be dedicated to training the cast on how to work around the Zoom platform. The list is: "1) Start / Stop / Change Video devices, 2) Start / Stop / Change Audio devices, 3) How to Change Backgrounds, 4) How to Pin Video Windows, 5) How to Rename" ("What We've Learned So Far …" 30). Practicing how to use the features of online platforms gives the actors the chance to remember their entrances and exits effectively. By constantly going over this technique, it ensures "smooth transitions within the play" ("LiveScreen Theatre Collection Director's Starter Guide" 2). This is all important to note so rehearsal time will not be wasted on re-explanation of features instead of using that time productively. A director should also establish the equitable rules such as arriving on time, break schedules, and proper etiquette between all personnel's whether rehearsals are in-person or virtual. Additional rules in online theatre may include: "all notifications on the user's device be set to silent to avoid interruption" because constant notification sounds would muffle a person speaking an important line ("LiveScreen Theatre Collection Director's Starter Guide" 2).

In the rehearsal process, a director's responsibility is to adequately "block" a production. Blocking is the positioning and movement of actors on stage to facilitate where the director wants them to be placed. However, in digital theatre, blocking becomes less of a physical principle. Instead of directing actors to laterally cross the stage from left to right, it is important to be aware of how much space the camera allows before moving out of frame. Blocking is adjusted through establishing sightlines and prop positioning as a new tool to adapt to the digital platform. Rather than focusing on physical blocking, Livestream Theatre suggests that, "focusing on the clarity and delivery of their lines as well as the intentions behind their scene partner(s) lines [is more beneficial]. Video chat might seem to be a disadvantage, but [online theatre allows viewers] to see

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every actor's actions/reactions with an unobstructed view" ("LiveScreen Theatre Collection Director's Starter Guide" 3).

Shaping an actor's performance in the digital platform would incorporate techniques from both film and theatre. Zoom Theatre refers to this as actors should be "working in a 99-seat House [and that] vocal modulation should have less freedom than stage" (What We've Learned So Far …" 32). In other words, a director should control the vocal quality of an actor as it should feel more authentic rather than amplified. Virtual performances are prone to time-related challenges. In order to establish a quicker pace, the director should shorten beats. Beats are shifting moments and actions in a scene. Arti Ishak, an actor-director involved in Emma Durbin's play, *landscape,* provided techniques necessary to end the timing challenges of digital theatre. To prevent the performance from lagging, "she has had to direct actors to interrupt each other and anticipate their cues" (Boland). Ishak states, "It's tough because you don't want to encourage them to not listen to each other, yet you need the cue to come at the end of the line" (Boland).

Online theatre has created a new area for directors to focus on. It makes the director versatile with how their role has been expanded. By obtaining more technological knowledge and insight on how to virtually direct, it makes the director more experienced to take on any challenge in the future whether in-person or online. The stage manager, considered to be the director's right-hand person, highlights skills that help facilitate the responsibilities of the director.

The Stage Manager's Experience

A stage manager is the "hub" of communication during a production. They are the liaison between all units and individuals involved in the show. Additionally, they oversee the phases of the production including: Onstage, backstage, pre-rehearsal, rehearsal, performance, and post-

performance. An important quality of a stage manager is to emulate leadership by staying focused to ensure a polished production, with everything running smoothly.

A stage manager accomplishes their tasks through communication. Karen Vuranch, an instructor of the Arts at Concord University as well as co-author for "A How-To Guide for Virtual Theater", a detailed explanation of how to stage manage a virtual production, stated, "The stage manager is the individual who is in complete charge behind the scenes, supervises the set up and running of the production, and calls all cues" (Glassman and Vuranch 14). Typically, in the virtual platform, the stage manager is deemed co-host on the Zoom platform with the director of the production. In the event of the director getting disconnected, the stage manager is then able to take over the rehearsal. Virtual platforms, such as Zoom, allow stage managers to coordinate with the actors, have screen share accessibility, and mute those not in a scene. They also could cue actors for entrances and exits throughout the performance.

Some production companies allow the stage manager to communicate with the actors in a different chatroom when it will be their time to appear on screen. Theatre critic Joey Sims states that "another responsibility of the stage manager is to remind the actors that they should be aware of microphone usage onscreen and offscreen" (Sims). During live theatre performances, an actor's microphone is controlled by the sound engineer upon receiving a cue list provided by the stage manager. A cue list indicates information about the completion, timing, chronology, light intensity, and volume degree of a cue.

Cue lists are also a priority that stage managers use to adapt in an online setting. Whether online or during a live show, a stage manager must remain organized. Google Drive has been a tool used by stage managers to ensure a virtual organization throughout the production process. In

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an interview that I conducted, Dayna Horn, a stage manager at Theatre in the Country in British Columbia, recalled that "sharing documents through Google Drive, was especially helpful if the script and cue sheets were Google Docs, as everyone could see any updated changes" (Horn). Dayna Horn's experience was that she had to "send emails as needed, keep track of everyone's role and contact info, and take notes in the script" (Horn).

Holding production meetings and sending out daily rehearsal reports is also considered to be essential in online productions. A production meeting is when the director, stage manager, and creative team discuss ideas and questions that benefit the needs of staging a performance. It is vital that the stage manager is taking detailed notes of these meetings to stay on top of changes and information. A daily rehearsal report is sent to the production team members who need to be made aware of all details that happened in the rehearsal when they are not present. A stage manager must also require a contact sheet in the event of an emergency or lateness. In online theatre, challenges could arise if the internet disconnects; actors "should text the stage manager" to bring them back into the digital rehearsal room (Glassman and Vuranch 17). It is also important to ensure that a stage manager creates a pre-show checklist. This checklist includes lighting set up, sound and visual tests, as well as making sure that "cellphones are silenced during the production" (Glassman and Vuranch 17).

Zoom fatigue is a challenge online theatre can face; it is important for stage managers to follow the Equity rule of taking breaks during rehearsals. These rules include: every 55 minutes that pass, a 5-minute break is allotted; and every 80 minutes requires a 10-minute break. In a first-hand interview with Bailey Dumlao, a stage manager from The University of Alabama at Birmingham, he stated, "It was harder to sit through long meetings. As a stage manager, it was worse than in-person when it came to keeping focus" (Dumlao). Stage managers must be one step

ahead of any challenge. With online theatre, there are new ways to overcome adversity. Sims responded that "Being able to be in this room together, even though we're not in this room together, creates and shares a laugh, a tear if it's appropriate – it's really nice to have those moments" (Sims).

The Actor's Experience

Actors rely on both the playwright's words and director's interpretation to create a theatrical experience for the audience. The digital theatre platform, especially, requires actors to be mindful of facial expressions and tone of voice. Acting in an online show can be unique when considering camera usage. Julia Brown, the artistic program's manager for Playwright's Center in Minneapolis, stated that actors should "need to know where the camera is … [Rather than] directing your gaze at the image of the person you're talking to, you'd be talking right into the camera. It's also important to arrange your script [when rehearsing] in a way that you can see your camera" (Brown 26:01–26:22).

An actor's success in this digital environment is also dependent on how much they are required to do on their own. Jim Glaub, an advisory committee member for the American Theater Wing, an organization that honors American theater, stated that the benefit to online theatre is to enhance the skill set for the individual actor. "For actors to understand the digital world and how to do this stuff themselves just makes them better creators. Actors are in a phase now where they become more than just actors. They're visionaries. They are their own makers" (Culwell-Block). Actors are now responsible for many technical elements that ordinarily are performed by stage crew members in live theatre. "Costumes, lighting sets, painting, building, coordination, and collaboration, transitions into the hands of the actors that are involved in the production. If you are not doing this together on location, the [actors] become in charge of localized props and sets."

(Culwell-Block). Some responsibilities for actors include but are not limited to shifting the lighting in their space, adjusting the microphone volume, and setting up software for virtual backgrounds. After participating in online theatre, actors can understand the importance of stage crew members and how collaborative the industry is. When live theatre returns, actors will be able to assist the crew members during a production, if needed. Though the actors are physically setting the space up in online theatre, the technical experts are the designers.

The Technical Experience

Online theatre is the result of a combination of technical elements, which help to orchestrate a production. These technical elements include lighting, sound, costume, and visual projections. As of 2021, online theatre throughout the past year not only displays simple accomplishments, but complex challenges as well. For instance, Emmett Costello, the sound designer for various theatre productions at the University at Albany, stated in an interview with me that the lack of communication was the biggest challenge. "It's much easier to ignore or forget to respond to an email, rather than telling you something in person. Most people do not intentionally ignore an email/text, but just forget, and that makes a show much harder to be involved in" (Costello). Though that may be an inconvenience, collaborative meetings can still be as productive as if they were in person. An avenue to avoid miscommunication is to record a meeting if someone was absent and email them the link.

When it comes to performing and producing the show, it is important to be mindful of the risk of technical glitches. In the event of a storm and internet connection is lost, it is suggested that there be a pre-recorded rehearsal to use as a backup. Jim Glaub said that though it might feel antithetical when replacing live performances with recorded rehearsals, "It's really almost

impossible to do these things live because of the Wi-Fi latency. There's always going to be a delay, which can be between a quarter of a second to as much as three full seconds, which can really mess up an acting beat" (Culwell-Block). While Wi-Fi connectivity could be detrimental to online theatre, the positives outweigh the negatives in technological software when creating productions.

As a result of the pandemic, the process of digital theatre has quickly developed from staged readings to full-length productions. Virtual Theatre Collaboration, a theatre organization from New Paltz, New York, was established during the pandemic. This program set a trend for using technological elements in their productions to their advantage. Dominique Torrez and Natalie Houle, the founders of Virtual Theatre Collaboration, stated, "With these staged readings, the tech side of the theatre was not being represented. It wasn't only the actors that lost the chance to perform, but the designers and technicians who had to let go of their opportunities [as well]" (Pauer).

As technical design progressed in online theatre, theatre companies were able to build and expand on prior lessons and mistakes, learning what methods work. For instance, Bard College's production of *Mad Forest* by Caryl Churchill conducted a livestream webinar so that other theatre companies could use the achievements and skills to expand upon their own virtual productions. Bard College's *Mad Forest* started off as many productions were before the pandemic: in-person and designed to be done on an actual stage. However, during the rehearsal process, on March 12, 2020, the team decided that they had to either cancel the show entirely or find another medium in which to perform. At the time, the team did not know how exactly their performance would be released. The use of Zoom's program started to surface for potential rehearsal and performance opportunities. "The speed of reinvention that the creative team undertook technologically, was daunting and exciting" ("The Making of Mad Forest at Bard College").

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The seminar, hosted by Bard College, thoroughly focused on design collaboration. Designers had to reinvent their artistic visions because the dynamic had shifted from in-person to online performances. Afsoon Pajoufar, the scenic designer, recalled that the set was already in construction when the pandemic shut down theaters. Instead of focusing on a physical set, Pajoufar had to "create a 2D reality instead" ("The Making of Mad Forest at Bard College"). She created a digital background for each scenic location and was responsible for helping actors with their backgrounds. She was also responsible for designing an illusion that the actors looked like they were in the same room ("The Making of Mad Forest at Bard College").

Abigail Hoke-Brady, the lighting designer, felt that the process had changed drastically as a result of the fact that she was no longer physically lighting the actors. The original intent of the staged version was to use "lighting as a key source" but now her process is virtually nimble and functions like a "director in photography" ("The Making of Mad Forest at Bard College"). She was responsible for making sure that the actors were not casting a shadow and that the green screen was functioning properly. She sent performers lighting equipment such as two clip lights and two dimmers. These tools would help with focusing and lighting an actor in accordance with their green screen. She provided actors with a list of cues for adjusting their lighting. As a result of her exposure to online theatre, she became not only skilled as a lighting designer but as a performance administrator.

The concept of costume design, as a result of online theatre, has changed physically according to *Mad Forest* designer, Ásta Bennie Hostetter. Her pre-production research stayed the same, however, she was more able to utilize the virtual backgrounds to her advantage. The sole responsibility of her work was to coordinate with the actors who were cast in multiple roles. Actors were responsible for finding their own costume or receiving the costume in a shipment from her;

she organized what should be worn between scenes by emailing a spreadsheet to the actors. At times, challenges arose for Hostetter, "It felt frustrating that no one could physically be able to help the actors with minor adjustments such as fixing the collar on their neck during quick changes" ("The Making of Mad Forest at Bard College"). However, the collaboration between the costume designer and the actors resulted in overcoming the challenges through communication and mending wardrobe malfunctions.

A new job role was formed for *Mad Forest* as a result of virtual theatre. Video design became a vital asset according to Ashley Tata, the director of *Mad Forest.* Eammon Farrell, a projection designer for his company Anonymous Ensemble, reached out to an online statement about the need for a video designer position in Bard College's *Mad Forest*. Farrell has had previous experience doing hybrid and fully online productions before it became necessary. When joining the creative team mid-rehearsal process, Eammon Farrell relied heavily on the groundwork of the designers' collaborative efforts. He stated, "It was a fast and furious process. I wanted to showcase the liveness and performances. There were only a few clips in important climaxes that were not recorded live" ("The Making of Mad Forest at Bard College"). Eammon Farrell wanted to work through the Zoom modifications, focusing on the spotlight feature. This feature required hiring tech developers to control camera and sound qualities of the performers. Farrell used a keyboard as a control panel to transition between different camera views that were designated to certain actors. Vanessa Hart, the stage manager, "cued all of these numbers through discord and live recording with 12 cameras in a grid on Zoom" ("The Making of Mad Forest at Bard College"). It is also important to note that because there are still options for companies to create this kind of work using the basic software on Zoom. While the program Bard College used might be costly for some companies, there are free versions of software still available to virtually create a production.

Though there are other methods to make online theatre work, the idea is still a working development in the community of video design and allows for further research.

According to Paul Pinto, the sound designer, audio has changed drastically because of online theatre. During the transition into online theatre, he originally "requested for the actors to carry little speakers and have them manually play the sounds" ("The Making of Mad Forest at Bard College"). Technical difficulties occurred when Zoom caused the microphones to cut out when another actor was speaking at the same time. In order to fix the issue, Pinto suggested "having the sound engineer play sounds through a Q Lab software that was projected through Zoom's audio" ("The Making of Mad Forest at Bard College"). Using this software enabled sound designers to transition their in-person work to the digital platform.

The production team at Bard College stands as an example for discovering new skills to create a more realistic online performance. Director Ashley Tata was impressed by one of her actors when she was perceived to look directly at another actor even though they were not in the same room. She learned that the actor had put Post-It notes with the characters' names in front of their sightline to indicate who to speak with ("The Making of Mad Forest at Bard College"). Other companies, like Zoom Theatre, suggested this method as well by having their actors mark the floor and their eye-line with tape to know where to stand and look in each scene ("What We've Learned So Far …").

It is worth acknowledging that online theatre is difficult, but possible, when collaboration amongst cast and crew members is prevalent. *Mad Forest*'s student stage manager, Vanessa Hart comments that online theatre "is a difficult process but so is creating theatre in general" ("The Making of Mad Forest at Bard College"). The learning and obtaining of new skills is what makes

the challenging work beneficial. Learning to handle adversity with online theatre during the pandemic will not only improve live theatre but also digital performances to come. Jeffrey Horowitz, the artistic director for Theatre for a New Audience, states, "It's powerful not because there is a pandemic, but because the director, actors, and designers are exploring in a fresh way how *Mad Forest* comes alive on Zoom—not as a replacement for live theatre, but as another way performance can happen" ("Live Webcast: MAD FOREST).

First-Hand Experience with Online Theatre

Dramaturg in *Lovers & Lunatics*

The evolution of online theatre has granted me the opportunity to expand and diversify my creative abilities as a theatre artist, changing the way I think of theatre. This style of theatre has deepened my craft and allowed me to be more involved in other roles besides acting. Digital theatre has allowed me to apply the skills that I learned while experiencing the changes in the roles of dramaturg, actor, and director in online productions.

During the Fall 2020 semester, the role of dramaturg was available on a new online production called *Lovers & Lunatics,* part of the University at Albany Theatre Program's season. *Lovers & Lunatics* was a creation led by director and theatre adjunct professor Angela Ledtke. This show was an interactive experience for audience members to "choose their own adventure" in three Shakespearean episodes. The material was collectively formulated by the director, assistant director, dramaturg, and the actors. The main takeaway of this production is to have the audience understand that these characters represent certain archetypes from Shakespeare's most famous plays and how their vote determines the given circumstance. Given circumstances are any

information about the characters and play that are important to the storyline. In the case of voting, this can include the audience members to choose when and where the scene is set, occupation of the character and the relationship to other characters. The dramaturg provides extensive historical background on the playwright, the characters, and the plays to help provide better context and development for actors and the audience. A dramaturg may assist a playwright in developing plays by together in order to provide the production team with appropriate research to contextualize that accurately represents the piece. Typically, dramaturgical studies can take up to 4-6 weeks of research at least. However, a challenge that occurred when producing *Lovers & Lunatics* was that scripts and character archetypes had to be fully created, researched, and revised within two weeks in between the show's episodes.

My first task was to help the director, Angela Ledtke, decipher what Shakespearean characters fit into certain archetypes. Ledtke's vision for her show required me to research Shakespeare's use of stereotypical archetypes of individual characters. When the actors were chosen to be part of the production, they were asked to list the top three Shakespearean roles they would like to play. In the beginning of the process, Ledtke and I found that the actors' chosen roles had an imbalance proportion of characters to plays. There were too many roles wanted in various Shakespearean plays that would make combining these characters in Episode 3 very complicated. Another imbalance was roles originally chosen were too similar to each other; the goal was to avoid repeating the same archetypes. As a solution, I suggested the possibility of cutting the number of shows to four and having two different archetypal characters represented in each show. The director and I took note of each actor's desired roles and matched that to characters with a similar archetype in *Hamlet, Macbeth, Much Ado About Nothing,* and *King Lear.* These plays were chosen because they were well known and relatable to non-Shakespearean scholars.

Once the characters were finalized, I shared a document with the cast about the text-based research that will help establish their archetypes. These included: adjectives for the character, lines that they say that enhance their descriptions, and lines other characters say about them to support the archetype. In *Hamlet,* the character Hamlet's archetype is the Flawed Hero/Lover and Ophelia is the Innocent Babe. For *Macbeth*, the character Macbeth is Tragedy's Minion and Lady Macbeth is the Powerful Woman. For *Much Ado About Nothing*, Beatrice is the Witty Independent Woman and Benedick is the Sidekick. Lastly, for *King Lear*, the character King Lear is the Flawed Ruler and Edmund is the Malign Influence. As the dramaturg**,** I observed Zoom rehearsals and provided guidance to the actors as they created authentic interpretations of the characters. Once the audience was eligible to vote in the other episodes, I assisted the actors in developing their new archetype through extensive research as well.

Working on *Lover & Lunatics,* I attended weekly production meetings, and learned the technical process necessary for collaborating virtually. These meetings were led by production manager Steve Michalek, who hosted Zoom calls with other members of the production team: the director, producer, designers, marketing manager, and me (dramaturg). These meetings served as an opportunity to convey visual ideas, commentary, and to answer questions that pertain to an individual's contribution to the show. Key points of discussion during production meetings were centered around the involvement of the designer's changing roles in these virtual performances.

Costume designers are an important part of the visual representation in online productions. In *Lovers & Lunatics*, Reneé Bell, the costume designer, suggested actors use their own articles of clothing to fit the style of their characters. Bell arranged costume fitting appointments through Zoom before every episode for each actor to match their archetypal role. Episode 1's costume design requested the actors to wear a beige/grey shirt with denim jeans. This neutral look allowed

for the audience to focus on the archetype of the character rather than looking like a stock Shakespearean character. The other episodes allowed for more elaborate designs to best fit the new archetypal role. As props and costume pieces were needed, Bell sent shipments to the actors who were unable to pick up items on campus. It was important to ensure that costume colors would work well with the green screen. This meant avoiding the colors white, green, and some shades of blue. In online theatre, the lighting designer had to coordinate with the costume designer to adjust the wardrobe if the green screen had affected the look of the actor.

Andi Lyons, the lighting designer, was responsible for handling the setup of lights during technical rehearsals. Some challenges that she had to face were that actors' cameras were grainy without adequate lighting, the virtual background distorted the bodies of the actors, and an even distribution of lighting was needed to shine on an actor's face, body, and green screen. It was important that once the lights were set, actors should not adjust them any further to prevent lighting errors. Similarly, in live theatre if a light fixture is moved after it is set, the entire process needs to be redone. There was trial-and-error with positioning the dimmer to indicate how bright the lights should be. If the clip lights were not angled properly, there would be a shadow cast onto the green screen. As a result, this caused a visual problem with light flares on the corners of the green screen. These large spots of light affected the way individual actors were appearing in their corresponding virtual backgrounds. However, during a production meeting, Lyons and Michalek resolved these issues when they tested the height of the lighting equipment and laptop camera. Michalek suggested actors use stacked textbooks/boxes/bins for computer height adjustments to avoid the light flares on the green screen.

Emmett Costello formulated the sound recordings and effects for *Lovers & Lunatics*. Costello created background music for multiple segments throughout each episode. The music

interludes were played during the pre-recorded B rolls---extra shots of the characters, during the different scenes, and during transitions. Costello's role was to program and adjust the sound to ensure that the actors could be heard over the background music. It was Shelby Deere's job as stage manager to command the actors and technical departments to carry out a particular operation such as entrances and Costello's sound effects. Like the *Mad Forest* production at Bard College, this was made possible using the Discord chat program so that the audience would not hear the cues on the webinar. Cell phones were used as a means for communication when relaying cues on Discord. Costello suggested that there also be a second group chat in case the first chat glitched during a performance.

Without a physical set to design and build, online theatre created the opportunity for Michalek to expand his skills as a virtual graphic designer. His role as a designer in *Lovers & Lunatics* required him to send notices to actors on workstation set up. The list consisted of a blank white wall to hang the green screen on, a desk located three feet away from the green screen, a laptop on the desk along with attaching clip lights on both sides of the desk. Before the actors received the technical equipment, Michalek tested each instrument to ensure that it functioned. The actors used the tools provided by Michalek to set up the space as directed in their own rooms. The actors gained exposure to this innovative, technical side of theatre as they were responsible for making their presentation clear and performance-ready. Over the course of the episodes, Michalek required the actors not to move or adjust the equipment from the start of technical rehearsals to the final third episode performance.

In episode three of *Lovers & Lunatics*, the dynamic of the show drastically changed. Actors had to conform to new acting roles and adjust to new dialogue because of the shift from monologues to two-person scenes. In this episode, actors modified their backgrounds with the help

of Andi Lyons and Steve Michalek in order to make it look like they were in one location. During the scene between Hamlet and Ophelia as well as the scene between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, actors shared the same background images to give the illusion of being side by side. In *Much Ado About Nothing* and *King Lear*, background images differed slightly in order to indicate that actors were looking at each other. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, the audience voted to select a new setting in this episode. Much of the vote for the *Much Ado About Nothing* characters were in favor of a mall food court. When Beatrice and Benedick were on screen, their backgrounds showed two different fast-food chains; this indicated a face-to-face conversation. In *King Lear*, the scene portrayed a courtroom with King Lear acting as a judge and Edmund as the plaintiff. The two actors placed themselves in divergent backgrounds, showing they were facing each other. Lear's background had a solid wooden wall behind him, whereas Edmund's background showed a jury behind him.

Lovers & Lunatics' production process was unique in that this show progressed every two weeks into something completely new and unexpected. As part of my dramaturgical role, I conducted an interview with Angela Ledtke about the creative process. Her inspiration to create *Lovers & Lunatics* stemmed from the community of theatre and non-theatre students. Ledtke explained:

> My first task was to create something equitable and challenging for the participating theatre students and merge this project with non-theatre students, some of whom are experiencing theatre for the first time. How do we achieve a feeling of community and active participation? That is how the idea of utilizing the audience to vote was born. (Ledtke)

Online theatre forced the industry to adapt to this environment in order to expose experienced artists to audience members who know little about theatrical study. As part of the pandemic, in-person collaboration is no longer an option; the question arises, "How do we recreate and explore humanity within the frame of this social distancing barrier?" (Ledtke). The answer is through the usage of digital theatre. Though the challenges in *Lovers & Lunatics* stemmed from technology, Ledtke states, "They account for some of the most surprising rewards. We strive to always 'get better' and the introduction of new technology has been a tantalizing carrot" (Ledtke).

Our world is ever-changing, and people must be open to adapting - always pushing the envelope to create something meaningful for society. As a dramaturg, the transition to online theatre was no different. During times of change, over the course of thousands of years, the theatre industry found a way to magnify its voice. The experience of a dramaturg in a digital setting allowed me to work closely with the actors by sending articles, videos, and scholarly sources when needed guidance. Digitally, research has been much easier to find on the Internet, so dramaturgical research has adapted well to this environment. Though the dramaturgical duration was shorter than normal, the process still left me with skills that would help me as a developing theatre artist.

Actor in rEMOTION Festival

As a result of the changing theatre environment, actors have become their own technicians in their space when performing in a full-staged virtual production. As an actor, I was required to stage my space in multiple shows throughout the summer of 2020 when participating in my first practical digital experience: rEMOTION Festival. Digital theatre granted the opportunity to obtain skills in film acting, learning how to perform in front of a camera.

The rEMOTION festival, held in June 2020, consisted of eighteen newly written plays by playwrights from across the globe. This international group was formed by Nicholas Tran, the the artistic director for the online festival, and other members of the Asian Creative Network to allow artists to continue performing during the isolation of the pandemic. Asian Creative Network was founded in 2018 as a Facebook group and globally has evolved into a collaborative and professional community of Asian creatives to find resources and work from a range from disciplines: portrait photography, screenwriting, directors, actors, digital design, and many more. The process of joining the rEMOTION festival began when an actor colleague of mine forwarded me a link to apply; I sent an audition video and was contacted by various directors for a callback. Upon receiving an email detailing what roles and plays I was casted in, the director and producer of each show asked to submit a Doodle Poll for rehearsal availability. Digitally, this allowed the producing team to organize online rehearsals proficiently based on time zone.

For example, actors located on the East Coast rehearsed at 6:30am in order to accommodate a New Zealand actor during tech rehearsals. This shows that online theatre is flexible in terms of working collaboratively. In live theatre, rehearsals would be done in one location, eliminating the opportunities presented to the New Zealand actress to work on this production. Live theatre does not limit who can audition or be casted for a role, but virtual theatre presents more opportunities to international artists who cannot afford to move to another location for work. This experience also highlights that theatre productions can happen at any time of the day. For example, the festival was set in Pacific Standard Time which meant some performances would start at 11:00pm Eastern Standard Time for me. Acting with artists worldwide presented several schedule inconveniences, but allowed more networking opportunities for future performances as a result of discovering digital theatre.

Actor in *New Works/New Ways*

Shortly after the last episode of *Lovers & Lunatics* premiered in October 2020, the University at Albany Theatre Program prepared for their second fall production: *New Works/New Ways*. This production was a festival of new plays by Maddy Rolon and Ava O'Dea, who were recent alumni of the program These performances were set to premiere mid-November 2020. In September 2020, I was cast in Ava O'Dea's play *Postmortem* as the lead character Winnie. Auditioning virtually provided me with a unique experience. The strength of a performance was not the only factor to a successful audition; being technologically prepared mattered as well. Ring lights were set up for adequate lighting along with the use of a blank wall, to deter from distracting the audition panel. It was also important to have had a strong Wi-Fi connection to avoid getting disconnected or lagged. After the rounds of auditions were over that night, I received an email from one of the stage managers indicating that I had a callback for *Lovers & Lunatics* but mistakenly told I did not have one for *New Works/New Ways*.

During callbacks of *New Works/New Ways*, I received an unexpected email from Ava O'Dea and Jacqueline Springfield, the director of this production. According to the email, I originally was called back for the role of Winnie in *Postmortem*. A glitch in the email system led to being mis-notified of my callback status. After scheduling a last-minute audition slot, the end results were being cast as Winnie. The benefits of online theatre allowed for me to prepare an audition for the role on short notice while not needing to relocate. If this were an in-person audition, I may not have been able to audition when at the time requested. Online theatre has also provided the opportunity to work with a highly accredited theatre artist to build connections within the future.

Guest director of *New Works/New Ways*, Jacqueline Springfield, is a professional actor and voice instructor. Her contribution to the University at Albany Theatre Program helped shape these plays into fully produced productions. Although rehearsals were conducted virtually on Zoom, Springfield's energy remained high and was projected as if we were all in the same room. Springfield worked through the technological challenges that the actors faced throughout the rehearsal process. Springfield directed actors to be mindful of the lag and pace accordingly with scene partners. Under her instruction, in order not to have a delay between dialogue, I began to speak before the other actor finished their line in order to keep up with the pace Springfield had requested.

In the beginning of the rehearsal process, Zoom fatigue caused many actors to struggle. Without having the physical presence of other actors to act near each other, it became difficult to find the stamina of performing. I typically relied on the energy of others in the past, however, online theatre requires that extra preparations needed to be done before rehearsals would start. As an actor, preparations included vocal warmups, jumping jacks, and staying hydrated. These preparations are skills that will help my endurance during both digital and in-person productions in the future. Another adjustment in online theatre required the use following where the director wanted the actors to be on screen. Springfield also found inspiration from Bard College's webinar. She directed us to hang post-it notes, which would set up appropriate sightlines to make us appear to be conversing with each other once the technical elements are established.

Learning how to set up technical elements during a production became an important skill for actors to do on their own. Once cast actors were sent technological surveys about the connection quality and types of equipment we had on hand. This survey helped the production team prepare a box of equipment needed by each actor. This box included: a green screen,

command hooks, clip lights, dimmers, frosted A-lamps, a blackout plastic sheet, ring light, earbuds, ethernet cable, and an adapter. Actors were responsible for setting the equipment before the tech process began. The use of technology in digital theatre established the illusion of actors being in one location rather than looking like they were in a Zoom meeting. During tech week, actors' equipment required much experimentation; some actors could not use dimmers due to microphone interference, others had difficulty hanging the green screen, and some had poor visual quality. The tech team focused on every actors' needs and solved the problem through the remedies of the equipment needing to be adjusted. We also ran a sound and visual check before every performance to ensure all elements were placed appropriately.

The production of *New Works/New Ways* was premiered on a streaming platform known as Twitch. MJ Johnson, the visual designer for *New Works/New Ways*, shared their screen to Twitch since they used a program called Isadora. This program is used to manipulate Johnson's screen to graphically design the actors in one space. The online experience helped shape me into a versatile, skillful, and knowledgeable actor. After obtaining the technical skills as an actor along with applying qualitative research of the various roles in online theatre, I was able to use the collaborative experiences when directing a digital show on my own.

Director in *Me, You, Them and the 'Other One'*

To fully understand the research and guidance from the professionals in other roles, directing allowed for me to apply the skills to a virtual production of the new play titled *Me, You, Them, and the 'Other One'* (MYTAOO) by Ryan Buchholz. This online production gave me the opportunity to work closely with the playwright, actors, and production team. Online theatre has provided me the resources and ability to direct my first one-act play. The free software, a minimal

budget, and finding the personnel to work with, though has its challenges, emphasized the importance of collaboration, adaptation, and dedication to a new, online piece.

ME, YOU, THEM, AND 'THE OTHER ONE'
AUDITION INFORMATION/CASTING BREAKDOWN
DIRECTOR: Alexa Rose Passante
PLAYWRIGHT: Ryan Buchholz

AFFILIATION:
Alexa Rose Passante's Honors Thesis Project (SUNY Albany Theatre Program)

SEEKING:

We are seeking all roles to be filled. We strive for equity, diversity, and inclusion in our casting choices. We are especially interested, when possible, in casting actors who identify with the given character. There will be no discrimination against an actor's race, class, religion, country of origin, immigration status, (dis)ability, age, gender identity, political affiliation, sexual orientation, or genetic information.
(No payment contract provided)

IMPORTANT DATES/SCHEDULE
Callbacks: Tuesday, December 15th, 2020 7:00pm-10:00pm (EST)
1st Rehearsal: Wednesday, December 16th, 2020 7:00pm-9:30pm (EST)

Actors will need to have availability between December 14th and January 28th nights (7:00pm-9:30pm EST)
(A tentative schedule will be made but will be flexible if some conflicts may occur)

Show dates:
Pre-recorded taping tentatively: Thursday, January 28th, 2021 (7:00pm EST)
Day of Livestream:
Saturday, February 6th, 2021 8:00pm (EST)

AUDITIONS

AUDITIONS WILL BE TAKEN PLACE ON **MONDAY, DECEMBER 14TH, 2020 7:00PM-9:30PM EST VIA ZOOM.**

SIGN UP SLOTS ARE REQUIRED BY FILLING OUT THE GOOGLE FORM: https://forms.gle/bJKxmVm4zCLPgDbu6

IF THERE IS A CONFLICTION WITH THE AUDITION DATE AND YOU STILL WANT TO AUDITION, THERE IS AN OPTION ON THE GOOGLE FORM TO **SUBMIT A SELF TAPE BY MONDAY, DECEMBER 14TH, 2020 6:00PM EST.** NO OTHER SELF TAPE SUBMISSIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER THAT TIME.

AUDITION PREPARATION

Please come in with a prepared **one-minute contemporary monologue** that best suits the style of this piece or character you are auditioning for.

FOR THOSE SEEKING THE ROLE OF DYLAN: Please also prepare a 16 bar cut (30-45 seconds) of any pop song. (A cappella preferred)

Trigger Warning
This play focuses on themes that may be considered triggering including sexuality, identity, substance abuse, and sexual assault. If you feel that anything like this is harmful to your mental health, we strongly advise you not to audition for this production.

SYNOPSIS:
Four friends after spending a year apart after their first year of college life meet back up in their hometown, North Fork, Long Island NY. From self-discoveries to hidden secrets, all is revealed when these four meet up in their old hangout-place: an abandoned bunker during the summer of 2018. It used to be a place for escapism but now becomes the entrapping environment where old drama is rehashed, unsolicited flirtation arises, and serious threats are promised. The purpose of this meetup was to rediscover the old 'dope shit' that they left behind four years ago in a time capsule and reminisce on how much they have grown since then. What starts off as a way of catching up ultimately leads to these friends growing further apart than ever before, maybe even wishing that they have never met.

CHARACTERS

ALYSSA
She/Her/Hers
Bisexual, but not out in her home town. Attending Ithaca College and majors in Screenwriting. Lacks financial support and works at the town beaches as a Beach Attendant. Desperately wishes to leave the North Fork and start her life elsewhere. She always tries to do what's best for others, but fails to look at what she, herself, needs.

ALEX
They/Them/Theirs
Gender queer and gay. They have recently come to terms with their pronouns during senior year, however the town has trouble accepting them as anything other than male. Currently attending SUNY Oneonta as an Education major. While lacking support from their family and community, they keep their head up and stay confident in their identity. They intend to seek clarity on the intimate events that happened last summer with Dylan.

KENT
He/Him/His
Straight as an arrow and ignorant. He attempts to be politically correct, but ultimately fails every time. He works full time in order to pay for community college in order to obtain his Associates degree. He is unaccepting of change and wishes everything could remain as it was during high school. Everyone knows a Kent in their lives.

DYLAN
He/Him/His
Straight. Attends Georgia Tech University and majors in Business. He's never worked a job or had to handle financial problems because of his family. He has issues surrounding homelife and copes by abusing substances. He wants to learn how to handle his problems by exploiting different outlets. He denies an intimate experience with Alex that occurred last summer. *This role requires singing ability.*

Figure 1. *MYTAOO* Audition Information/Casting Breakdown

In Summer 2020, Ryan Buchholz, the playwright for *Me, You, Them and the 'Other One'* held a virtual workshop reading of this play. When participating in the reading, I was inspired to direct this play as a full digital adaptation. After rereading *Me, You, Them and the 'Other One'* in November 2020, my goal was to meticulously extract the underlying details of the characters while also researching the themes of the play. This helped in the development of my artistic vision while being mindful to the playwright's intentions. I met with Ryan Buchholz about forming a design team and creating a schedule for important dates/deadlines up until the online premiere of the

show. The design team consisted of University at Albany alumni and current students from the Theatre Program. The design team consisted of scenic designer, MJ Johnson ('22); video designer/editor, Aidan Sobina ('19); sound designer, Emmett Costello ('22); stage manager/assistant video editor, Gwen Bowman ('20); playwright, Ryan Buchholz ('21); social media manager, Samantha Wilson ('22); and me. After contacting theatrical designers to take part in this show, we coordinated a production meeting in December 2020. The goal of the meeting was to brainstorm how each designers' technologies would be utilized in accordance with my artistic vision. With the vision that I had in place, it was concluded that recording the show in advance was easier and more convenient according to video editor Aidan Sobina. Sobina established that the vision that I had would be better executed by refining and editing actors' placements on screen during post-production. The illusion of the four characters sitting around a table in their "abandoned summer shack" was the visual design that the team collectively agreed upon. After the production team discussed the technical needs for the show, I created a casting notice to promote audition details to various theatre-affiliated Facebook groups to garner interest (see Figure 1).

Those interested in auditioning for *Me, You, Them and the 'Other One'* signed up for a time slot using the Google Forms link attached to the casting breakdown. For those who were unable to attend the December 14, 2020, audition at 7pm EST, actors had the option to send in a taped recording that was due the same day by 6pm EST. Auditions and callbacks were held on Zoom allowing actors to introduce themselves and perform for the playwright and me. This allowed me to personally form a director-actor relationship even in a remote setting. As a director, it was my responsibility to find an authentic representation of each character during auditions. I

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was able to cast actors that were well represented in pronouns, sexual orientation, diversity, and gender identity.

Once the actors were cast, they were required to fill out both a conflict schedule and tech survey on Google Forms. Having the conflict schedule allowed me to appropriately schedule days and times for rehearsal that best worked for the actors. However, January 23, 2021, was a mandatory date for all cast and crew members since it was the day to film the production. The Google Forms enabled the production team to know in advance which software actors could access and enable during the start of tech week. The Google Form allowed for an easier method of online communication when discussing actors' needs for technical equipment. Some specifics of the tech survey included: operating system in use, webcam availability, wired or wireless headphones, access to a green screen, and strength of internet connection.

However, a conflict arose for the production team when Morgan Sholtis, the actor casted for the role of Kent, did not have a functioning webcam/microphone due to a broken computer. Sholtis claimed in the tech survey that he was knowledgeable on fixing computers and assured the team that it would no longer be a conflict by tech week; for rehearsals he used his phone to connect to Zoom. Sobina and the rest of the design team decided actors will use Open Broadcast Software, (OBS) which is a free program that only works for computers. According to Sobina, OBS provides a better picture quality when actors individually record themselves as well as extracting these files more effectively than other free software do. Unfortunately, by tech week, Sholtis had to be released from the production because he could not fix the technical problems on his computer. The plus side was that during auditions, I decided to cast an understudy who could take over any role in the production even though the show was pre- recorded. Our understudy, Jade Magno McGovern, attended all rehearsals and filled in the role of Kent so that the production could

continue. I spent the last few days of tech reiterating the blocking to them on Zoom along with brainstorming character development.

The biggest challenge when it came to directing was trying to communicate to the actors about the pacing. When it came to Jacqueline Springfield's dilemma in New Works/New Ways, I finally understood as a director the complications involved in this task. Acting in online shows limit your mindfulness to lagging; however, from a director's perspective, it is a prominent issue. Timing is particularly important to a playwright's vision and essential for jumping from line to line. Once the cast memorized their lines, timing was no longer an issue especially when using the exercise skills that were taught to me by the director of *New Works/New Ways*. These vocal and physical warmups were prevalent and helpful when directing a digital production.
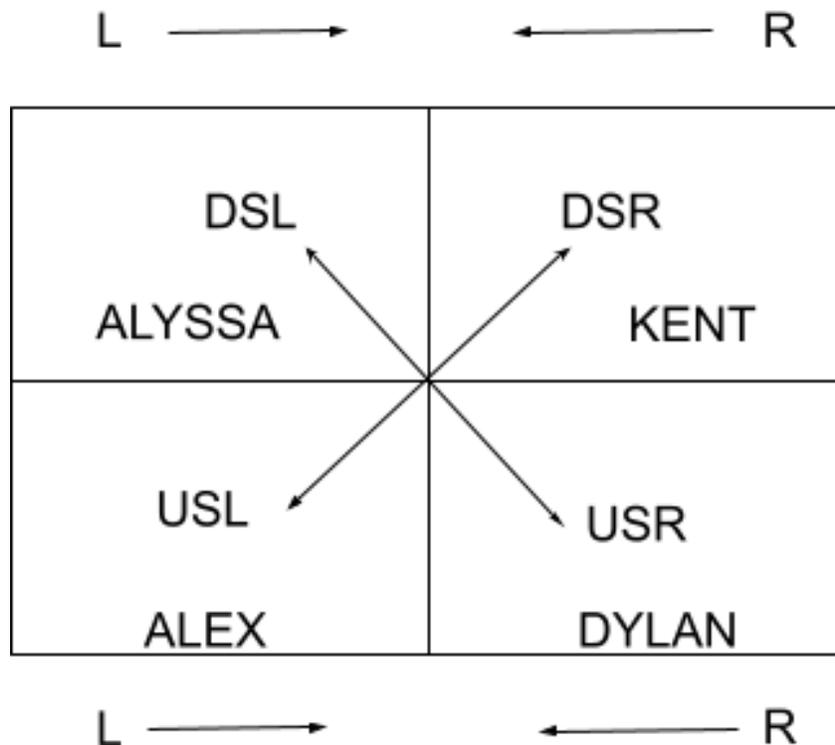
Figure 2. Blocking chart for the online production *Me, You, Them and the 'Other One'*

Blocking in an online production focused on instilling sightlines, passing of the props, and placement of the characters in each scene. In this case, I created a standard template of the table where the characters would be seated, as well as their given sightlines to interact with each other. (see Figure 2). To make this believable, blocking ensured that the actors would know where to look when someone else was speaking, as well as being mindful of passing props.

This figure indicates that the characters, Alyssa and Kent, are "next to" each other; Alyssa would be facing her left and Kent would be facing his right when they would be interacting. Alyssa and Alex's boxes are on top of one another. This indication means that the two characters are across from each other on the table; in order to make it believable that they are facing each other, they were directed to look directly into the camera to talk. The characters, Alyssa and Dylan are diagonal on this figure. In order to interact, Alyssa must make note of a downstage left (DSL) sightline, which means that she would be looking at the bottom left corner of her computer to refer to Dylan. Dylan's sightline would be upstage right (USR) and would look to the top right corner of his screen to interact with Alyssa. Alex and Dylan are also next to each other on the bottom of the figure. Much like Alyssa and Kent, facing left to look at Dylan is Alex and facing right to look at Alex is Dylan. In this figure, Alex and Kent are diagonal from each other; Alex's sightline is upstage left (USL), which indicates that they would need to look in the upper left corner of their computer. Kent's sightline is downstage right (DSR), he would have to look at the bottom right corner of his computer screen in order to speak with Alex. Lastly, Dylan and Kent are "across from each other" at the table; much like Alyssa and Alex, they will also be looking directly into the camera when interacting with each other.

Directing on the Zoom platform has its complications especially when it comes to the placement of stage directions. In live theatre, when a director blocks a show and directs an actor

to move stage left for example, that perspective is in accordance with the actor. On Zoom, it is important to be attentive to the actors' stage lefts and rights rather than your own mirrored directions. When I conducted the blocking during the first rehearsal, every movement and sightline was opposite of what I had intended. The dilemma was noticed immediately and was easily fixed once I changed the blocking direction for the actors. An important production element of *Me, You, Them, and the 'Other One'* was the time capsule design. The time capsule was needed in the show because the four characters left it behind four years ago and the reason that they were meeting together was to open it up. It was discussed in a production meeting that the capsule can be digitally placed in post-production editing. The actor's blocking was to reach in their designated corners because the time capsule would be placed in the middle of the screen. The character Alyssa would reach her bottom left corner, Kent would reach his bottom right corner, Alex would reach their top left corner, and Dylan would reach his top right corner of their computer screens. By pinning the actors' screens in the order of Alyssa, Kent, Alex and lastly, Dylan, I was able to see that the four placements accurately fit toward my blocking.

Directing in this online platform allowed me to collaborate with not only the actors, but the stage manager and design team. Stage manager, Gwen Bowman helped in sending daily calls, which are reminders to the actors of when to attend the Zoom rehearsals. Bowman relayed other vital information to the actors as well such as ordering green screens, marketing promotions, and reminders of deadlines. Working with Bowman in past productions, I knew that they were organized and on top of communication. Bowman created the rehearsal reports, much like the reports would be done in live theatre and sent them to the design team. The rehearsal Zoom room was also available for design team members to log in and observe for further design visions. To avoid Zoom fatigue, Bowman established that rehearsals be 2 ½ hours Monday, Wednesday, and

Thursday nights with equitable breaks in between the rehearsal period. Bowman continued to be communicative throughout the process and reminded actors the list of items that needed to be obtained by tech week.

Once blocking was completed, the actors' responsibilities were to set up their staging placement. This consisted of a table to set their props, the computer height reaching eye level when seated, the purchased green screen taut and hung, as well as having a ring light. These pre-tech requirements allowed the creative designers to proceed with tech rehearsals without the delay of setting up equipment during the tech process. Tech week was efficient, especially when we had the understudy set up their station in the event of an actor being unable to perform. This was beneficial because it saved time when Jade Magno McGovern took over the role of 'Kent' when Morgan Sholtis had to be replaced three days before filming *Me, You, Them, and the 'Other One'*.

To begin this process, Aidan Sobina arranged a rehearsal a week before tech to do a step-by-step on how to use OBS. Sobina stated in a first-hand interview that a challenge was that "everyone had a slightly different hardware and it made it difficult to resolve problems because each person would require a different solution" (Sobina). Since the actors had to adjust the technical equipment themselves, it took more time to have the setup be efficient. However, the technical process became easier once the computer settings were configured and solved. Sobina also believed that the asset of green screens "made it possible to put the actors in scenes rather than just be in their bedrooms" (Sobina). Green screens also allowed MJ Johnson to have the opportunity to implement their own design for the setting of the show with virtual backgrounds.

In an interview with Johnson, they claimed they had prior experience with the technical field for both online and live theatre. They stated their role in *Me, You, Them and the 'Other One'* was a blend of tech and design:

It definitely differed a lot from a traditional theatre production. Instead of designing a set to be constructed I needed to come up with virtual scenery and help figure out the best way to bring the play to life on a screen instead of a stage. With every actor being remote and needing to bring in and adjust their own equipment the lines blurred a lot between cast and crew. (Johnson)

Johnson has had experience with online streaming, and in creating technological backgrounds that best fit the setting of the play. In this case, they were excited to build on the skills they already had by being introduced to OBS, a tool that will enhance their career as a digital designer. When it comes to collaboration, Johnson noted the equal significance it has in both online and live theatre:

Everyone always comes into it wanting to make the best possible show. I have found that both cast and crew have always been more than willing to take on tasks themselves that they might not have ordinarily had to worry about. In that sense, the team spirit of theatre is even stronger in this new format. (Johnson)

Johnson was essential in researching potential virtual backgrounds of old-looking shacks that were part of my artistic vision; these virtual backgrounds became the scenery for the actors to perform in. Another responsibility that Johnson had was to perform checks on an actor's visual technology before each technical rehearsal and recording. During tech week, the use of audio and sound effects were also principal factors that were required in *Me, You, Them and the 'Other One'*.

Emmett Costello's contributions as the sound designer were essential throughout the production process. Even though the sound effects were incorporated during post-production, he played a crucial role in ensuring the audio quality of actors. Costello was responsible for playing

the cues for an actor to come on and off screen. When it came to handling copyright issues, Costello had to either find generic free sounds or create the effects himself. In his interview with me Costello described his process:

> I spent a lot of my time researching the sounds and music that I wanted to use. I also used [the software] Audacity to edit sounds when I needed to cut down larger sound files and add fade-ins and fade-outs on some transition music. During tech week, I incorporated the music and sounds into the run throughs. I did this by using a cue software that was similar to QLab to play the cues through Zoom. I also worked with the video editors to add the sound effects and music in post-production. I relayed where each sound went, and how loud or soft it should have been. (Costello)

Costello felt that even though there were challenges throughout the process, it helped him to be a better prepared designer in future productions. Online theatre showed him that sometimes his "first instinct shouldn't be to find a sound online, but to simply try to create it myself first and go from there" (Costello). Costello also believes that digital theatre creates opportunities for theatre artists because "online collaboration can be done anywhere. Being able to be involved in a production from your own bedroom allows many more people to be involved when they otherwise couldn't have been" (Costello). The playwright's involvement in *Me, You, Them, and the 'Other One'* enabled the technical designers to envision their ideas onto the digital platform.

Ryan Buchholz's involvement as a playwright in this process allowed me to rely on him to ensure that I was authentically representing his vision of his play. His collaboration in this digital process was very helpful; directors do not always have the playwrights observe rehearsals or be involved in the creative visionaries. Buchholz attended a few rehearsals to check in on the character

development over the course of the play, and was responsible for adjusting the script wherever needed. His perspective enhanced both my directorial ability and the overall intentions for his show. In an interview conducted by myself and Samantha Wilson for the production's Instagram page, we asked for his thoughts on the evolution of digital theatre. He responded that online theatre is a "positive trend to collaborating in new efficient ways that can be another asset to theatre" (Buchholz). He continued to say that "digital theatre is a compass that keeps leading us further into the depths of creativity. Each virtual production that I have taken part in for the past year has found progressively better methods to provide actors and technicians opportunities to collaborate" (Buchholz).

Collaboration leads to successful productions; this is a reason the development of online theatre has grown exponentially since March 2020. The audience reception has meant more exposure for companies and productions that would not have been possible without online theatre. Online theatre has also allowed the audience to engage in various productions in ways that are unique to this outlet. This, however, does not mean that online theatre will overtake the traditions of live theatre, but only enhance it. As a result of the pandemic, live theatre has been figuring out how to safely reopen its doors with instituting proper guidelines in place. Globally, theaters have started implementing safety protocols that will allow for them to reopen for live productions. This does not mean that online theatre will completely disappear either; it will simply be another opportunity to create theatrical productions.

Conclusion

Audience Reception to Online Theatre

As the prevalence for online theatre grew for theatre artists, the audience's reception has determined the amount of publicity and revenue shows get. The "action of live performance, such as actors being off-book, in costumes, holding props, and under bright lights" indicates how impressive digital theatre can be with collaborative mindsets (Burke). However, the viewers watching are all in their own homes, from anywhere in the world. Audience reception heavily affects the successes of digital theatre. Online theatre has allowed for audience members to afford watching productions, whereas in the past, tickets to see live theatre may have been too expensive. For example, different theatre companies provided affordable prices to view shows due to the stress from the pandemic. In August 2020, two up-and-coming Santa Fe-based companies, &Sons Theatre and Ad Astra Theatre reduced their prices during their rendition of *She Kills Monsters*. The price range depended on how much an audience member could afford. Director Zoe Burke stated that the two pricing options were "The More-If-You-Can" ($15) and "The-Less-If-You-Need" ($5). Burke trusted audience members to be ethical when purchasing tickets since she understood that the pandemic has been difficult for many (Burke).

Another example of a company providing accommodations to audience members' financial circumstances is a group known as The Creation Theater. The Creation Theater is the largest professional producing theatre company in Oxford; this company performs uniquely inventive productions in extraordinary locations. During the pandemic from April 11 to May 10, 2020, Creation's location was on Zoom, where they performed their version of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. According to the University of Exeter's article, audiences provided critical and financial success for the production:

Creation Theater charged £20 per viewing device, which helps them stay open and continue to produce new work with an international reach. The overwhelming majority of those surveyed said the performance was good value for money, particularly as they were charged per-device, [rather than per person] and 79 percent said they would be willing to pay to watch other Zoom theater, both in and out of lockdown. ("Digital Transformation Will Be Key to Ensuring Survival of Theatre Industry during Coronavirus, Research Shows")

Richard Nelson's trilogy that was produced throughout 2020 received an abundance of exposure because of the online release. The plays are titled *What Do We Need to Talk About?, And So We Come Forth*, and *Incidental Moments of the Day*. Nelson's plays were viewable online for free during a few months of the pandemic. Although audiences did not need to pay, the Public Theater encouraged viewers to donate and support organizations such as the Actors Fund, the Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation (SDCF), and the Theatre Artist Fund (UK). The Actor's Fund is a charitable organization that "fosters stability and resiliency and provides a safety net for performing arts and entertainment professionals over their lifespan" (Actors Fund). SDCF provides emergency grants to directors and choreographers. "The Theatre Artists Fund in the U.K. was created by Sam Mendes and raised millions of pounds for freelance artists" (Marius). With this support, theatre artists are provided aid for insurance, healthcare, housing, careers, and more. Due to Nelson's increase in credibility in over 30 countries, he picked these programs to provide financial assistance to support theatre artists who were affected by the pandemic. Online theatre does not only reduce the cost of viewing theatre, but it also allows for audience members to see it without the need to travel.

Globally, online theatre grants various companies exposure to audience members; these audience members would not have the opportunity to watch these productions in-person if they were unable to go abroad. Richard Nelson explained how much of an impact online theatre can have on audience members who would normally never have the chance to see his New York premiere. He states, "I was pretty stunned. I think everybody was. It just kept growing, and we learned so much. I've been writing these plays and we've been doing them in New York, and then suddenly the plays are equally seen anywhere in the world. So that became a very exciting experience" (Marius). Digital theatre also allows companies to gain a better reputation because of this increase in audience observation. Nelson's trilogy earned over 100,000 views from the publicity generated by the online productions. The more publicity a show gets, the more support it will receive.

Online theatre has advanced well enough to create a larger following on popular social media apps, even more than in-person live promotions. This can even be seen in a segment called *The 24 Hour Plays: Viral Monologues*. This company "brings together creative communities to produce plays and musicals that are written, rehearsed, and performed in 24 hours" (Drozdov). However, the company saw an increase in publicity when transforming their original platform to this online medium, "The first week we did it, we had 150,000 views on Instagram. That is three to four times as many people [that] have attended the 24 Hour Plays on Broadway in its 19-year history" (Tran).

Another example of a company that experienced the increase in audience because of online theatre is The Creation Theater. According to the University of Exeter's digital case study tool kit on online theatre transformation, it was surveyed that before their production of the *Tempest* on Zoom, "32% of respondents said that they had not heard of Creation Theater" (Aeibischer and

Nicholas 93). Their production was also "viewed by more than 1000 households in over 27 different countries" (Aeibischer and Nicholas 33). Digital theatre is a benefit to the industry for promotion and exposure as well as enhancing the audience's new, engaging experience.

In online theatre, audience members experience productions through various avenues. Active participation allows the audience to feel a sense of inclusion and they are still deemed to be important to productions while in a virtual setting. One example would be the engagement of the audience in *Lovers & Lunatics*; the audience took part in a series of votes throughout the three episodes. As a result of voting, character roles and archetypes drastically changed from episode to episode. Within the two-week span between each episode, actors had to prepare for their new character role based on information from the audience vote. For instance, Hamlet's original archetype was the "flawed hero," yet the audience had the opportunity to choose for Hamlet to become a "hippie" or a "mob boss." With majority of the votes, Hamlet's new character archetype was the "mob boss." The actor playing Hamlet had to change the perspective of the dialogue and personality because of audience participation.

The voting system was enabled through the Zoom webinar features that the University at Albany Theatre program set up. This webinar granted the audience the ability to sign in "as attendees: They are invited by the hosts to watch and listen to the panelists in real time but are not speaking or visible themselves" ("LiveScreen Theatre Collection Director's Starter Guide" 1). This helps prevent accidental background noise that may disrupt an online production. Within the webinar, there is a polling feature that allows the attendees to vote. According to the Zoom support system "the polling feature for webinars allows you to create single-choice or multiple-choice polling questions for your webinars. You will be able to launch the poll during your webinar and gather the responses from your attendees. Hosts and co-hosts can launch polls, but… not able to

vote in polls themselves." ("Polling for Webinars"). Audience engagement has become a priority in online shows. This is because Zoom fatigue occurs when watching a screen for an extended period. In online theatre, voting is not the only type of engagement that maintains audience involvement.

Creation Theater's company pursued the idea of having the audience virtually interact within the performance. During their rendition of *The Tempest*, "audience members were encouraged to leave their cameras on, allowing Creation Theater's stage manager to pull them into the Zoom show" (Pellerin). Chief executive of the Creation Theater Lucy Askew compared this experience to being "at a big sports match, and they're spotlighting the people in the audience. In those moments you experience what you would at the theater or a concert. You're all sharing a cultural experience" (Pellerin). With the audiences' cameras on, it allowed for them to participate in the virtual production. For example, according to performance critic Heidi Liedke, actor "Itxaso Moreno as Ariel, asked audience members to conjure up a storm with her, by rubbing their hands and imitating the sound of blowing wind" (Liedke 4). More interaction includes when:

> Ariel turns to [the audience] to click [their] fingers for rain drops, clap hands for heavy rain, and randomly selected screens show[ed] people in their living rooms doing just that. Spectators chimed in enthusiastically and they saw strangers' smiling faces. The idea that the figurative power belongs to the audience is the most memorable impression. (Liedke 3)

Creation Theater's *Tempest* conducted surveys after the performance to inquire data on how receptive and invested the audience was during the production. According to the studies provided by the University of Exeter, "Audiences said participating in Zoom performances made them feel part of a community and provided them the opportunity to do something with friends

and family. They also said it reduced feelings of isolation and loneliness" (Digital Transformation Will Be Key to Ensuring Survival of Theatre Industry during Coronavirus, Research Shows"). The audiences rated their experience on Zoom "easy, or very easy" while using the technology during the performance. (Digital Transformation Will Be Key to Ensuring Survival of Theatre Industry during Coronavirus, Research Shows"). Specifically, this allowed for the company to study if digital theatre would be a viable method of producing in the future.

Another avenue of audience reception is using the chat features on streaming platforms. For example, in the production of *New Works/New Ways*, Twitch was used; a chat button allowed the audience members to comment as the show was happening. This helps production teams to not only get "immediate feedback [from the audience] but allows them to be engaged more so" (Weisman). The Q & A function has also been used after online performances are over. These talkbacks would provide the opportunity to "have everyone turn on their cameras and microphones to chat with the cast just like they would in [a] lobby [after a show]. It's the best alternative to staying connected with your community of fellow artists as well as your extended theatrical family" (Weisman). Joy Zurzolo conducted a Q & A after the streaming of *Singing With my Demons* concluded.

The receptiveness of the audience led Zurzolo to feel optimistic about the impact of digital theatre on the industry. As a playwright, she felt strongly that online theatre will open more opportunities for viewers to experience theatre worldwide. When conducting this interview with Zurzolo, she believes:

> Virtual productions will continue past the pandemic and find a loyal audience who, due to health issues or geographic constraints, will opt for virtual participation. I don't think that this will be simply a temporary pandemic solution. There are

possibilities to engage virtual audiences in more remote rural locations, as there are

opportunities to engage viewers dealing with age or health issues. (Zurzolo)

The audience's reception to online theatre has been impactful for many theatre companies to continue their collaborative efforts, worldwide. However, some companies have already taken steps to transition back to live theatre.

Transitioning to Live Theatre

A question that has been pondering within the theatre industry since March 2020 is when the future reopening of live theatre will occur once the pandemic ends. It is unlikely that online theatre will replace live theatre, however it will enhance the exposure and reach a more diverse set of viewers. Digitally produced shows have been popular even before productions were streaming online. For instance, viewers had access to programs such as Broadway HD, allowing them to watch taped productions from Broadway/National Tours. These programs have not been an issue for the financial state of the live theatre companies. Although digital theatre has been an outlet for artists to collaborate and create, the theatre industry needs live performances to reopen. After losing their jobs during the pandemic, artists only have certain sources of income, such as unemployment, to survive from.

In Fall 2020, Virtual Theatre Festival (VTF) donated a portion of their ticket sales to the Actors Fund. The Playbill Virtual Theatre Festival was the first nationwide, live-online theatre festival for fully produced shows ("About"). According to the Actor's Fund, "[they] received fifteen thousand requests for aid in the first three months of the pandemic and has distributed some thirteen million dollars" (Schulman). VTF supported the organization by having the audience "purchase an All-Access Festival Pass for only $2.99, and $1 from each ticket will be donated to

The Actors Fund" ("About"). During the pandemic, Broadway artists and celebrities held virtual

benefit concerts hoping to collect donations on behalf of the industry. One such event included, "a

ninetieth-birthday concert for Stephen Sondheim, aptly titled *Take Me to the World*, brought a

bounty of musical-theatre experiments [to help contribute and raise money]" (Schulman). *Take Me

to the World* was filmed in the living rooms of the artists and streamed on YouTube. It was directed

by [the editor-in-chief of Broadway.com] Paul Wontorek, and was a benefit for Artists Striving to

End Poverty" (Schulman). Artist Striving to End Poverty (ASTEP) was "conceived by Broadway

Musical Director Mary-Mitchell Campbell and Juilliard students to create after-school and summer

programming" for arts education (Campbell). While the funds and charitable organizations were

supportive and helpful, artists' return to in-person productions is what is needed for companies to

rebuild financially and provide job opportunities.

The plan for reopening theaters has been a topic of conversation, taking into consideration

the pandemic and upcoming vaccinations. The prediction for Broadway is to reopen in Fall 2021,

however, some other companies have already slowly integrated safety protocols for current and

future productions. For example, in March 2020, Open Jar Studios, one of the largest rehearsal

spaces in Manhattan, became a storage unit for personal protective equipment for hospitals around

New York City. However, NBC anchor Gilma Avalos, reports that "[Open Jar] will be setting the

stage for live performances from Broadway stars starting in August, with the rehearsal space

getting transformed into a socially distanced theater for solo performances" (Avalos). Open Jar

Studios plans to use safety materials such as plexiglass to socially distance audience members, as

well as protecting the performers. Open Jar Studios' project manager Jeff Whiting states that the

performers "won't have a mask on because of the plexiglass shield. They have a microphone, so

the sound will go out to everyone. Attendance for the performances will be limited in capacity and would require a temperature check upon entering the studio" (Avalos).

Asolo Repertory, Florida's premier professional theatre in Sarasota, has also enforced the safety measures of temperature checks and wearing masks properly for their productions. Asolo Rep requests that tickets be purchased in advance so that attendees can be scanned in to avoid physical contact. They have not allowed food or drinks in the space, as well as not providing any concession stands during the performance. Regarding seating, "[audiences are] arranged in groups of two and socially distanced for patron and staff safety. The stage area is twelve feet from the front row of seats" to provide protection for both audience and performers. ("Covid-19 Safety Protocol")

As for performers, the rehearsal process begins virtually on Zoom, but for in-person rehearsals and performances, they must get tested weekly to ensure a negative result to continue. On the day of performances, if an actor's temperature is over 100 degrees, they would not be eligible to perform. ("Covid-19 Safety Protocol") The stage managers, creative team, and tech crew are required to always wear personal protective equipment to protect themselves, the performers, and audience members. Asolo Repertory also has plans for ensuring that there is minimal interaction between the cast and crew when backstage. Props and costumes, for example, will not be shared and will limit these passings only when it is necessary. Due to the uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic, various protective methods are still being planned and implemented once live theatre industry reopens.

Globally, other companies have been working to protect personnel and audience members. In Seoul, *The Phantom of the Opera* ran its tour from March 2020 to August 2020. Ticketholders were required to participate in the following safety precautions: go through a disinfectant shower,

have their temperatures taken, wear masks inside the theater, and provide contact information to the venue. When the pandemic was beginning to spread worldwide, the venue, Blue Square Shinhan Card Hall took initiative and "beefed up safety protocols, requiring additional theater cleaning, hand sanitizer in the lobbies, and reduced stage dooring" (Amodio). These safety protocols were implemented to reduce the number of cases while keeping theaters open throughout the global pandemic. Only two cases arose, and they shut the theater down for two weeks and have not had a trace of Covid since these precautions were instilled. As for the theater companies in America, the layout of the old theaters makes these safety measures more financially difficult and inaccessible. The theaters in America do not have the ability to install disinfectant showers as well as disassemble seating. However, until it is safe to produce live theatre, some producers such as Tony award-nominated producer, Sarahbeth Grossman, are going "retro." Joseph V. Amodio, a freelance journalist from the Barron's newspaper states that "Grossman and her Dallas Theater Company colleagues have considered possible outdoor drive-in productions, and BBC Radio has begun airing dramatizations of recently shuttered London plays" (Amodio). However, for safety reasons, digital theatre stands as the most accessible alternative to live theatre until safety precautions can be met.

Over the course of 2020 and 2021, online theatre has served as the primary means of production for creative artists, designers, and technical staff. Well-established playwright and screenwriter Jessica Honovich noted that the importance of digital theatre is to "bring the community back together however we can, wherever we are. The value of theatre has not changed, even if the form has" (Tran). Online shows have been an acceptable medium of entertainment for audiences. The skills obtained from online theatre due to the changing roles will be beneficial when integrating back to live theatre. These innovations have created opportunities for

advancement in the theatre industry. The pandemic has inspired individual artists to create and revolutionize the theatre industry by implementing new styles of origination such as online theatre. Through collaborative dedication and overcoming virtual challenges, online theatre will be an asset rather than a detriment when live theatre returns in the future.

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