



WAITING FOR THE HOST

A PLAY FOR STAGE OR STREAM
IN TWO PARTS

BY **MARC
PALMIERI**



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PLAY SERVICE
INC.

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*For one of the many it took from us, Thomas A. Ramsay,
January 1, 1955–April 24, 2020*

WAITING FOR THE HOST (Part I) had its world premiere under the title *Streaming Passion* at Penn State Centre Stage Virtual (Rick Lombardo, Artistic Director) on April 16, 2020. It was directed by Rick Lombardo, the technical director was Chris Swetcky, the director of marketing was Cheri Sinclair, and the production stage manager was Rowan Young. The cast was as follows:

THEODORE Steve Snyder
BEN Cole Harris
EFFIE Barbara Korner
VINCENT Gabriel Peña
SARA Julia Cherson
GRACE Rachel Harker

STILL WAITING (Part II) had its world premiere at the Redhouse Arts Center (Hunter Foster, Artistic Director; Samara Hannah, Executive Director) in Syracuse, New York, through its “Virtual Redhouse” platform in June 2020. It was directed by Hunter Foster, the marketing and publicity was by Sue McKenna and Stephanie Consroe, the education director was Marguerite Mitchell, the video editing and graphic design were by Joshua Reid, the production manager was Daniel Whiting, and the production stage manager was Margot Reed. The cast was as follows:

THEODORE Steve Gamba
BEN Brendan Didio
EFFIE Jennifer Cody
VINCENT Robert Denzel Edwards
SARA Marguerite Mitchell
GRACE Yarissa Tiara Millan
DODD Jeremy Kushnier

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Please know that Parts I and II can be produced together, as just Part I, or in whatever sequence works best. (The initial productions were done in two separate runs, Part I then Part II, as perhaps anything over an hour is a wee bit long at the laptop screen.) They have been performed both entirely live and entirely prerecorded. The play has also been staged physically, in the flesh, actors apart on the stage, in screened-off areas representing their place of sequestration.

Gender and age range is totally flexible and only suggested here; actors can be any ethnicity. Please make all that your own. Embracing the unpredictable nature of attempting to put on a play from however many separate locations at once is entirely encouraged. Making any adjustments to fit casting or technological capability is also encouraged and expected.

I live in Queens, which was referred to often as the “epicenter” of the American coronavirus outbreak. I wrote this play, both parts, alone in my basement during the “quarantine.”

Part I would go live as the inaugural show of Penn State Centre Stage’s virtual platform. It was the final night of Passover, 2020, at 7 P.M. The cast had rehearsed and would perform from their homes separated by hundreds of miles along the East Coast. Through my and the New York City actors’ windows, we could hear people cheering in the streets for our first responders. To our delight, some thousand people arrived online at “curtain time” (or “window time”) as audience members to a new, somewhere-in-between-theatre-and-live-television form. We were all in the same room, so to speak, only not. We were all together, only not. Actress Julia Cherson, who was playing Sara, just after we bid one another broken legs and went to “places,” said, “I needed this.” Hear, hear. Theatres had gone dark, shows closed, and yet we somehow made it to an opening night. It felt like we were doing what we loved doing, and we all indeed needed it very much.

My great thanks to my friends and family, too many to name, who encouraged me to send this to my agent, Mary Harden, and Robert Vaughan at Dramatists Play Service. Thanks to Rick Lombardo for

being the first to do this thing, and to Hunter Foster, who came up with the title and told me to write Part II. Thanks to Pangdemonium in Singapore, whose production showed us just how globally shared this quarantine is. And thanks to Raven Snook, who first told the world about it in one of her heroic, daily TDF Stages articles that told people where to click to have some kind of theatre, even in its absence. Thanks to Fr. Larry Byrne, Susan and Teddy Byrne, the vestry, and the real All Saints Church in Bayside. Thanks to the Theatre Project's Mark Spina and Rev. Jason Haddox, Mercy College, and to all who've done this show. Thanks to all who will. And thanks to those who do this play someday in the future, long after this season of things so unwelcome has come to its most welcome end, and our lives, and theatres, have been resurrected.

Marc Palmieri
Summer 2020
New York City

CHARACTERS

THEODORE

BEN

EFFIE

VINCENT

SARA

GRACE

DODD

*“I had else been perfect,
Whole as the marble, founded as the rock,
As broad and general as the casing air.
But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in
To saucy doubts and fears.”*

— William Shakespeare
The Tragedy of Macbeth

WAITING FOR THE HOST

PART I: WAITING FOR THE HOST

Setting: The internet.

At rise: April 2020. It is 7:04 P.M. on the last night of Passover, and late in the Christian season of Lent. On a computer screen, five windows are open. In the windows we see Theodore (male, 50s), the rector of a small church on Long Island; Vincent (male, 30s), a gym teacher and coach, wearing what looks like a windbreaker; Ben (male, early 20s), a college student and Theodore's son; Grace (female, 30s–60s); and a black screen that just reads "Effie" across it. It may or may not be immediately clear that Ben and Theodore are in the same location, which is the church property. The sound of some mix of outdoor clapping, cheering, banging on tin pans, horns, and whistles, fading from its climax, can be heard. Grace, Theodore, and Vincent are clapping along to what's left of the noise.

GRACE. (*Enjoying the noise.*) It gets a little louder on my block every night. Two nights ago only a few houses were doing it. Now it sounds like twenty!

VINCENT. Same here. Some neighbors who've never even seen each other are banging on stuff and waving at each other through their windows. Seven o'clock, every night. My sister said in the city, First Avenue was so loud the EMTs in front of NYU couldn't hear themselves saying "Thank you."

GRACE. It's inspiring.

THEODORE. And it's deserved.

EFFIE'S WINDOW. I can't figure it out! I can see y'all but I can't see a camera!

BEN. Effie, it should be bottom left. There may be a red slash through it, and it should say, “Allow camera” or “Start video” or—
EFFIE’S WINDOW. A red slash?

THEODORE. It’s an icon.

EFFIE’S WINDOW. An icon?

BEN. Not like a religious icon, just a camera icon.

EFFIE’S WINDOW. I don’t know what you’re talking about.

GRACE. She doesn’t use the computer much.

EFFIE’S WINDOW. No, I use the computer, Grace. I check email sometimes but this is...

THEODORE. Ben, make sure she knows she’s not looking for a real camera.

BEN. I know, Dad. Effie?

EFFIE’S WINDOW. Yeah?

BEN. So you’re looking not at the actual lens of your PC, but the camera symbol—

Suddenly, Effie’s window brightens and we see Effie, female, 50s–70s, looking baffled.

ALL. Effie! There she is!

Effie’s window goes black again, saying only: “Effie.” Everyone groans.

VINCENT. Damn. We had her.

EFFIE’S WINDOW. Can you see me?

ALL. NO!

BEN. But we saw you for a second.

EFFIE’S WINDOW. You did? Wait a second. Oh, this is aggravating!

THEODORE. Relax. Our Jesus is running late.

VINCENT. Running late?

THEODORE. Our one professional performer.

VINCENT. That’s a stretch. And how do you “run late” when you live in a one-room place and your appointment is in your one chair?

GRACE. I haven't seen Sara in years.

Grace clears her throat.

She was in two of my classes. She's so talented. I'm not surprised she's in New York City. And busy.

VINCENT. She's not busy. Nobody's busy. It's lockdown. She wasn't busy in the first place.

BEN. Effie?

EFFIE'S WINDOW. Ben, I have no idea what—

Effie appears again, in a perfect medium closeup.

—you're talking about. Icon, slash. Can I do this any other way?

ALL. We see you! Effie you're on!

EFFIE. What?

THEODORE. Keep it right there! That's perfect!

EFFIE. I'm on?

BEN and THEODORE. Yes!

EFFIE. Somehow I got it on. Great.

The view of Effie abruptly lifts, showing only the tip of her forehead.

BEN. Well now we can't see you. But we can see your ceiling.

THEODORE. Sara should be on by now. She said five minutes late.

BEN. Effie, now you have to bend your screen toward you a bit.

EFFIE. Bend my screen? Won't it break? It's glass.

BEN. *Tilt*, I should say. *Tilt* the screen back to the way you had it. There should be some kind of joint—

VINCENT. You just tilted it up, now tilt it back *down*, Effie.

EFFIE. Ah, I see. You mean—

She tilts herself back into view.

BEN. Yes! Hands off now! RELEASE!

She does, startled.

EFFIE. Oh y'all can see what I see, is that it?

BEN. That is it.

THEODORE. So while we wait for Sara does anyone have any questions? We have our casting set?

GRACE. It's the same script we do every year, right?

THEODORE. Right. A few casting changes, though, to streamline, keep this thing doable.

GRACE. Usually we have the whole vestry perform.

THEODORE. Well...usually we do it live on Palm Sunday too, but we didn't.

BEN. There's nothing "usual" anymore.

VINCENT. Like bringing in a ringer who not only isn't a parishioner, but who is Jewish.

GRACE. Well, it's Passover, too.

THEODORE. Our church is open to all. Vincent, you promised me you two were on good terms.

GRACE. Oh there's a history! Gossip! Spill it!

EFFIE. You know, Father, I think this whole season has been a true Lent. This virus. True suffering. It feels like a few weeks ago we were talking about what we'd give up for Lent. I was gonna give up cheese. Then we gave up civilization. And I've had more cheese than I've had in my whole life.

THEODORE. Well I am glad we're doing this. And so will our parishioners be. More and more have been tuning in to our streaming masses, for which I'm very grateful. After our "Digital Palm Sunday" I got a bunch of messages saying how much they missed the Passion performance. That's why we're doing this. The closer to normal, the better for everyone.

VINCENT. So this will be recorded?

BEN. Yes. I'll edit it and put it on our website.

VINCENT. And we can enjoy the crucifixion all year long!

THEODORE. Thanks to Ben. My son's misfortune of being dragged home from SUNY Albany gives us a chance to use his media skills. I call him Ben C. DeMille.

BEN. (*Not laughing.*) That's hilarious, Dad.

GRACE. Jesus is a girl. That's different. And Jewish. I like it!

THEODORE. Well...

VINCENT. Who's gonna say it?

EFFIE. Say what?

VINCENT. "The real Jesus was Jewish!"

GRACE. That's right! Everybody was Jewish back then.

BEN. That's not correct.

THEODORE. I saw her father at 7-Eleven, who is actually a gentleman I went to high school with. Through a mask he made out of a scarf, he started telling me about Sara and that she was feeling very down, and that the theatre business is being hit so hard with all this. Obviously. And he also told me he had a friend...an older man who, just that morning...hours before I saw him...who had symptoms one morning and by the next night...

Pause.

I didn't know what else to say...anyway, I thought this would be a nice way to involve someone else from the community. And get a skilled reader! So I told him we needed a Jesus.

VINCENT. Though we didn't *need* Jesus, since I'm usually Jesus.

THEODORE. It's a good deed, Vincent. As I said, she's been hit hard.

VINCENT. She's "hit hard" because her restaurant is doing takeout only. Not because theatre is hit hard.

GRACE. Vincent...? Do you want to share your history with Jesus before she arrives?

VINCENT. We were together, we broke up. Wasn't pretty.

EFFIE. Ooh. Did someone break a covenant? That's a Bible joke.

VINCENT. Not really. What's a covenant again?

THEODORE. Are you kidding me?

VINCENT. Yes! I'm kidding. Not really.

THEODORE. God made covenants with the His people, agreements. Contracts. He'd look out for them if they were loyal, praised him, lived under his rules...and God's side of the covenant was...well, he wouldn't destroy mankind.

Silence. People stare, shuffle papers, think...

WAITING FOR THE HOST

by Marc Palmieri

4 men, 3 women

The play can be performed as one show or separated by its two parts. In Part One (WAITING FOR THE HOST), while theatres, playgrounds, schools, and churches are shuttered by a modern plague, the rector of a small church on Long Island gathers a handful of parishioners via video conference. His goal is to record a theatrical reading of the story of the Passion for the church website. As exes bicker and technology confuses, this socially distant endeavor quickly becomes chaotic. Still, in the effort, the group finds a strange, painful closeness, and that their comic and clumsy reading has become a kind of desperate prayer. In Part Two (STILL WAITING), the pandemic lockdown is well into its second month. Members of the church find themselves bitten by the “acting bug.” With the help of a “professional director” from Manhattan, they hope to launch a community theatre at the church. To their surprise, the bishop and church leadership found their Passion Play objectionable, and their plans are met with resistance. They decide to put on a showcase of their skills, with an “updated” version of medieval Biblical plays, and find they win the support of an unexpected guest.

“WAITING FOR THE HOST...allows a new work, a new approach to theater, a new approach to performing, and a new approach to directing to take place and it is definitely entertaining. The play does not disappoint. It is real, raw, and brings some much-needed laughter; exactly what theater is supposed to do.”
—BroadwayWorld.com

“Call it a play within a play within a crisis... The play authentically flaunts all the glories and pitfalls of a typical online group session.”
—The Star-Ledger (NJ)

“...a pair of short plays inspired directly by the restrictions on American life created by Covid-19 [that] have a sweetness and self-consciousness tied to the earnestness of the characters facing the awkward mechanics of Zoom life... They provide a quiet affirmation of the power of community and an exploration of faith.”
—Syracuse.com

“[WAITING FOR THE HOST] just may be the first full-length work written for our new surreality.”
—TDF Stages

Also by Marc Palmieri

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