

UC SANTA BARBARA

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Theater for Our Times

[Risa Brainin](#) had a dilemma on her hands. A professor in UC Santa Barbara's [Department of Theater and Dance](#), she was set to direct a staged reading of the new comedy "Fortunes," but on the day of the first rehearsal the campus was ordered to move to remote instruction in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

How does a theater group operate in a time of social distancing? The same way the rest of us are: connecting via Zoom, the online video conferencing service.

LAUNCH PAD, the university's acclaimed incubator of new works, will [present](#) "Fortunes" Thursday, April 2, at 7 p.m. at <https://UCSB.Zoom.us/j/181140604>. The virtual reading is free and open to the public, which is asked to sign in at 6:55. The audience will be invited into a virtual waiting room, where they'll be given further instructions. A Q&A will follow the reading.

Written by Hollywood veterans Dan Castellano and Deb Lacusta (actors and writers of several "Simpsons" episodes), "Fortunes" tells the story of five anxious people in 1980 who turn to a psychic who can see everyone's future but her own.

Brainin, LAUNCH PAD's artistic director since its founding 15 years ago, said she initially figured she could reschedule the reading for the spring quarter. But with the campus now largely shut down for the foreseeable future, it was time to get creative.

"I thought, 'Well, why don't we try to do it virtually and see what that's like?' " she said. "I'll tell you, we had our first rehearsal and it was really fun. For one thing, I

think because everyone is isolated, it's just great to be together and keep our work alive and moving forward."

Brainin, who has used Zoom for years with design teams working on plays in other cities, is quick to note that the reading will be an experiment. If it goes well, though, it could set the stage for more virtual readings while the world hunkers down.

"Hopefully, you'll see more of these virtual readings popping up here. They are happening around the country as well," she said. "There's no shortage of wonderful writers out there looking for opportunities to work on their new plays. And because we had to cancel our productions for the spring, we're excited to offer our BFA acting students a chance to perform..

"When our students leave this training program, most of what they will be doing is new play development," Brainin added. "So these kinds of experiences are crucial to their future in the profession. And who knows how long we'll be in these circumstances. This may be what we all have to do for a while."

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.