

ABUNDANCE (a requiem on zoom)

By James Still

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Commissioned and originally presented in June 2020 as part of the UC Santa Barbara, Department of Theater and Dance LAUNCH PAD Zoom festival ALONE, TOGETHER; Risa Brainin, Artistic Director.

NOTE ON CASTING: Everything tells a story. In the same spirit in which I wrote the play, the character of ANNIE may/can/should be played by an actor of any gender, race, ethnicity, origin and other-abledness. In whatever ways the play is cast, it will tell the story of abundance.

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ON YOUR SCREENS:

A WOMAN – let's definitely call her ANNIE –
flickers into view.

Don't get cute with the background – the space
should be empty, not even neutral – EMPTY.
Empty can be beautiful.

ANNIE looks out at US. We can see her but she
can't see us.

ANNIE

Hello?

(...)

Hello?

ANNIE looks around.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Huh.

(...)

Anyone there?

(...)

Maybe you can see me?

(...)

Am I on mute?

ANNIE leans in and fiddles with her device.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

This was the link, I mean, this is Zoom, right?

I'm on Zoom.

I don't know why I'm on Zoom, but this was definitely the link.

Am I in the right place?

ANNIE looks at us.

She waits.

(...)

(...)

(...)

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Well.

(...)

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Um... I came as soon as I could,
as soon as I got the text with the link, the invitation.
As soon as I --
this is so new to me.
You probably hear that a lot.
But I'm not sure what happens next.
You probably hear that a lot too.

(...)

ANNIE (CONT'D)

OK, why don't I talk --
and if you want to say anything --
can anyone hear me?
I don't know what I'm supposed to be looking for.
Or WHO I'm supposed to be looking for.
I -- ...
I don't know if this is what usually happens --
I don't know how long this part lasts,
I mean, things ended sooner than they should have --
or maybe they ended exactly when they were supposed to.
But I'm no longer --
I mean, obviously -- I'm not, you know...
What I want to say
is that I'm guessing most people come here to tell you that they didn't have enough time,
that there was so much more they wanted to do,
and that maybe they could make a bargain.
I'm just guessing? --
but you hear about that kind of stuff, that kind of reaction.
And sure, part of me feels that way too.
That's human, right?
Am I making any sense?
Can anyone see me -- because I still can't see anyone.
Are you...? (...)
I'm getting the feeling you aren't going to answer me.
If I could just see you --
maybe you could nod or something.
But I can't see you so maybe you could make a noise?

(MORE)

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Maybe you could snap your fingers?
 Or yodel?
 Or clap your hands.
 Maybe sing a line from Puccini
 or a song by Joni Mitchell?
 I don't know.

ANNIE waits.

Complete silence.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

I need to say this one thing --
 that even though it seemed short, shorter than I planned --
 I really had a good life.
 It's not that terrible things didn't happen,
 or that I didn't know sorrow,
 or that I accomplished every single thing I ever hoped I would --
 but it was all very -- human...
 and tender...
 and small...
 But enormous.
 Yeah, that's it -- mine was an enormous life.
 There was so much... abundance.
 Isn't that a beautiful word?
 Abundance.
 I could say it a million times and never not love the way it sounds,
 the way it feels.
 I had more than enough --
 I had plenty, in fact.
 And I don't mean money, I don't mean that I was rich.
 But my life was rich --
 I knew... abundance.
 In the end the only thing I didn't have enough of was -- time.
 That's the mystery, right?
 In the end, that's the thing we can't get more of... time.
 So I'm wondering --
 and maybe this is against the rules
 but since I don't even know the rules I figure it's worth asking.

(...)

Some people --
 when they die --
 they leave money,
 they leave jewelry,
 family pictures,
 maybe a house or some heirloom,

(MORE)

ANNIE (CONT'D)

some material thing that whoever gets it
 can touch it,
 hold it,
 and call it theirs.
 But I was wondering --
 in fact, I'm really hoping --
 that instead of leaving any of that kind of stuff behind I wonder if I might leave some TIME.
 Can I give that away?
 Is it mine to give?
 Can I leave time to someone who needs it?
 Please?
 I'd love to make it someone special but I also don't want to push my luck here.
 I think I'm asking for a lot.
 But TIME is the one thing I used to have so much of even when I didn't know I had so much of it.
 60 seconds to a minute.
 3,600 seconds to an hour.
 86,400 seconds to a day.
 604,800 seconds to a week.
 31,449,600 seconds to a year.
 I think that comes to well over a billion seconds in my life.
 A BILLION!
 That's crazy, right?
 Time.

(...)

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Since I don't know you
 and can't see you
 and can't hear you --
 I'm going to pretend.
 I'm going to pretend I can see everyone I ever loved ,
 everyone I ever knew,
 everyone I ever met.

ANNIE looks out at us and we feel seen.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Hello.
 I see you.
 And you're beautiful.
 Every one of you.
 Every single one of you.
 O god I'm going to miss you.
 I want all of you to take a deep breath --
 do it with me.
 Come on -- do it.

ANNIE takes a deep breath and audibly exhales.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

That was amazing.
That sound --
the sound of...
time.
The sound of life.
Over a billion seconds.
It
goes
by
quickly.

(new idea:)

All of you --
every one of you gets
one
extra
second.
Whoever sees this,
whoever is out there.
It's yours.
From me to you.
Abundance.
One.
Beautiful.
Perfect.
Second.
It's a mystery.
Savor it.
And one more thing --

But ANNIE is suddenly muted, she's beginning to disappear, the image of her slowly fading on our screens.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

[moving her lips
but we can't hear what she says,
she does this for several seconds --
we'll never know what she said] --

Whatever screen you're watching goes dark.

The play is over.