

TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES

PLAYS FOR ONLINE THEATRE

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INC.

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INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, theatres on Broadway and across the world went dark. The coronavirus pandemic had spread with alarming speed, and it was no longer safe for actors and audiences to gather in crowded playhouses. The shutdown seemed to be the beginning of a very long pause for drama—until theatre artists, undeterred and ever resourceful, turned to the internet.

Livestreaming platforms like Zoom offered a solution. Families, friends, and coworkers were using video chats to overcome the isolation of their quarantines, and playwrights immediately saw the possibilities, generating boundary-pushing work with livestreaming in mind. A new genre of theatre was born, a testament to the flexibility, tenacity, and ingenuity of the art form.

Dramatists Play Service was itself part of this movement. Starting in April 2020, we asked our authors to write, or share with us, short works for livestreaming platforms. TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES is a selection of these plays, with more to be found in subsequent volumes. The plays may be performed on the internet but also in person and onstage. They span a range of subjects, genres, and themes, but are linked by their exploration of staying connected under trying circumstances—the very same impulse that drove artists to the internet to keep theatre alive.

Over the course of the pandemic, online theatre has proved that it's not just a temporary replacement for traditional performances but a distinct form of theatre with its own virtues. The convenience of watching plays from home has drawn digital crowds: Many streaming plays had as many viewers in weeks as their onstage equivalents would have had in years. The plays have found not only bigger audiences but new ones, breaking down financial and geographic barriers and other obstacles to access. They engage theatregoers in meaningful, interactive ways, and they tend to require fewer production resources, allowing companies to mount performances quickly and, if they choose, engage with current events in almost

real time. Perhaps the biggest perk: Everyone gets the best seat in the house.

When TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES went to press in late 2020, Broadway remained closed—the longest shutdown in the theatre district’s history. Online theatre continues, and all indications are that it’s here to stay. Whether you enjoy the plays in this collection on the page, on the screen, or on the stage, they are representative of both a remarkable period in theatre history and the beginning of an entirely new theatrical experiment.

—Leah Barker, Editor
December 2020

CONTENTS

HEY STRANGER by <i>Steph Del Rosso</i>	7
OYSTER by <i>Elaine Romero</i>	23
INTRO TO FICTION (VIRTUAL) by <i>Ken Urban</i>	29
A REAL ESTATE OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION by <i>Leah Barker</i>	41
BLACK IN BLUE by <i>Aurin Squire</i>	51
LOOKING BACK by <i>Arlene Hutton</i>	59
ARTFUL by <i>Christina Quintana (CQ)</i>	67
BOREDOM, FEAR AND WINE by <i>Craig Pospisil</i>	73
FORCED by <i>John Cameron Mitchell</i>	83
TELEPHONES WITH CORDS by <i>Mashuq Mushtaq Deen</i>	91

HEY STRANGER

BY STEPH DEL ROSSO

CHARACTERS

EVE, female. Smiley face with hearts for eyes.

GIDEON, male. Winky face.

ZOE, a teen, female. Eye roll.

PLACE

The internet.

Have fun with Eve, Gideon, and Zoe's respective spaces.

Perhaps Eve's space is cluttered.

Perhaps there's something about Gideon's space that reads "trying too hard."

Perhaps it's the other way around.

There should be some sort of abstract painting or art piece in Gideon's space.

It should not be "good" art.

TIME

Now-ish.

NOTES

/ indicates an interruption.

Line breaks indicate a slight, slight hesitation.

[Words in brackets] are unspoken.

Caps in the Middle of a Sentence are meant for emphasis.

The play should take about 10–12 minutes. Consider pacing accordingly.

HEY STRANGER

Two squares.

Eve and Gideon each in their respective spaces.

A breath and then—

EVE. It's great to see you.

GIDEON. You too.

EVE. Do I look grainy?

GIDEON. What?

You kind of sound far away. Like you're inside a tunnel.

EVE. Oh. Shoot. Let me / just

GIDEON. Maybe it's me

EVE. I said, do I look grainy?

Did that—

GIDEON. One more time?

EVE. Do I look / grainy

GIDEON. I'm gonna adjust / my

EVE. DO I LOOK GRAINY

GIDEON. Oh there you are

Loud and clear

Ha ha

EVE. Sorry

Am I yelling

GIDEON. A little

EVE. Sorry

GIDEON. Don't apologize

EVE. Sorry

I mean

I think I'm nervous

GIDEON. Oh yeah?

EVE. When you reached out I just—

“Hey stranger”

I love that.

“Hey stranger”

GIDEON. I was worried you'd think it was spam

EVE. No way

GIDEON. You told me you'd delete my number

EVE. I did?

GIDEON. After you threw the Instant Pot in my face

Yeah

you

EVE. Oh god. Right.

Did that leave a

bruise

GIDEON. No I ducked, remember?

Quick reflexes

EVE. Wow I'm [sorry]

That was not my

finest

moment

GIDEON. It's OK

At least I got to keep it.

I made so much chili that year.

EVE. That's

great

GIDEON. Don't worry about it.

We were babies.

EVE. We were children.

GIDEON. I'm glad you didn't Actually delete my number

EVE. Me too.

Especially now that we're, you know

older

and more

Mature

GIDEON. Very true

A seductive beat.

And then—

EVE. Is that
coffee?

GIDEON. It's a Cappuccino actually

I got myself a milk frother.

I know, bougie! But self-care. Right?

EVE. I thought this was
happy hour

GIDEON. Did I say that?

EVE. Yeah in your text you said happy hour

GIDEON. That's just an expression

EVE. Oh. Right. That old

Expression

GIDEON. Is that

a bottle of wine?

It is.

EVE. Nooo

No no

GIDEON. Wow I'm sorry. You really thought—

It's just a figure of speech.

EVE. Oh yeah no I got it

This is

tea.

Eve moves the wine bottle out of the frame.

GIDEON. (...) It's

3 P.M.

EVE. Yeah this is tea.

Eve takes a big sip of the "tea."

Awkward smiles.

So how's
the chiropractor business?

GIDEON. Booming
Not to brag but yeah, booming.

EVE. Congrats!

GIDEON. And what about you, are you still...

Doesn't remember.

working with

Shot in the dark here.

dogs?

EVE. (...?) I teach

Well I mean I tutor.

Teenagers

GIDEON. *(No recollection.)* Oh right right right right right

EVE. Shit—it's telling me my connection / is

GIDEON. What?

Eve says the following while typing it in the chat box.

EVE. I'm unstable

GIDEON. You're—[?]

EVE. *(Realizing.)* Oh not literally! Ha!

My connection I mean. My connection.

I think my neighbor is downloading too much porn.

I heard all this moaning.

GIDEON. Unless it was the bad kind of moaning

EVE. Is there a bad kind of moaning

GIDEON. Like a, painful moaning

EVE. No it sounded, joyful.

I think.

I think?

GIDEON. I don't want to freak you out or anything...

EVE. *(Noticing.)* Wow I love that art

[?] piece, behind you.

Is that a painting? It's very

Provocative

GIDEON. *(Faux modesty.)* Thank you—thanks

EVE. Wait are you the artist?

GIDEON. It's my new hobby.

Or bad habit!

EVE. (*Trying.*) No no no you're really talented

He's not.

GIDEON. You want to play the game?

EVE. The game?

GIDEON. That game we used to play, when we'd go to museums together. Remember?

We'd try to guess the title of the piece without looking at the little label.

EVE. (*Kind of touched.*) Oh right! The game!

GIDEON. So

EVE. (*Considering the art piece.*) Ummmm
"Catapult"

GIDEON. No

EVE. "Homesick"

GIDEON. Nice but no

EVE. "War [?]
Time"

GIDEON. Uh-uh

EVE. "Lonely"

GIDEON. Nope

EVE. "Lonely"

GIDEON. You
already guessed that

EVE. Did I?

GIDEON. Yeah, you—

EVE. Whoops
That word's kind of
been on my mind
a lot
lately

TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES PLAYS FOR ONLINE THEATRE

This collection of socially distant shorts is designed to be performed on the internet as well as the stage. Playful and inventive, TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES taps into the delights and frustrations of staying connected.

HEY STRANGER by **Steph Del Rosso**. Years after a messy breakup, Eve and Gideon reunite. What could go wrong? Possibly everything. A comedy about mixed signals and bad internet, loneliness and autonomy. And one very precocious high schooler. (1M, 2W.)

OYSTER by **Elaine Romero**. Marisela negotiates a potential opportunity in a border world where kids live in government cages and being bilingual comes at a price. (1W.)

INTRO TO FICTION (VIRTUAL) by **Ken Urban**. During office hours, a professor discusses his student's short story. When her characters feel too close for comfort for the professor, teacher and student must reckon with how to write a good ending. (1M, 1W.)

A REAL ESTATE OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION by **Leah Barker**. Are you in the market for a new home, and with that home, a new you? Would you like that new home-slash-you to be a charming saltbox Cape? Audience votes guide this interactive tour and auction, complete with special guests, updated appliances, and a realtor's long-hidden secret. (1W, flexible casting.)

BLACK IN BLUE by **Aurin Squire**. After one act of police brutality too many, one man decides to do something. But in trying to get "street justice," he threatens his life, his brother, and his job. (2M.)

LOOKING BACK by **Arlene Hutton**. Kath was the last visitor to leave a major theme park before the pandemic lockdown. While reminiscing about life pre-Covid, two roommates challenge each other's ideas of what truly makes a person happy. (2 n/s.)

ARTFUL by **Christina Quintana (CQ)**. In the wake of her ex-husband's departure, Taani logs on to a Metropolitan Museum of Art webinar. Suddenly in conversation with the art itself, she finds the event is more personal than she ever could have imagined. (1M, 3W.)

BOREDOM, FEAR AND WINE by **Craig Pospisil**. When you're stuck at home during a pandemic, everything happens online—even therapy. Harper is suffering, and can't reconcile feelings about the terrifying disease with the monotony of lockdown. Jess tries to be sympathetic, but the session goes off the rails. (2 n/s.)

FORCED by **John Cameron Mitchell**. When the author was invited to attend Russia's first queer film festival, he was prepared for trouble: The hosting cinema had pulled out after a national film figure derided the event as a "festival for child molesters." Inspired by the courage of the organizers, Mitchell agreed to attend, bringing his Russian friend Sasha along. This monologue is derived from his diary. (1M.)

TELEPHONES WITH CORDS by **Mashuq Mushtaq Deen**. Bozz and Banjo, best friends and fellow puppets, are feeling the separation of a Zoom existence. Frustrated, Bozz wants to talk by phone, and Banjo can't help but sense their friend's growing existential despair. Usually the optimist, even Banjo begins to wonder about the hands at work in their lives. (2 n/s.)

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