

A play for live streaming during social distancing

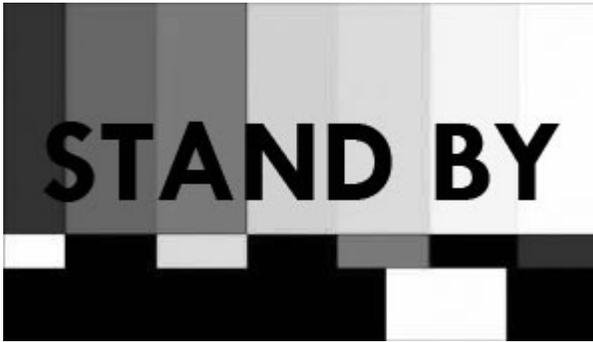
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Lee Gundersheimer

leegunder.com

lee.gunder@gmail.com

218.591.6653



COVER LETTER

A play for live streaming during social distancing

Stand By is a play for digital meeting platforms and to be either live-streamed or recorded and played back as a streaming event. It was written to be a fundraiser or a call back to performance for actors, directors, writers, small and large theatre companies, and academic environments hungry for online resources for teaching and performing.

Doubling and tripling can occur, but the spirit of the play is to involve as many artists as possible and affordable, a community of theatre in the best sense of the term.

The genesis of the Stand By seems to coincide perfectly with the Alleyway's stated goals:

Preference will be shown to works with vibrant characters and distinct voices, which engage in authentic human connection while representing a uniquely theatrical experience.

I hope you will agree.

Lee

SYNOPSIS- STAND BY

Stand By is a play that explores how we are coping to social distancing and this pandemic. Survival, integrity, greed, empathy, and grieving are themes throughout.

It is the story of three groups (all to be cast gender and racially blind)

A healthcare professional and college professor, their child and his/her/they's boyfriend

A city council in a small seashore town

A college class taught by the professor.

The first part of the play is a few weeks ago at the start of the pandemic, and the second part is 6 months later and deals with how do each of these groups survive and how have they changed.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(all gender/age/race blind- use the best people)

Health Care Professional

Professor of History (his/her/they's wife/husband/partner)

Brighton, a college student (their child)

Dakota, a college student (boy/girlfriend of Brighton)

Mayor

City Manager

City Clerk

Council People (at least 6)

Reporter

Musician

College Students of the Professor (at least 6)

Younger Musician

Stand By is a new play, only weeks old, and has no prior production history.

Lee Gundersheimer Bio

Lee is a writer, actor and director and teacher based in NYC. He is the author of many plays including *Pas De Deux*, winner Best Play, New American Play Festival on Theatre Row in 1997, and *Incommunicado*, which opened the 1998 New Federal Theatre season and was nominated for three Audelco awards. He directed Deb Margolin's *Three Seconds in the Key* at PS122 (it went on to win the Kesselring Prize) and staged her play *Why Cleaning Fails* at Here and Dixon Place where he co-wrote (with Rae C. Wright) and directed *The Moon in Vain*. Lee is the former Producing Director at Century Center for the Performing Arts and former Artistic Director of Avalon Repertory Theatre. He was the Industry Liaison in the Department of Drama at NYU for ten years, and is a lifetime member of the Actors Studio playwrights and directors lab. He is the current Arts and Culture Coordinator for the City of Winona, Minnesota.

Stand By

A screen pops up with a health care professional in it. The play is age/race/gender blind wherever possible, cast the best people.

HEALTHCARE PRO. Can you hear me? Is this working?

The partner/wife/husband of the Healthcare Professional, a college Professor of History, pops up:

PROFESSOR. Yes, I can. I can see you, but I can't hear you. Wait; is that such a bad thing?

HEALTHCARE PRO. I can hear you. By the way.

PROFESSOR. Oh, now I can hear you. You have to click the... How wonderful. Can you hear me? (*The Healthcare Professional pretends to mouth some words*). You have to click the... You're kidding me, aren't you?

HEALTHCARE PRO. (*joking*) Sorry, I can't...

PROFESSOR. Very funny. Leave it to you to joke at a time like this.

HEALTHCARE PRO. What better time. Nothing like a good plague joke. Hey, did you hear the one about the plague? Why bother... No one's gotten it in the past 600 years.

PROFESSOR. Unfortunately, I can hear you. I am so relieved. This will save everything.

HEALTHCARE PRO. Might be a bit of an overstatement.

PROFESSOR. I can see and hear you perfectly. Willie, you look tired. This really is amazing.

HEALTHCARE PRO. What, that I look tired? It is pretty cool. For now. Until we break the internet.

PROFESSOR. How are you?

HEALTHCARE PRO. Fine...

PROFESSOR. I still don't understand why they had to quarantine you. I understand being cautious, but you had no symptoms. And they still want you to go into work? Isolate you from us, but go right back to the front lines? I'm sorry. I just don't know how to process all this. I'm sorry. Seriously, sweetheart, how are you?

The Health Care Professional just stares ahead and then begins to sob.

Another screen pops into view and we lose the other two screens for a time. This back and forth between “scenes” will happen often. In this new screen is a college age student:

DAKOTA. What up? Didya get it to fly? Yo, you there? Testing one two, testing, yo Tik-tok Brain did you hit the internet audio button? Did you install the app?

Another college student pops into view.

BRIGHTON. Tik-tok Brain? I had to pee. Sorry. This isn't like rocket surgery you know.

DAKOTA. What are you wearing?

BRIGHTON. Stop that. Seriously.

DAKOTA. What? I can't help it if you get me all, I don't know, randy.

BRIGHTON. Randy?

DAKOTA. Yeah, isn't that what they use to call it. Worked up, hot, horny?

BRIGHTON. Randy?

DAKOTA. I don't know, I saw it in an old movie I was watching with the fam.

BRIGHTON. You were watching a movie that got you off with your family?

DAKOTA. It was in the movie. The diatribe, or whatever you call it. It wasn't like porn or something. Hey, Mom shoot me your log in to Porn Hub.

Pause

BRIGHTON. Porn Hub doesn't need a log in. For most of it.

DAKOTA. How do you know that?

BRIGHTON. Where were you last night? I texted you. And called.

DAKOTA. Did you? *(Looks down or pretends to.)* Oh, crap, you did. Five times? Sorry. I just saw that.

BRIGHTON. Yeah right. Where were you?

DAKOTA. We were on the beach. A bunch of us. There was a bonfire.

BRIGHTON. A bunch of us?

DAKOTA. Yes, you know, Terry, Leigh, a whole lot of us. What. Are you upset with me? Why are you ghosting me? You knew I was coming down here to have a good time. As good as we could under the... We talked about this. You didn't want to.

BRIGHTON. Yeah, and you were all broken up about it. It was three o'clock.

DAKOTA. What, when you decided not to come down here?

BRIGHTON. In the morning. When I "ghosted" you. We haven't talked for days, Dak- a few "gotta go now" texts...

DAKOTA. We didn't get back until late. This morning actually. After waffles.

BRIGHTON. Waffles?

DAKOTA. Yes. It was wild. This other group met up with us, and it turns out they were from (*insert name of state that would have the most impact here*) too. Is that crazy? (*Silence*) This place is packed and hardly anyone is actually from here. I mean, like packed. (*Silence*) Are you really that upset with me? (*Silence*) You knew we came here to have a good time. That was the whole point. Our final chance. Our last break.

BRIGHTON. It just may be.

DAKOTA. What do you mean by that?

BRIGHTON. Tik-Tok Brain.... Ha, tick tock... too surreal.... Do you have any idea what is going on right now? Are you that clueless?

DAKOTA. Oh, come on, Brighton. We have talked all about this. Endlessly. Damn. You even packed baby wipes for me. Which was very sweet. You're like my mother.

BRIGHTON. Good. Though your mother is as clueless as you are.

DAKOTA. Screw you. Okay, maybe you're right.

BRIGHTON. Did you just say screw you?

DAKOTA. Did you just call me my mother? Look, you are just upset because you think I was with someone.

BRIGHTON. Were you?

DAKOTA. No, I just told you. Well, I mean not "with" someone, but with everybody. It was sick.

BRIGHTON. Unfortunate choice of words...

DAKOTA. Come on. No one here is even... I mean everyone is healthy and happy and just wanting to have some fun. There was some full tilt craziness... off the hook. *(A long pause.)*

BRIGHTON. I don't... I can't see you anymore.

DAKOTA. What? I can still see you. And hear you. Not that it's been all that much fun...

BRIGHTON. I've been thinking a lot about this. All week. Longer... And it's hard, it is. Because, we've... you asshole, I thought I loved- I did - I do. But I can't hang out with you anymore. I don't want to. I can't.

DAKOTA. Are you breaking up with me? By like Skype or Zoom or whatever the hell this is? That is so cold.

BRIGHTON. You just don't get it, do you? People are dying. My father/mother isn't even allowed... You can transmit this thing with no symptoms. Don't you get it? And you and Terry and Leigh are just "full tilt" bonfiring.

DAKOTA. Look, come on, don't do this.

BRIGHTON. I haven't seen my father/mother in a week. He can't even come home.

DAKOTA. But you told me he/she was fine? He/she is right?

BRIGHTON. That is not the point. They have at least two confirmed patients now. Testing positive. Right here in *(Insert name of town that will have the most local impact)* And you are eating waffles with-

DAKOTA. They weren't even good waffles. Crappy actually. *(Brighton hangs up.)* Hey, come on... actually they were the best waffles I've ever had, asshole. *(He/She/They just stares ahead and after a few lines into the next scene the Student's window cuts out)*

One by one, city politicians pop onto screen of various ages.

MAYOR. I can'd get this damn thing to work. I quit.

CITY MANAGER. Mr./Madame. Mayor, you have gotten it... I can hear you just fine.

MAYOR. Well, thank god.

CITY MANAGER. Though not a good day for quitting...

MAYOR. Tell that to Breza. He/She/They just announced I hear. Running against me.

COUNCIL PERSON 1. Good evening everyone. Can you hear me?

COUNCIL PERSON 2. *(to someone off)* No sweetheart, I'm having to meet right now. Please go play or do your homework- okay I know you don't have any homework. No you can't go outside. Not right now. *(to the meeting)* I'm sorry.

CITY MANAGER. No worries.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Have we started? Damn, I was so sure I had this thing ready. Then it just went whateverthecrap and kicked me out. Are the press on yet?

CITY CLERK. Not yet. But we are recording.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Great, and I just said whateverthecrap.

CITY MANAGER. Is that even a word?

MAYOR. We are just gathering here.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. *(Surprisingly young)* Well isn't this all 1984 or what?

CITY CLERK. Is everyone online now? I'm sure I sent the link, and you all confirmed.

COUNCIL PERSON 5. I am so grateful to everyone for making these concessions. I truly believe it is important to set the right tone here.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. We haven't started yet, Sawyer. Don't waste it.

COUNCIL PERSON 6. Present. Isn't this all high tech and big city.

CITY CLERK. We should be able to see everyone if you click the top right button here.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. It's like the Brady Bunch meets Dr. Strangelove.

COUNCIL PERSON 2. Is everyone doing alright? How is everyone feeling?

One or two of the council people answer: "fine, so far, just fine."

COUNCIL PERSON 3. No symptoms yet. Here, here *(Toasts with a glass of scotch)*.

A local reporter's screen pops up.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Ah, sorry. I'll just leave this over here.

REPORTER. Good evening everyone. Thanks for allowing me to attend.

CITY CLERK. And we are recording and live streaming. Fingers crossed. I count all six, seven with the Mayor present, so we can begin.

MAYOR. Yes. Well, then here we go. I call this meeting to order at 6:31. Let's begin with the pledge of allegiance.

COUNCIL PERSON 2. Oh, I don't have a flag. So I guess you... I should just face...

All rise showing different states of dress for each of the council people, perhaps a dog or cat comes into frame as they stand and state: "I pledge allegiance to the flag, of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Some of the council people are visibly moved by this simple gesture. Some are not affected at all.

MAYOR. Thank you. Be seated. *(We hear a cat hiss.)*

CITY CLERK. Roll Call. Councilman *(or woman as needed)* Rogers

COUNCIL PERSON 1. Here. *(This process continues all around)* Council Man/woman Manklewitz, here, Breza, here, City Manager Stewart, here, Mayor Gomez, here, Councilman/Woman Hitner, here, Tyler, here, Connors, present.

COUNCIL PERSON 2. *(to someone off)* Yes, I said I was here and we just said the pledge. Sorry, we couldn't wait. We can say it later. Yes, you can sit and watch over there, but sssshhhh.

CITY CLERK. First item of business is the approval of the permit to suspend off street parking for Crosby Street.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Move to approve the motion as submitted.

COUNCIL PERSON 5. Second

MAYOR. Motion made by Councilman Hitner, seconded by Tyler. Any discussion? Hearing none, I call for a vote. All those in favor say: Aye. *(all vote in favor; mechanically)* All those opposed, same sign. *(gavel bangs)* Motion carries.

CITY CLERK. Item 2.1 is petition for sewer line for the new sub-development in Grandview Heights.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Move to approve the motion.

COUNCIL PERSON 5. Second.

MAYOR. Motion made by Councilman Hitner, seconded by Tyler. Any discussion? Hearing none-

COUNCIL PERSON 6. Madame/Mister Mayor- I don't think you could see my hand.

MAYOR. I'm sorry. I didn't. Go ahead Quinn.

COUNCIL PERSON 6. Before we move forward, I just want to make sure... that we have made sure that the proper setbacks have been implemented. This development, as you know, one that I had grave misgivings about in the first place, abets our protected parkland, and already may be encroaching on valuable territory for many species.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. This is about sewer lines, Quinn. The property lines have been drawn and approved, even though there should have been no need to seek approval, which delayed the project months. We, I mean the developer has already begun to.... Look, I understand your "environmental concerns".

COUNCIL PERSON 6. They are not just mine.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. We are all "concerned". Always. This is a town built on tourism and the environment. Of course, we want to keep it pristine. But these delays, these let's table it and hope we can find a way to... do you have any idea how costly they are? It's been months. And each time the vote is 6 to one.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. It is usually 5, 2.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Whatever. At some point, we just need to (*an attempt at levity*) as John Lennon said so eloquently, "Let It Be".

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Paul. Paul wrote that. (*whispering under breath*) I thought everyone knew that...

MAYOR. There is a motion on the table...

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Simply about the sewer lines.

COUNCIL PERSON 6. Fittingly...

COUNCIL PERSON 3. The motion just wants to make sure we approve the painstaking and costly work that we made the developer, the extra steps that we forced them to take already. Look the bottom line is we want to make sure we get these sewers right-

COUNCIL PERSON 4. I'm not touching that... too easy.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. And we did. Did we not?

MAYOR. Is there any other discussion?

COUNCIL PERSON 6. I didn't get an answer to the question I raised.

COUNCIL PERSON 2. What was the question? I've forgotten.

COUNCIL PERSON 6. Were the proper setbacks taken into consideration?

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Of course they were. That's what the whole variance was about.

COUNCIL PERSON 6. No, that was why we requested the study and then the "extra steps."

COUNCIL PERSON 5. Do we have anyone from Engineering present?

CITY CLERK. No, I am sorry. I didn't think we would need anyone. I am terribly sorry. That is my fault.

MAYOR. No worries.

CITY CLERK. This meeting by remote is all so new. I should have thought of that. I am terribly sorry.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. I move we table the request until next meeting when we can have a report from engineering assuring us the proper setbacks have been considered and followed.

COUNCIL PERSON 6. I second that motion.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Jesus Christ. We are talking about the motion for a sewer line, what in the hell is going to happen when we get to whether we should shut down the damn city?

MAYOR. *(Banging his/her/they gavel.)* Order, Order. *(He/She/They realizes there is a soft surface, a paper towel or something on top of the gavel block and no noise.)* Oh, damn. Sorry, there was a— *(Then the noise is very loud because it is right by his/her microphone.)* Order! Order!

The screen goes black for a long beat. All cameras go out. A screen of a guitarist, or pianist, or cellist, or violin player. NOTE: A song will be played. If this can be an original song from a great local artist, all the better. The tone of the song should be like One Song Glory from Rent. Subject should be composed during adversity and wanting to be remembered. It can also be an instrumental and a classic pop song ("Stand By Me" or "Everybody Hurts" if available) or a classical piece ("Beethoven's Piano concerto # 5 in e flat major; Emperor Concerto, 2nd movement" would be preferred). What is essential is that it will become a motif, and therefore must be beautiful.

MUSICIAN. So, hey, hello there. Thanks for tuning in, and listening. I am here in my study because, as you well know, all the bars and clubs and restaurants are closed- I think everywhere in the world, except parts of Idaho... and therefore all of our gigs for the foreseeable future are canceled. As you know I do this for a living so.... Usually with a bunch of great players who are all so wonderful, and I am going to miss making music with them. But this is supposed to only be for awhile, right? This whatever circle

of hell we have all tumbled down into... I thought I'd try this live streaming thing- I know, very original, John Legend was going to lend me his bathrobe, but I thought naaa not a good look for me, and besides that's been done now... And I have set up the obligatory Vimeo if you want to donate. I'm giving to musicians who need this more than I... it should be on the bottom of the screen here, but if it's not, it's Leslie Mansfield music dot com and you click on the pay here button. Isn't this funny, this is like when I was just starting out, and you played at the farmer's market, or at the fair, or wherever they let you set up for tips, and you'd put out a case and then just play your heart out and hope. I even wrote busker on my first income tax form, under occupation, because I was too proud to write musician. I'll write musician when they pay me for it, but I am not going to write video store deliverer, so I wrote busker... because I loved the sound of it. When I lived in New York, my first roommate was a street mime- and I can hear you: mimes are about as popular as clowns- must be the white face- but anyway she was an incomparable artist. And she would play, no sorry, perform, for hundreds on the steps of the Metropolitan Museum, for like hundreds. She made great money too. The steps were packed... They eventually outlawed performers in front of the steps because the crowds were getting too large, true story... Too much revenue to the artists without a way to take their cut, I suppose... And part of her act was she'd walk right behind people that were rushing to and fro, the endless, I don't know, tide of people that are a city. Having to rush here and there, going this way and that, sometimes in great flocks. But she'd mimic them perfectly, and you'd laugh because each one had such a distinctive gait, and posture. And, I don't know, essence. And she'd just instantly match you- a few steps behind this one and then dart to the next one as they'd pass going the opposite direction, this way and that... That was the highlight of her act. The become the crowd section. Wouldn't work these days... Sorry, I was thinking about her a lot today, as I was setting up this... my "concert hall". How she would just head out to her "5th Avenue theatre" every day and play to hundreds. Her name was Susan. And by the time she was thirty, she caught muscular dystrophy- no you don't catch that- do you? You develop it. And that always seemed so cruel to me, so damn unfair, because she was so beautifully in her body, so in complete control... like a swan... She passed away before she reached forty. Anyway, this song is a new song. I didn't write it for her, but I might as well have. (or substitute: "you may recognize this one, it has always meant a great deal to me. So I wanted to play it for you today...") But today, I'd like to dedicate it to her. So this one is for you, Sue.

The song begins and we hear just enough of it or maybe most of it before the windows to the Health Care Professional's window pops up and then his partner/wife/husband too.

PROFESSOR. It's okay, Willie.... I'm so sorry that I'm not there with you. That things... Look, I'm not going to lie to you and tell you not to worry

and everything is going to be fine, because neither of us work in the White House. But may I tell you something?

HEALTH CARE PRO. Uh, oh. Whenever a Professor says that you know you are in trouble... Am I failing?

PROFESSOR. We all are... that's funny...

HEALTH CARE PRO. No, it's not. It's pretty damn depressing...

PROFESSOR. No, I mean that you'd ask me that. See... Okay, you know who Camus was right? Albert Camus.

HEALTH CARE PRO. No but someone once told me a Camus joke, and I told them I wanted to understand it, and they said that is exactly why I never would.

PROFESSOR. Do you just have bad jokes for every occasion?

HEALTH CARE PRO. It's a skill set. Hey, you married me. I would have done my best thirty minutes at the wedding, but you begged me not to.

PROFESSOR. Your best? Thirty minutes? Since when... Okay maybe on the honeymoon...

HEALTH CARE PRO. Ouch... Camus. Wasn't his whole thing that things are the way they are, even if we wanted them to be, hoped they would be, desired them to be, with our whole being, otherwise. We can never will them to be what we actually wanted them to be.

PROFESSOR. I knew I loved you for something.

HEALTH CARE PRO. Because I know the most depressing thought ever thought? That nothing can ever be what we want it to be? So what? You actually wanted to be with- who do Historians crush on- Tocqueville or Este Lauder and you got me?

PROFESSOR. I'm going to ignore that...

HEALTH CARE PRO. Another sign of true love...

PROFESSOR. I'm a teacher. Don't make me take away points for going way off topic. Here's the point: I added just one work of literature to my post war 20th Century History class this year, and guess what it was? Now also keep in mind I made this syllabus last summer, long before any virus had jumped species. But I centered the entire semester around Camus' The Plague. Now why is that?

HEALTH CARE PRO. Because the world has sucked now for last few years? And now it just sucks worse- what would that be? What is beyond sucks? What would sucks worse be, apocalyptic? Chucky Cheese?

The City Council screens pop back on and the Health Care scenes go out. It is later in the same City Council Meeting and things are very heated. Somehow, the musician is also seen and he/she/they plays throughout this scene, the music becomes underscore, perhaps a lyric sneaks into the moments.

MAYOR. Order. Please!

COUNCIL PERSON 4. No, wait a minute, dammit. I didn't get a chance to speak here.

COUNCIL PERSON 2. Can we please be careful to watch what in the hell we are saying?

COUNCIL PERSON 1. (We hear a dog start barking) It's okay Roscoe. Sshh. Sshh. I'm sorry.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. (*Overlapping*) Watch what we are saying? We are voting to do nothing in the middle of a pandemic. To keep the damn beaches open so that this man/woman and all the other blood thirsty, power mad members of this city... So they can make even more damn money when we know it might be killing folks. It is going to kill folks.

COUNCIL PERSON 1. We don't even have one case yet, do we? Well, do we?

MAYOR. Point of order.

COUNCIL PERSON 6. What point of order, we are discussing the motion.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Mister/Madame Mayor, are we voting or not?

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Are you going to try and tell me I can't speak?

COUNCIL PERSON 1. We did let you speak, and we are all aware of what is at stake-

COUNCIL PERSON 6. No, I don't think you are actually...

COUNCIL PERSON 2. I think we all need to remember that there are other-

MAYOR. Point of order. I would like to call a vote.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. "Hearing none I will call a vote." That is what you are supposed to say. Hearing none. Meaning there is no more discussion. Am I hard to hear?

COUNCIL PERSON 1. (*the dog is barking louder*) Roscoe. It is alright. Come here. Everything...

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Or is just because you are afraid to stand up to him/her. Worried about your votes. That the election is coming up. Don't rock that boat.

CITY MANAGER. This is like some scene from Jaws...

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Exactly. That is exactly what it is. And we are going to need a bigger boat. We could have voted on this in the emergency session last week. Long before... We knew what was coming. We knew Spring Break was just around the corner. We knew there were going to be thousands...

COUNCIL PERSON 6. And now who knows how many right here might-
MAYOR. Order.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. And we could have stopped it. We should have just stopped it. If there is lightening, we shut down. If there's red tide. The beaches should have been closed.

CITY MANAGER. We should have. I tried to... I just don't have the authority.

COUNCIL PERSON 4. But we do. If we decide to amend the motion and-

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Are you out of your mind? One sixth of the GDP for the entire year.

COUNCIL PERSON 6. Out of my mind? Are you out of your mind?

MAYOR. Order. I mean point of order.

CITY CLERK. This is all being recorded Sir/Madame

COUNCIL PERSON 4. What difference does that make? There is a reporter here too. What are you going to say to them?

COUNCIL PERSON 3. It's already Wednesday for Christ's sake. The break week is halfway over-

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Are you kidding me? Do you hear this?

MAYOR. I move we recess. Right away.

COUNCIL PERSON 6. You can't do that. Can you?

COUNCIL PERSON 2. Can we all remember that others are listening to this... my own-

COUNCIL PERSON 4. I don't give a damn who hears me. The whole world should hear what is going on here.

COUNCIL PERSON 2. Please. I can't listen to this anymore, I don't want--

MAYOR. We are in a recess. Immediately. *(The Mayor gets up from his/her chair.)*

COUNCIL PERSON 1. *(The dog is barking louder)* Come on Roscoe. It is alright. We can go outside and-

COUNCIL PERSON 6. Can He/She/They do that?

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Where are you going?

Everyone sits dumbfounded for a moment waiting for the Mayor. Roscoe the dog stops barking but jumps into Council Person 1's lap. Council Member 3 drinks from the glass of scotch. The Health Care Professional and Professor screens pop back on.

PROFESSOR. Crazy, right? So the first thing we are going to cover when my students get back, I mean when they go online- so odd- there will be no "going back," for now, will be this masterpiece of absurdity, of passion and freedom and revolt and what are the odds of that? Of having chosen the perfect work of literature for this exact moment in time?

The Musician finishes the song and stops, and looks at the screen.

MUSICIAN. I was having a hard time with that. The ending. Endings are always hard, aren't they?

Student Two pops into view.

DAKOTA. Come on pick up. Please. Pick up.

All scenes are happening at the same time now.

HEALTH CARE PRO. How am I? We had a meeting today and we had to go over worst-case protocols because the odds are they might happen. No, they will happen. That we will find ourselves having to make decisions that no one would have ever even dreamt they might have to make, let alone someone who has taken an oath to "above all do no harm." We ran drills for it today... Like in Italy. And Spain. You've seen the videos right? Patients just lying on the floor because... They were giving us rules... For having to choose who to help and who to let die, when we can't... When- not if- we run out of beds and respirators.

PROFESSOR. *(now it is the Professor who starts to cry. Slowly as she says)* Oh my dear God...

DAKOTA. I can't believe you are doing this to us...

BRIGHTON. *(Coming back online)* Now who's the one ghosting?

DAKOTA. I thought you loved me?

BRIGHTON. Don't do this, Dak. Don't make this any more difficult...

DAKOTA. Do you?

BRIGHTON. Don't...

DAKOTA. Did we not say that to each other over and over. That we would never be like the others, and say I love you if we didn't mean it? I mean with all our heart and soul mean it?

BRIGHTON. Dak, we are young and stupid so of course we say stupid young Rom-com things. That is pathetically what young people do.

DAKOTA. Not us.

BRIGHTON. Especially us. I see that now.

DAKOTA. We were always going to be different. Better than- Brighton coughs. Not the same as everyone else... anyone else...

MUSICIAN. I think that song may be just about better than anything else I have ever written (or use: possibly the best song ever written) But then that's the thing about superlatives. Something else always comes along...

BRIGHTON. That was before you decided to be a prick/bitch and in the middle.... *(Coughs again)*

DAKOTA. Brighton? You okay?

They stare ahead at each other but it is really us. The City Council is there.

CITY COUNCIL PERSON 2. Does the recess mean we will come back?

CITY CLERK. I suppose, yes, when the Mayor returns.

CITY COUNCIL PERSON 5. When is that?

CITY COUNCIL PERSON 6. Who knows.

CITY CLERK. Meeting is recessed. We will reconvene in fifteen minutes.

Brighton coughs again.

DAKOTA: Brighton? Are you okay?

All screens go dark- One by one. Brighton's is last.

End of Act One

Stand By- Act Two

The screen becomes full of the college students from the Professor's class all at once (or as quickly as technically possible). The Professor is there too. We are mid-class. The students, can all be actors we have seen before (if so, please refrain from "playing young"), or they can be new performers if the budget allows or community or academic theatre large casting desires are in play. The more being creatively included the better. If more than seven, divide the lines up as the director sees fit.

STUDENT 7. I am being asked to try and understand the meaning of all this. Meaning in the time of the Plague.

There is a very long pause.

STUDENT 1. What the hell?

PROFESSOR. Bryce, watch your language please.

STUDENT 2. How long are we supposed to wait?

STUDENT 3. I'm exhausted.

STUDENT 4. Is he/she/they ever going to say anything?

STUDENT 1. Probably never read the damn book.

STUDENT 2. Like you?

PROFESSOR. I think Charley is onto something

STUDENT 4. On to proving we are all idiots.

STUDENT 5. That happened months ago.

STUDENT 6. Right?

STUDENT 1. Like just about 6 months ago now.

PROFESSOR. I think what Charley is having us consider is what is the point of arguing, of presenting an argument, if nothing according to Camus, is knowable.

STUDENT 1. Nothing is knowable? I never knew that...

STUDENT 2. So then, what is the point of doing homework?

STUDENT 3. Or this class?

STUDENT 4. Or school?

STUDENT 5. Or life... (*They all pause again.*) I may shoot myself.

STUDENT 7. (*who has been silent, finally*) Exactly.

STUDENT 2. He/she/they speaks!

STUDENT 7. (*very proudly*) The Plague is not Camus' only guide to how to live through what we have had to live through. Guys, think about it. This is our defining moment. We will be telling our kids about how we lived through this pandemic. This will have shaped who we are, and what we are, and how we move forward.

STUDENT 6. In our case, afraid to ever leave the house...

STUDENT 3. Or to ever touch anyone again...

STUDENT 7. And actually Camus felt this collective dread is in essence how everyone has moved through any time. That is why he wrote the Mythology of Sisyphus.

STUDENT 5. Shoot me now...

STUDENT 6. I miss a good school shooting actually. Helpful sometimes.

PROFESSOR. Be a good audience guys, and that was not funny...

STUDENT 5. Come on, professor. Even you have to be sick of this. All this jibber-jabber about the meaning of life.

STUDENT 4. Jibber-Jabber?

STUDENT 5. Excuse me, the lack of meaning... I mean Professor how can you sit there and listen to this (*the sound like the parents in Peanuts specials*) Waw Waw Waw?

STUDENT 4. Is that the definition of Jiber- Jabber?

STUDENT 5. I mean you lost...

PROFESSOR. A daughter. Yes. (*pause*) We all have lost someone. Or know someone who has lost someone. Or are still very afraid or sad.

STUDENT 6. This is like The Leftovers...

STUDENT 5. I'm sorry but I don't mean to be a jerk. Honestly, I don't.

STUDENT 6. Kinda missed that exit ramp...

STUDENT 5. Fine, then I'll shut up.

STUDENT 3. Not you too...

PROFESSOR. Go on, Denver. I understand. Honestly I do. It's a struggle for all of us. But that doesn't mean we give up.

STUDENT 7. Exactly.

STUDENT 2. I think I get it now... Wow. That really is amazing...

PROFESSOR. (*Feeling very pleased by that little light bulb moment*) You were saying?

STUDENT 5. It's just all these damn ideas. Philosophizing- trying to finding ways to "making sense of it all" crap. Maybe there isn't any meaning-

STUDENT 7. Exactly!

STUDENT 5. Maybe I just want to go back to playing a really damn fine game of soccer. To go out to a bar with friends and get toasted. That is what my life is. Was. Being with people. Experiencing... joy. Is it so wrong to just want a little frigging pleasure...?

PROFESSOR. Actually Camus thought that too. He marveled, he valued, he believed we needed to focus on the most simple acts of life.

STUDENT 4. I've heard that by next week it will all be over. They are going to lift the ban.

STUDENT 1. Hallelujah.

STUDENT 2. I heard that too. But they said that before...

STUDENT 1. Yeah, remember Easter...

STUDENT 2. Two weeks of no new cases, it all may be about to go back to normal.

STUDENT 3. What's normal now?

Brighton appears in a screen. The Student's freeze in place. In this act there are many times the action seems to just freeze and wait.

BRIGHTON. I got to visit him/her last night. Broke all the cosmic rules of social distancing. (*Healthcare Pro's screen pops up. After his shock of seeing her, we can see he is talking but there is no audio coming from his screen*) I don't know why they let me. Said that there are times that they will just... I wanted to tell him/her it was alright. That I didn't blame, don't blame him/her. Anymore than I blamed him/her or Mom/Dad for my Lupus. (*The student's screens disappear, one by one.*) That I just love him/her. But they don't let you speak. No audio... It was so nice, him/her and me. And I just listened to him/her speak. Talk to me. Heaven... Just to see him/her and listen to him/her, even if I couldn't hear... We both understood.

Council Person 3 and the City Manager's screens pop up. The other two screens go out.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. So what do you think it will be? We know for sure Hitner and Connors will want us to stay shuttered. But 4,2 is enough to open us back up? Right?

CITY MANAGER. It is a majority, yes.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. We need to hold that special election as soon as possible. We need to fill my old seat.

CITY MANAGER. It is on the calendar. I can always vote to break any tie.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Is that supposed to make me feel better? It doesn't.

CITY MANAGER. Madame/Mr. Mayor it is going to be a long four years if-

COUNCIL PERSON 3. I understand. Trust me I do. We will find a way to work together.

CITY MANAGER. Even if it kills us? Too soon? You can always just give me a terrible review and fire me, with enough votes from the Council.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. I have enough trouble just getting the damn beaches open...

CITY MANAGER. Is that supposed to make me feel better? It doesn't.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Hitner should have just resigned like he/she threatened too... How the hell she/he was ever elected is beyond me. The world is going to hell in a wooden casket.

CITY MANAGER. Hand basket.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. What in the hell are you talking about? Do we have the votes or not? You are supposed to be advising me.

CITY MANAGER. I thought I was supposed to run the City.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Are you threatening me?

CITY MANAGER. My job, that you hired me for, is to enact the Council's decisions, to assist in creating a working budget and make sure the city is funded and staffed and running smoothly. But if you want my advice-

COUNCIL PERSON 3. I just asked for it, didn't I? For the love of Saint Peter, Paul, and Mary...

CITY MANAGER. The CDC is warning of premature returns to normal. They are advising caution. That even if there was a lessening of the virus in

summer and fall, it could come back even stronger than before. The second wave of the 1918 virus was more deadly than the first.

COUNCIL PERSON 3. Well no one could ever accuse you of girding the lily...

The students and the Professor come back into view, and the City officials freeze and then disappear.

PROFESSOR. Class, can we focus back a bit. I'm glad that we are all feeling optimistic, but this is Charley's time, and we shouldn't interrupt him/her.

STUDENT 5. Cue the buzzkill...

STUDENT 7. We are all exhausted are we not? Because we have all been pushing the rock uphill, only to have it fall back down again and again. Month by month, week by week, day by day...

STUDENT 5. Seriously, who stole his/her Ritalin.

STUDENT 7. The Sisyphus myth says we wake up in the morning and push our burden back uphill, only to have it fall back down again. Up and then down. And that's been us. Wake up and work very hard only to have it all come crashing down. That is why Camus believed the greatest question of all is-

STUDENT 4. Should I drink the Kool-Aid or not...

STUDENT 7. Exactly. Right again. The greatest question of all is suicide.

STUDENT 2. To be or not to be.

STUDENT 7. Yes. That is what The Mythology of Sisyphus teaches us. It actually begins "There is only one really serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide."

HEALTH CARE PRO's screen pops up.

HEALTH CARE PRO. It was not intentional you know. I just wanted to go to sleep. For a week. Okay, maybe more. It's like that joke. I am slowly losing my battle against my crippling depression syndrome. Really, how do you feel? I couldn't be happier.

Back to the students. The Health Care Professional disappears after a beat of silence.

PROFESSOR. He died in a car wreck you know. At 40.

STUDENT 2. Who?

PROFESSOR. Camus. And he wasn't even driving...

STUDENT 5. So then what does any of this prove? Screw it. I'd say to—who keeps giving him the rock?

STUDENT 2. Who?

STUDENT 5. Sissy Pants. In the myth, who gave him the rock in the first place?

STUDENT 2. Oh, I don't know.

STUDENT 7. The Gods. Only Camus did not put much faith in deities of any kind.

STUDENT 1. Like I said, then the whole damn thing makes no sense.

STUDENT 5. Like some big important genius French guy who is fixated on suicide and then gets taken out by because he decides to ride shotgun with some drunk. Look if you ask me the secret is to say, "keep your damn rock. I'm out of here."

STUDENT 4. It's a metaphor, numbnuts.

STUDENT 5. Then I say, "screw your metaphor. I'm metaphorically out of here."

STUDENT 6. He can't. He's not allowed to leave.

STUDENT 3. Welcome to the club

STUDENT 5. I'd say, "screw the goddamn club, I'm off this damn mountain, here's your damn rock", and I jet back to my valley or where ever."

STUDENT 7. But you're not. Are you. You logged into this class today, when you could have just gone out, why?

STUDENT 5. Don't tempt me. Because I need the damn grade. Sorry, Professor.

STUDENT 7. You woke up and didn't kill yourself today, why?

STUDENT 5. The day is young...

STUDENT 4. I liked it better when he/she was just staring at us, and not saying a word.

STUDENT 7. Camus would say it is because we learn to actually enjoy the struggle. We take a kind of weird joy from it. We learn that there is pleasure in the struggle.

STUDENT 2. We were supposed to give a report on (reading) “How does the Plague continue to inform our generation, six months into this pandemic?”

STUDENT 7. I am.

STUDENT 3. No, you’re not. You’re talking about sissy pants and pushing rocks. None of that is even in the book I had to read.

*Student 1 has gotten up, walked to the bathroom, and set his /her computer down on the floor and pulls his /her yoga/sweat pants down and sits on the toilet forgetting to have muted the camera. All at once, the students go OMG, That is crazy, You go, girl/guy. *Important* The angle should be such that we only see him/her in profile so the nudity is no more just a bare leg.*

PROFESSOR. Payton, you are helping define the notion of absurd a little too literally.

STUDENT 1. Oh, crap.

STUDENT 5. Well that answers that great question.

STUDENT 4. What?

STUDENT 5. Was it number one or number two.

As Student 1 reaches down quickly to shut off the camera, the entire class goes dark.

The musician’s screen comes up. He/She/They is trying to play their instrument. We see how ill he/she/they is. He can no longer really play. The frustration is visible.

The City Council Screens pop up. Council Person 3 is now Mayor. They are finishing the pledge of Allegiance- One nation under God with Liberty and Justice for All. At the same time, the older musician’s screen goes out and all at once, we have a younger different musician.

CITY CLERK. Item one under NEW Business is Recommendation to end Resolution 6 point 5 the sheltering in place and closing of non-essential businesses and public lands.

COUNCIL PERSON 2. I motion to approve.

COUNCIL PERSON 1. Second.

COUNCIL PERSON 3/MAYOR. Motion from Rogers, seconded by Manklewitz. Is there any discussion?

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Yes, Madame/Mr. Mayor.

COUNCIL PERSON 3/MAYOR. As my grandmother used to say, I would have bet the farm and the barn next door on that one. Council man/woman Hitler?

COUNCIL PERSON 4. Thank you Madame/Mr. Mayor. Let's talk about what is at stake here today...

The screens shift to the younger Musician by everyone else freezing.

YOUNGER MUSICIAN. I used to play with Leslie Mansfield, and I loved him/her very much. And I am honored to be asked to play this song, that I know he/she/they loved. You never used to worry playing with Leslie, because even if you were having a bad day, you knew you were playing with the best. And like all the best, Leslie always found a way to make you sound better. Always took a step back and let everyone on that stage shine. I hope I do you proud Les. It's been three months now, and we all miss you very much.

The same song we heard in Act One plays again. A bit more mournful than before if need be.

The Health Care Professional's camera pops up and the Musician's screen stays up for a while playing until it just fades out. Four more screens pop up- a grief support group.

HEALTHCARE PRO. Thank you for letting me play a bit of that song before we begin. I don't know why but it just helps me... Not exactly upbeat for a grief support group. I was going to begin with a joke, because I do that a lot, use humor to...

SUPPORT GROUP MEMBER 1. Were those jokes?

HEALTHCARE PRO. Tough crowd. You Grievers are a tough crowd. Oh, well screw it. I am gonna do it anyway. Probably why I still need you guys. Right? Old habits... I am trying, even if it doesn't seem like it.

SUPPORT GROUP MEMBER 2. It's okay, we got ya.

SUPPORT GROUP MEMBER 3. Speak for yourself...

HEALTHCARE PRO. So anyway, stop me if you've heard this: My therapist wanted to tell me about the 5 stages of grief. I said... First of all nothing bad has happened! Second: HOW DARE you imply that it has?!! Third: So, I'm only paying half for this session. Wow, Thanks for ruining my good mood... And finally: Okay, okay tell me all about it...

*The HEALTHCARE PRO and support group cameras all freeze.
The PROFESSOR pops up.*

PROFESSOR. I had a very good day, Will. Am I allowed to tell you that? We teachers live for days like this. Usually caused by one student who ought to be teaching the class themselves, which is pretty much what happened today. But you should have seen it. My love- (*Pauses just a bit because she realizes that it has been a long time since she has called him that.*) One of my students who barely registers cognition let alone grasping complex concepts, she/he/they actually got it. Today was one of those Eureka moments... she/he/they understood absurdity. Which is of course it's own punch line. We historians live so often in the past. Like miners, we keep looking for patterns in the past that can be mined for... And it occurred to me, Willie, that is what we are all doing. You and I, and heck, most of the whole world, right? That is why we have chosen to fight and endure and keep living. All of us, collectively trying to survive this, to keep the damn thing going. I teach, you heal, others make things, but we do it because there just has to be more than the past, there has to be another day. And we wake up and we realize there is going to be one, right? It's inevitable, I suppose, until it's not. So if there's going to be another day, well then, by damn, we have to do all we can to make it that much better. No one wants it to be worse... Or this bad, ever again...Unless you work in fossil fuels. There is no redemption there. My student understood that. Not the eureka kid, that was wonderful, but I'm talking about the Shining One (*STUDENT 7's screen pops into view.*) the one who, I don't know, is the best that our future will bring. He/She/They is why we work so damn hard. Why we have children, and parent them with such tenderness and care. And if we are lucky enough, carefully deliver them to the world. He/She/They are our tomorrow.

STUDENT 7. So I will conclude with three famous ideas that Camus ends his novel with: First: It will never truly end. "For this was the record of what had to be done and what, no doubt, would have to be done again, and again against this terror."

HEALTHCARE PRO. I stole that, but it's not bad right? That joke? Tell me all about it... Acceptance... Okay? So I will tell you about it. I went back to work yesterday. (*The support group offers congratulations, each a bit different*) Alright, Alright, I have never been good with praise and admiration. You know that. Comes from having five Irish aunts... Anyway, I went back to the medical center and that was tough enough. I mean you have no idea how guilty I felt- okay, you guys all know exactly how guilty I have felt... I mean for most of the war, I was nowhere near the trenches, and we were so undermanned as it was. And I had a job when so many didn't. Some still don't. But hey, I went back. And everyone was so... I mean they were so kind. And that helped... None of that whispered resentment behind my back for bailing on them- all that crap that I was so worried about. And I plan on going back again on Monday. One day at a time as they say. But that

is not what was on my mind all last night. Or at least in those can't get to sleep, down the rabbit hole hours of the night. No, I was online, looking at my map, you know the one that I have been compulsively checking for number of tests, number of cases, number of deaths-- you know what I mean Connie, I know you do.

SUPPORT GROUP MEMBER 3. Oh, do I... I have it on my phone. My iPad... I'd put it on the car touch screen if I could...

HEALTHCARE PRO. I mean I check it five times a night sometimes, like a compulsive broker checking stocks... a Coronavirus bookie or something... anyway "bing" no new cases all across the country, all across the world. For weeks now...

STUDENT 7. The second idea Camus concludes with: What we learn in time of pestilence there are more things to admire in men than despise.

Reporter and Council Person 3/Mayor's screens pop up.

REPORTER. Madame/Mr. Mayor. What do you say to those who are worried about this victory? About next weeks ending of the sheltering in place?

CITY COUNCIL PERSON 3. I say what could be more exciting than a City, than a community coming back to life? Of the doors opening for our businesses, our school bells ringing. Our churches calling us back to worship. And I promise you this, we have learned a great deal from this ordeal. And what we have learned, we have learned together, as a community, as one city. What we have learned is, by the grace of God, we will once again thrive. And we have learned that no matter what adversity we face, our city is the jewel of the Gold Coast. You can already feel it, can't you? It is right around the corner. We are all just waiting to come out again, the crowds are wanting to travel, and they want to visit us, to walk our beaches and recreate in our blue waters. The sun is ready to shine on all of us, and a new day will dawn on our shores.

STUDENT 7. Beware: "The plague never dies it waits patiently in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, handkerchiefs, and old papers for the day when it will once again rouse its rats and send them to die in some prosperous city."

Brighton appears again suddenly in a screen

HEALTHCARE PRO. And then all of a sudden this happened... Brighton, my late daughter/son, now please do not call me crazy here-- because well, of course, at least half of us here are certifiable, or at least were, I mean we met in the psych ward right? Anyway my daughter/son... just all at once appeared on my computer screen. I mean she/he/they just popped up, like she/he/they was right there. Wanting to video chat with me. Like we did when she/he/they was seeking treatment. Back then, we wore that Zoom

room out; sometimes we stayed on that thing for so long... Like teenagers on a party line... And at first I thought, aw crap, my support group is going to be so pissed- so I rubbed my eyes and she/he/they would not go away. I mean there she/he/they was...

STUDENT 7. And finally what we learn is, if there is one thing one can always yearn for and sometimes attain, it is human love.

HEALTHCARE PRO. And so I said: "hello, my sweet bright one." And she/he/they just stared at me. And I said "I've really lost it, haven't I... they are going to put me back in the rubber ward for sure." But then the weirdest, okay the second weirdest, because the first weirdest was she was even there, what was odd was I just started to talk to her/him/they. And it didn't matter that she/he/they didn't say a word. I mean up until she got sick, I think the only thing she/he/they used to say to me was thanks for the Master Card. But I just told her/him/they how I was, and how the world was, and how her/his/their mother was, and that finally we were probably going to be okay, that it was a very rough patch there for a while. I told her/his/their how her/his/their mother so blamed me, felt it was my fault, which was so natural since it actually was.... But that I was seeking treatment and wasn't looking to medicate anymore... and I swear to you as we are almost sitting here together, she/he/they and I just started to cry, at the same time, together.

Brighton is now crying. There is no audio from her screen this time.

HEALTHCARE PRO. And I told her/him/they it was alright. That we loved her/him/they so much, and how much we missed her, how everyone missed her. And then-- I had to-- so I told her/him/they that I was so sorry, that I would spend the rest of my life being so sorry. And then, because I knew no one would believe me, I don't know why, but all of a sudden I decided I should take a screen shot. I suppose because I knew when I told you this, I'd have to have some proof, so I wouldn't have to go back to square one with all of this recovery... And then I kid you not- the-okay- third weirdest thing, no wait a minute this WAS the weirdest without a doubt thing. I took the screen shot and- wham- nothing. (*Brighton is gone.*) She/He/They wasn't there. At all... And I got so sad, so worried. I mean just like that, where her/his/their screen was went blank. But then I have no idea how to tell you this, she/he/they just appeared right next to me-

Brighton does appear in the same screen as he/she/they- which means that actor should be cast as an actual healthy family member of the performer playing the Healthcare Professional-1 at least for now- and it should be the first time we have seen two people in the same screen.

HEALTHCARE PRO. And that of course freaked me out because we had had to keep so far apart the last few weeks of her/his/their... couldn't even stand by as.... and I said, "what are you doing here? Are you actually here?"

And please say something to me,” and all she/he/they did was come up behind me and lean over me sitting in my chair, because I was just too damn freaked out to even move, and she/he/they kissed me on my forehead. And just when she/he/they did- wham the computer and all the lights went out. Like as if someone snapped their fingers and the whole world went dark.

As she/he/they tenderly kisses his/her/their forehead

Blackout

END OF PLAY