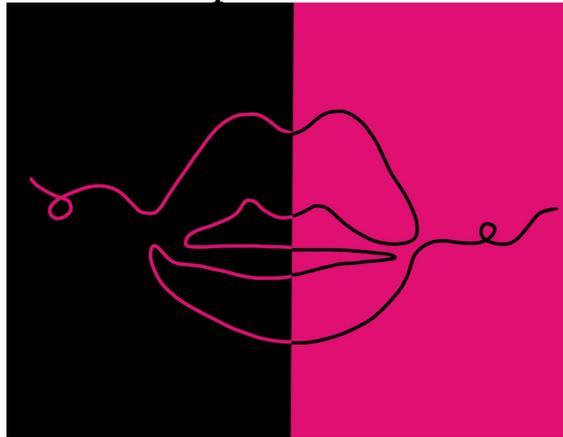


# FIRST KISS NEWSLETTER

The latest news and updates from First Kiss Theatre



IN THIS ISSUE

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**UPDATES ON THEATRE  
IS DEAD FESTIVAL**

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**OFFICIAL LINEUP OF  
FEATURED  
PRODUCTIONS**

---

**MEET THE ARTISTS  
BEHIND THE WORKS**

---

**GET TICKETS NOW!**

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## **An Insight Into The Theatre Is Dead Festival**

*By Ellie Strayer*

Hello everyone! This is our second Newsletter! How ~exciting~?!

First off, we have to say a big thank you to the lovely responses we've been getting about our work thus far and to everyone who has been so supportive of our journey. As Peter Brook would argue in *The Blank Space*, theatre doesn't happen without an audience.

To everyone who has reserved tickets to our festival so far, thank you from the bottom of our hearts. And to everyone who hasn't... What are you doing, friends??? We'd like to take this opportunity to welcome and introduce you to the Theatre Is Dead Festival. Months in the making, this festival is a celebration of how theatrical artists have persevered through this time of quarantine and isolation and have adapted to the evolving idea of theatre. For, of



course, when we say “Theatre is dead,” we mean that live theater might be on hold (perhaps you could say in a coma but that wouldn't be as catchy), so we're encouraging people to do whatever they can to keep the arts alive. As we all know, art can never die, so this is all meant to be satirical but we nonetheless are thrilled to be exploring new mediums to keep art innovative.

We thought we'd share a little of our process with you! Over the past few months we have been working together with emerging artists to create new, exciting means of virtual theatre. With just a few phone calls and a few texts, a company of like-minded artists was formed at 11:21 p.m. EST on Wed., Aug 12th, 2020. Soon, our intent to launch our company had a lot to do with shining a light on projects we had all already been working on, or wanted to produce. Just a few Zoom calls later, a festival was born and a line up was conceived. With a very liberal idea of what virtual theatre means, we've since put together a thrilling festival, honoring our dearly deceased theatre and celebrating new artistry!!!



**On October 24th and 25th, 7pm EST on both days, we cordially invite you to come and honor the life of Theatre with us and support our company, our emerging artists, and our select great causes all on the virtual stage, aka Youtube Live!**

As artists, and as active citizens, we've also decided to donate a large amount of the proceeds to organizations who help make positive change possible. On Saturday, we will be supporting Color Of Change, an organization dedicated to fighting for racial justice in America. On Sunday, we will be supporting the Environmental Defense Fund, an organization dedicated to combating climate change and preserving our natural world. Tickets for this event are a suggested donation of \$15 per day, OR \$5 per performance you stay for! These are just suggested amounts however, and anything you are willing and able to donate is much appreciated. This festival can be totally free if you want it to be!

To get a ticket, just fill out the google form attached to this newsletter and give us your email! The email will ask you to Venmo us (@firstkisstheatre) or it will send you to our PayPal. Make sure to include in the comment or subject link that it's for the festival! And if a donation is not possible for you at this time, fear not! Art should be accessible to all, and we'll work with you to make sure you attend We'll send you a link to our YouTube Live festival day-of on both days! The link will be available for all who cannot attend a few days after the event, but we recommend pre-ordering tickets NOW to save yourself the hassle!

TICKETS HERE:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1anf9MHRRSNC9dYeKNgD2Ytta7bO0HHSf6dad3Roke4/edit#response=ACYDBNhv9gPnvSpXxTFIVTLwC6ldC2NGdczu-gEtmSRGofp9H8\\_JcQG4Pg955B4Y8syEgmA](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1anf9MHRRSNC9dYeKNgD2Ytta7bO0HHSf6dad3Roke4/edit#response=ACYDBNhv9gPnvSpXxTFIVTLwC6ldC2NGdczu-gEtmSRGofp9H8_JcQG4Pg955B4Y8syEgmA)  
And without further ado, we'd love to present our line-up of artists!

# SATURDAY NIGHT LINEUP



Was Going To  
Created by Ellie Strayer

This piece is about the specific feeling of numbness you get when you're stuck in a routine. It's very much a response quarantine, and it's very much gathered from the emotional and sensory responses of someone in a post-grad position watching the rest of the world fall apart. This piece is primarily a claymation, however contains elements of frame-by-frame animation, watercolor, and pen on paper. It also includes footage from the window of a plane during a flight from Denver to Boston at the very beginning of the world unraveling (March, 2020).

comment below  
Written by Emmy Kuperschmid  
Directed by Terry Kitagawa  
Editing by Robyn Huey  
Kitty - Lyndsay Tucker  
Jess - Marth Brown  
Margaret - Nina Gravlin

Kitty is a fifteen year old girl who, after being uprooted in the middle of the year, finds comfort and control in vlogging and the internet. But as her viewers increase, so do her mother's stage-mom tendencies--and what happens when Kitty makes a real life friend who wants to be in a video with her?





## X-Stream: An Online Play Reading About Reading Plays Online

Written By Casandra Clifford

Directed by Rebecca Schilsky

Angela - Liliana Mastroianni

Hector - Sterling Ross

Tate - Erin Frances Speirs

All zoom productions are unintentionally Annie Baker plays. The prolonged silences. The awkward pauses. The stark fourth wall created by your computer camera and the World Wide Web. One may think “hey that’s awesome! I love The Flick!” or “The Aliens is totally rad; I’d dig that happenstance,” but this unintentional theatricality comes at a price: control. As artists on zoom, we lack the ability to control pacing! Diction! WiFi! Outside car noises! Parent’s footsteps! And many other technical issues. This makes productions- and rehearsals- harder than they’ve ever been before. In this piece, we get the inside scope on an attempted play reading. But will X-stream be an Alien success? Or a Flick turned Flop?

## The Cat’s Ashes

Written by Lee Harrison Daniel

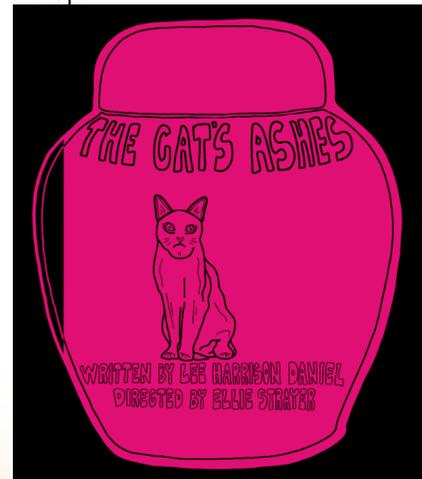
Directed by Ellie Strayer

Cast:

Claire Shutters

Liliana Mastroianni

This is a non-play. Whatever that means is correct. It is about everything and anything and nothing. It takes place in The Shower, Cyberspace, Starbucks but more Fucked up, and Minnesota, but it also doesn’t. Please watch it.



# SUNDAY NIGHT LINEUP



## Zoom Haunted House

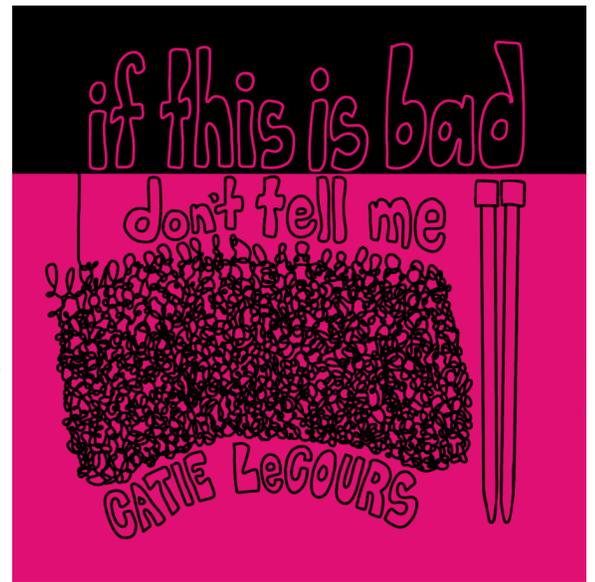
Written and Created by Eliza Kuperschmid

Featuring: Eliza Kuperschmid, Sean Cheney, Georgia Ossorguine, Addie Scenti, Grace Hill, Geri Cynamon, Maddie Sassoon, Chris Morabito, Julia Guarneri, Hannah Margolis, Kayleigh Duggan, Jordan Gonzales, Penn Hoen, Becca Schilsky, Nick Leonard, Danielle Sun, Olivia Sun

Isn’t Zoom... scary? Am I actually on mute right now? Am I stuck on mute forever? Who’s going to be in that breakout room? Are my friends shit-talking me in the private chat? Can the professor see that I’m not wearing pants? A harrowing (and potentially silly) exploration into the horrors of video conferencing.

if this is bad don't tell me  
 Writing, Design, and Animation by Catie LeCours  
 Lew - Pdraig Bond  
 Cora - Grace Alberti  
 Zosia - Catie LeCours  
 Jill - Amalia Culpepper-Wehr  
 Dorian - Patrick Carter  
 Niamh - Marina Kalaw  
 Violin - Joseph Dugan

There are two countries in this story. This Country, and the Other Country. Six people exist. Cora, a tired woman who condemns religion before it can condemn her. Lew, an eccentric man who drifts with intention. A Girl who knits sweaters, spells, promises, garlands, nests, blankets, and plots. A sweet Child who feels everything deeply. A Boy who seeks color, beauty, light—enlightenment. And Niamh, a poet.



### Cowgirl Summer

Written and Edited by Karen Stewart

Melanie - Calliope Pina Parker

Theresa - Cornelia Silsbee

Lily - Audrey Erickson

Man - Ian Locasio

VOICES: Giuliana Mancini, Isabella Iorio, Madeline Rose Parks, Anne McDonagh, Laurel Ledesma, Nanouli Shevardnadze, Cashel O'Malley, Jess Kantorowitz, Julia Gazzara, Jordan Hurley, Lolo Rosado, Audrey Pugh, Rachel Ruecker, Kiara Negroni-Martinez, Nora Kraft, Erin Browning, Piper Lewis, Beau Valentine LaBranch

SOUND TEAM: Cashel O'Malley, William Lorenz, Kiara Negroni-Martinez, Beau Valentine LaBranch

SPECIAL THANKS TO: Everyone I sent fragments of this play to at various early hours of the morning, GarageBand (much love), and Harry Edward Styles, the king of my heart since 2012.



When I first got the idea for Cowgirl Summer, I thought it was going to be a funny little play in which fifteen year old me wishes for her One Direction posters to come to life and be her friends, and through the power of teen girl imagination her wish comes true. It was going to be the absolute Disney Channel version of my experience with boy band fandom, the version where I got everything I ever wanted. What I wrote instead is very much not that, I think probably for the better. This play became an exploration in the darker side of teen girl obsession, the line between love and infatuation, and the ways in which our childhood relationships determine what kind of weird we become as adults. It's about how we learn to identify and cope with desire and fear, and what happens when you can't tell the difference between the two. Also, and maybe most importantly, it's a ridiculous play about Harry Styles fanfiction where they have sex in a cornfield. I hope you'll allow all those things to live together, and whatever story results for you is exactly what I intended. I swear.

### So, What Are You Looking For On Here?

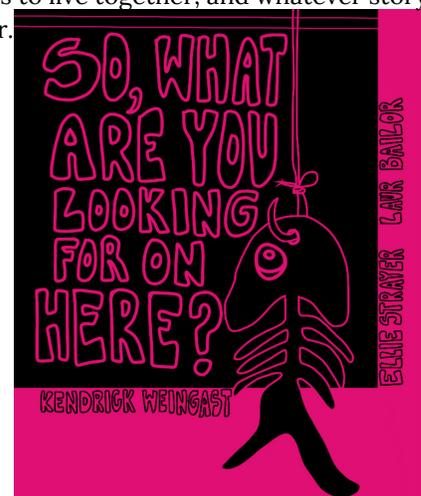
Written by Ellie Strayer

Devised by Ellie Strayer, Kendrick Weingast, Laur Bailor

Edited by Kendrick Weingast

Voices by Dave Seidman-Joria

This piece is a meditation on the virtual dating scene, specifically dating apps, in 2020. Lifting conversations and experiences from their own lives, devisors Ellie Strayer, Kendrick Weingast, and Laur Bailor have been able to piece together emotional interactions that exist in a heteronormative space in order to explore themes of sameness, loneliness, and double standards.



Now that you've gotten a taste of our lovely eight new works that will be shown in the festival, we'd love to spotlight some artists that have been involved in the process and give them an opportunity to share what this has been like for them!



KAREN STEWART

Writer and Editor of Cowgirl Summer

Working on Cowgirl Summer has been an amazing creative outlet since the pandemic happened. Of everything I've written as a playwright/created as an artist, it is the piece I'm proudest of and I'm so glad I chose to bring it to life in this new way. I'm interested in how theater artists will inevitably find ways to keep theatricality alive during a time when live theater as we have known it cannot exist, and I think radio plays and podcast plays are a fascinating way to do that. I am learning about this medium as I go, and discovering how to mold my art to fit the form. I'm super grateful for this festival and the opportunity to share what I'm working on with a larger audience! Also, I'm so excited to see everyone's work! I'm grateful that people are choosing to get creative about how we keep the community alive right now, and this festival is a really great way to do that. People are making some really weird and wild stuff right now as a response to the absolute chaos we've been thrown into, and I am SO hyped to see it all.



BECCA SCHILSKY

Director of X-Stream: An Online Play Reading About Reading Plays Online

Working on this piece has been a great challenge, as it is my first time doing theater over zoom. I was trying to hold on to my zoom theater virginity for as long as I could- what can I say, I was afraid it was going to hurt! I've seen many virtual performances that have been unsuccessful because the artists rejected the virtual reality instead of embracing it. That is why I have stayed away from the process; however, it is also the same reason I fell in love with X-Stream. Casandra Clifford's piece fully embraces the zoom rehearsal process. It is littered with interruptions and reeks of frustration. I have been everyone of these characters at one time or another: a lazy bastard, a technical immigrant, or an impatient playwright. All of them suck. With Wasserstein wit and Baker beats, X-Stream shows us that yeah, theatre is dead, but our desire for collaboration isn't.



EMMY KUPERSCHMID

Writer of comment below

Working on comment below has been such a delight! Terry Kitagawa and I produced/workshopped a different version in 2017, and it's been so much fun to come back and revamp it. It's a totally different play now, and I'm so grateful to have this time and space to develop it. I'm also excited to connect with new collaborators and experiment with this new form! Digital theater is here to stay, and I'm so energized by all of the possibilities it presents. What makes something theater when we can't gather in the same space? I don't have an answer yet, but I'm excited to find out. Everyone on this team is INCREDIBLE and I'm so grateful for them! We're also located all across the country, so this particular combination of people could only happen virtually. I spend a lot of time online (especially now) and I'm interested in internet culture and questions of identity, control, and curation on social media. I think social media can be empowering--it's a place where we have control over our image, what we share, and how we're perceived. We can be whoever we want to be online. But there's a danger that can come with that too; what if the identity you've curated doesn't match who you "really" are? This is the kind of thing I think about daily, and it's been fun exploring it in a theatrical context.



CLAIRE SHUTTERS

Actor in The Cat's Ashes

Working on this piece has been so fulfilling as an actor. Lee has crafted such a provoking and ardent script to which Ellie has brought such perspective and life. This is my first time working with many of these collaborators but I hope it won't be my last. Everyone I have worked with during this process has had such a genuine desire to create interesting work which has made the process so unbelievably rewarding.



LILIANA MASTROIANNI

Actor in X-Stream: An Online Play Reading About Reading Plays Online

Actor in The Cat's Ashes

Working on these pieces for the festival has meant a lot to me. I am fortunate enough to be in school right now where I can direct a project, but acting opportunities are more scarce than ever for so many actors. It has been so incredible to be able to do what I love most. It's not the same, but it gives me the opportunity to think about acting in ways that I hadn't before, and I'm so happy to have shared these experiences with such talented artists!! I am most excited for people to see all our work! We've poured so much energy and commitment into these projects and I can't wait to touch people's hearts and minds with it :) This opportunity has given me new ways of thinking about theatre and what theatre is.

One of the projects I worked on is a play about reading plays online and all the technical difficulties that can come with that, which has been super fun! It's been interesting to see how some of our own slight technical difficulties mirror those in the play, and highlights theatre artists frustration with having to transfer our work to a space that in a lot of ways can't do the work justice.

On the other hand, I worked on another project that is a non-play, and completely embraces these bizarre circumstances under which we are making 'theatre'. I've grown a lot from these works in different ways: with a newfound appreciation for how theatre is traditionally staged in person, and a sparked curiosity for how the digital world and what we think of as theatre can marry.

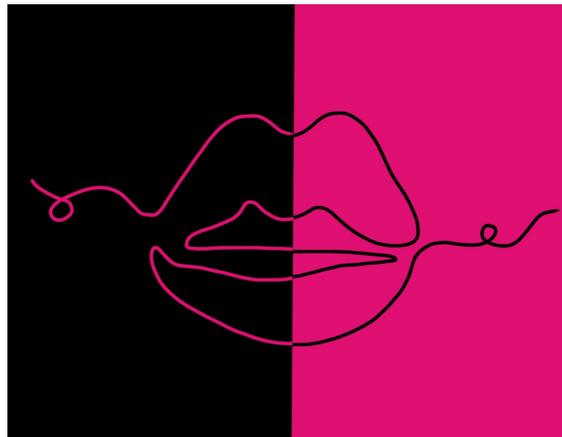


TERRY KITAGAWA

Director of comment below

I directed the original version of comment below in 2017, and it's amazing to be revisiting this play after three years. Emmy and I have been talking about how much we have grown as artists in that time. It's so refreshing to work on this piece from a new perspective and to work with phenomenal actors who are bringing so much energy and life into these characters. This opportunity to direct comment below with First Kiss has been so amazing. I have been in a couple of Zoom style readings as an actor but yet to explore what it means to direct via Zoom. I have learned so much about both the advantages and limitations of this internet medium as a director. I always ask "why here, why now?" before starting to work on a play. comment below lends itself to Zoom, as it is about growing up deeply connected online. comment below dives into living a performative life and asks if the performance is taken away, what is left? I am excited to see how this online space, like Zoom, continues to develop for art!

It's still new and there is so much possibility that is still to be discovered. I have seen a little bit of some of the many brilliant ideas in the online space, and those ideas continue to build my inspiration for my own work! I can't wait to see what the other artists in the Theater is Dead festival have created!



Thank you once again for subscribing to our newsletter and staying updated with us, we truly hope to see you at our festival!

Peace and Love,

The First Kiss Theatre Company Artistic Team