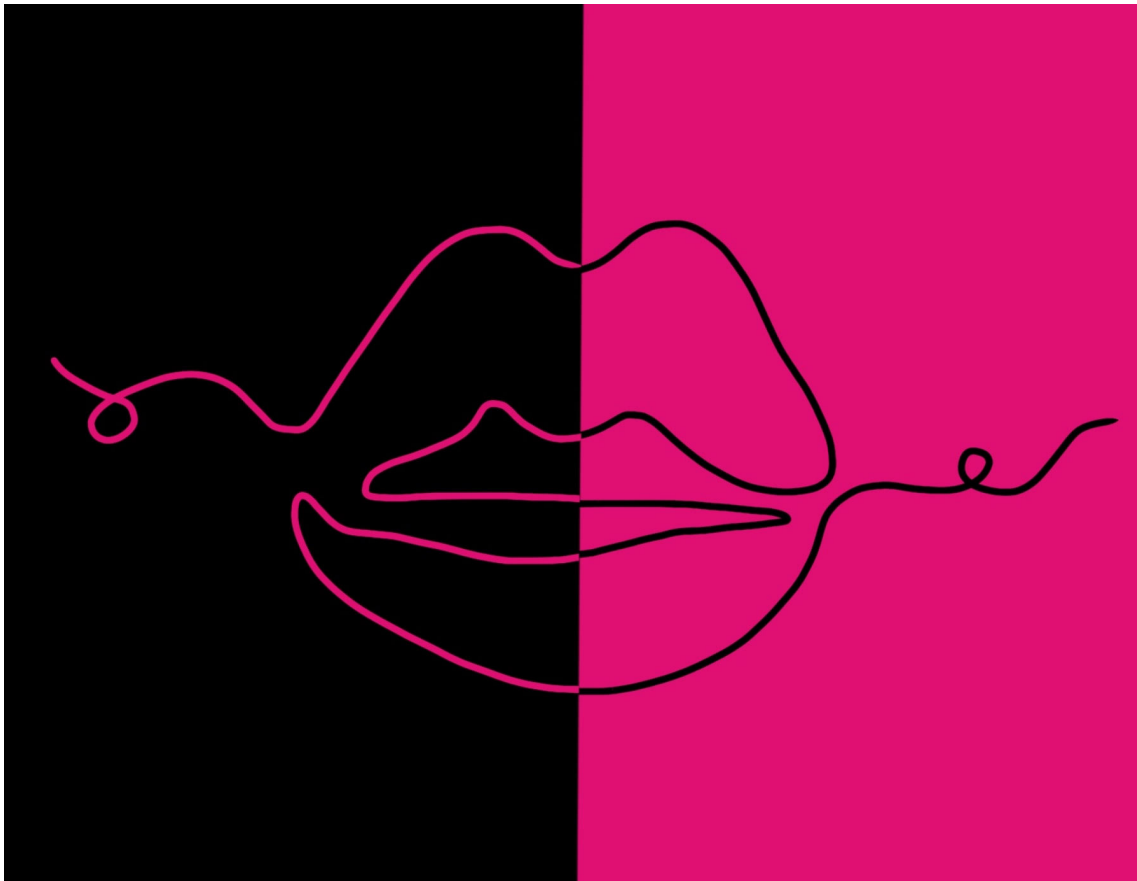


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OCT. 2020, ISSUE 1

# First Kiss Theatre Company

*A Taste of Upcoming Adventures with First Kiss*



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**WHAT IS NEW FOR  
FIRST KISS?**

**THEATRE IS DEAD -  
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## **Welcome to First Kiss...**

Ellie Strayer - First Kiss Co-Founder and Co - Artistic Director

Hello, hello, hello and greetings from all of us at First Kiss Theatre! We first want to thank you so much for making the best decision of your life: becoming a website subscriber! We won't bother you too much, we swear! We'll be sending out these funky, fresh newsletters every once and a while to make sure you're updated with the awesome things we're up to! We cannot thank you enough for subscribing — staying in touch with the arts and the broader artistic community is so important during this uncertain time. Let's get into it!

A little about us? Well we're glad you asked! First Kiss Theatre Company was created by superstars Ellie Strayer and Kendrick Weingast, during the hot quarantined summer of 2020, to provide a place for frustrated artists such as themselves to participate in new work and explore what virtual performance means during this time when theatre cannot be in-person. Since our founding, we've bonded together with like-minded artists and we've been working together to create our very own virtual festival: Theatre Is Dead Festival.

The concept behind "Theatre Is Dead" is two-faced: We, of course, miss live theatre so dearly and have been joking around that the theatre we once knew and love is dead. However, at the same time, we've been aligning ourselves with like-minded artists who also want to explore what it means when we take the concept of "in-person art" out of the concept of "theatre." We sat down with our artistic team, and they all had incredibly interesting things to say about our future, both as a company and as a society.

"I think that 'Theatre is Dead' really means that theatre is transforming," Resident Artist Liliana Mastroianni explains, "The old ways we thought of and practiced theatre have had more than their day in the sun, and it's damn time that new forms (dare I say, Mr. Chekhov) take hold of American theatre and we push the limits of what theatre is." Company Member Eliza Kuperschmid agrees, claiming: "I think that theater as we know it now was killed along with the COVID closures of in-person theaters. What I mean by 'theater as we know it now' is theater that cares more about money than art. Theater that prioritizes the stories of white, cis, heterosexual bodies and that prioritizes those same bodies on stage. Theater that is inaccessible to many for more reasons than I can name. This type of theater is dead now because taking the time off and stepping away from the stage has allowed artists to really evaluate the industry and decide what we actually want to see on our stages moving forward. I personally am thrilled by this new era of theater that will rise from the metaphorical ashes of the pandemic - utilizing innovative platforms, telling a wider variety of stories, truly listening to one another and becoming more empathetic through art. It's the kind of transformational, identity overhaul that T-Swift references in her song 'Look What You Made Me Do': 'Sorry, the old theater can't come to the phone right now. Why? Because she's dead.'"

As artists, and as frustrated, active citizens, we've been very critical of this time, but have also felt blessed with such a transformative period to live through in our youth. Co-Artistic Director Kendrick Weingast explains: "The age of sitting in a cramped and crowded room, watching actors touch and kiss onstage is dead. The dance of intimacy that people do around masks and the inability to be physically intimate with each other is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit, and is something to be admired and astonished by, however the life we knew once, before March, is gone. Maybe a new theatre will rise from the ashes. Maybe we will be better for it.

"The idea of being "better for it" is a kind of optimism our company has chosen to believe in from the start. With a very liberal idea of what virtual theatre is and means, we've moved forward with a dedication to adapt our own creative processes around staying safe, both physically and mentally, during 2020.

"The truth of that matter is that this is all unexplored territory, and you can choose to complain about it, or you can pioneer the search for finding something that works. And you have to try everything. Literally everything. Experiment, experiment, experiment," Co-Artistic Director Ellie Strayer suggests. "It takes a kind of persistence, dedication, and motivation to be able to create brave art, but we need it now more than ever. You have to look inward, really value artistry, even above entertainment, even above all else, in order to create something honest. And honesty is what we need right now, what with all the lies and hoaxes in our political system. Besides myself, Kelly-Ann Conway's daughter's Tik Tok is the only thing I trust."

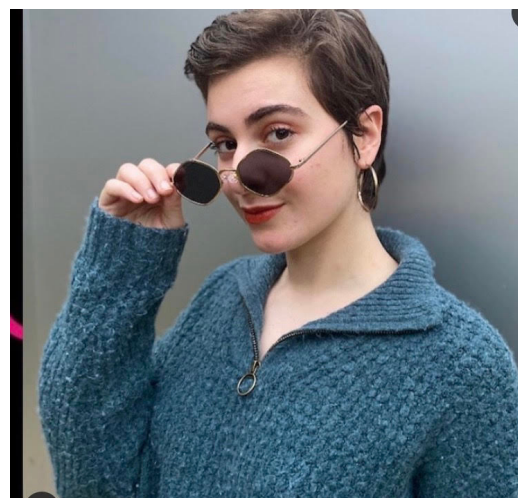
"Creating new work during this time means being hella innovative," Mastroianni agrees, "It means taking everything you know and turning it on its head, just like everything in 2020. It means being so incredibly aware of every single decision you make, and keeping your morals and values in check. It means being equitable, inclusive, and accountable.

When asked "How important is it to continue being an active citizen even when things aren't trending on the internet anymore?" Kuperschmid responds: "Not just important - vital. I think that's the frustrating thing about social media - it's amazing that so many people are coming together and using their platforms to support great causes but the second the hashtag stops trending, it's just back to business as usual (aka TikTok dances and beach pics). I'm by no means coming for TikTok dances and beach pics, it's fun to express ourselves online and connect in that way."



I just think that the real work comes after you put up the post - what are you doing 'in private' to make changes in your life and for others? It's not possible to erase thousands of years of social injustice in one Instagram post. It's just not possible. But each day, if you take a small step towards being more empathetic, listening to more stories, educating yourself, tuning into the world, that would be more than enough.

We asked "How are you being kind to yourself?" to Weingast, and she responded: "I look toward the future. That seems more simplistic than it is; there is only so much self care I can accomplish without being around people, socializing, but also adapting, conversing, problem-solving. I fundamentally believe that every interaction you have changes you in some way...so what does it mean when you aren't interacting with people? To combat this, I have been working on myself. I'm eating more than a single vegetable a day, drinking water, and creating art. Creating is helping me the most."



"And making art is like the best form of self care sometimes," Strayer chimes in. "I mean apart from like showering and meditating and being healthy, allowing yourself to be vulnerable and to flesh out deep feelings in your work is very much a cathartic, therapeutic practice. We didn't start a company to get attention, we don't create work to get attention. The motive behind what we're doing here has far more to do with creating something meaningful than it has to do with getting instagram likes. Of course, attention and recognition are nice but they too can happen in meaningful ways. When you see something that moves you, you want to share it with people who you think will benefit from it."

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And when that thing you share comes from a place of kindness, of love, of bettering yourself and your community, then that's how we change things. That's how your drop creates a worthwhile ripple and that's how that ripple creates an influential tidal wave."

On our website, [firstkisstheatre.com](http://firstkisstheatre.com), you will find more information about us and our upcoming projects. Under the "About Us" page, you will also find an extensive list of resources and organizations we've been utilizing during this time to be better citizens and to continue to educate ourselves.

There will be more information on our Theatre Is Dead Festival coming soon on here (the newsletter) and on our Instagram and Facebook accounts.



Be sure to check it out — you **WON'T** want to miss the weekend of October 24th and 25th.

Thank you for taking the time to engage with us!