

Hello, Jesters and their parents!

I have bunches of updates for you. Apologies in advance for the long email.

THESPIANS CHECK-IN: You are all warmly invited to a **Campfire Party tonight (Monday, May 25). Yes, parents, too.** You can ask questions, meet some of your amazing directors, as well as your fellow actors! We can talk through any questions/suggestion you have. Here's [the link](#). **Meeting ID: 870 069 8695**; Password: **088961**. We'll have another one on Thursday – same time, same link, etc.

THE BIG ANNOUNCEMENT: Traveling Players will be happening this summer, on the same dates, but now it will be completely digital – on Zoom. A lot transpired over the past two weeks, and it became clear that this was the only safe option.

Trust me when I tell you that I fought this hard. This outdoor theatre gal doesn't retreat to a screen without a fight. I'm the founder of great theatre into the great outdoors – the place where theatre began – around a campfire – and where I think it should remain. Cast parties should include fireside chats late into the night and s'mores.

Instead of 4 purple bus routes, we were going to use 6 buses in order to effectively social distance on them. We were going to design costumes that all incorporated masks. We had plans. We feared you guys would have yet another fun, exciting thing that you were looking forward to taken away at the last minute. We didn't want to add another thing to that long list.

But the realities of COVID-19 started crashing down. We lost access to Madeira, which closed their camps and has sealed up buildings until school opens again. If they had let us on property, they would have tripled our rent, since the CDC cleaning protocols are intensive, and cleaning products are tricky to get your hands on.

Moreover, we have students and staffers living with essential workers, and we were worried that we would have to recast the play multiple times as actors went back into quarantine. Our plan was to put 14 actors in a play that we could do with 11, in a pinch, but we would take more to have understudies. We were adding staff to be on standby for when directors went back into quarantine.

And none of this begins to examine the health risk, which is not yet fully known. Several of us live with or are immune-compromised. I fall into that category. There are others in our community who are even more vulnerable than my household is. My conscience cannot cope with the idea I endangered someone's health in a serious way, and that is a very real possibility. This virus is most often spread by the asymptomatic, so I knew the cute purple no-touch thermometers that I bought for each bus wouldn't actually keep the virus out.

I know many of you were holding out hope that Traveling Players would be the place that would find a way to keep camp in person. Kids would leave their houses, go outside and be with their friends! I was hoping for that, too. I'm sad, but I'm relieved, too. Keeping everyone safe right now is a heavy burden to carry.

SPRING BREAK: Knowing that an online future was a possibility, Traveling Players quickly pivoted to hosting three spring break camps, rolling out different curricula for each age group.

(The middle school one was the best, and we learned valuable lessons that week of what to do and what NOT to do.) Here's what we learned:

- **Working on a play keeps kids connected.** Our greatest successes happened when our students were all working on the same project. Working on a single play gives students a shared challenge. Just like when we're in person, our students succeed when they work together.
- **Keep it kinesthetic!** Traveling Players has always trained young artists to use their whole bodies, and going digital will not change that. Digital classes are more effective and more fun when they are physical. Actors are expected to create space where they can participate in full body activity – after all, we still need to see a ship wreck in *The Tempest!* That can't happen if the actors are just on a boring conference call.
- **Dedicated community time is key to a successful digital camp.** Digital camp often moves much more quickly than in person camp because transitions are faster and students aren't able to have side conversations. But side conversations are how real friendships are built! If students can't build those relationships by chatting while they set up a tent or carry a set piece, then they need other time to do it. We found that a mixture of **longer breaks** (10 minutes minimum), **non-theatre games**, and **leaving the Zoom- room open over lunch** allowed our students to build friendships just like they would if they were in person!
- **Several blocks throughout the day work better than a single uninterrupted camp day.** There has been a lot written about Zoom-fatigue; maybe you have experienced it yourself? We found that even with a highly physical class, students had the most fun, and were most successful when they worked in several 2 - 2.5 hour-long blocks throughout the day, with breaks in between to get off the computer and give their brains and eyes a rest from screens.
- **Being digital means there are new possibilities for classes!** From design, to film to puppetry, there are lots of new and exciting opportunities that are perfect for digital camp!

SUMMER 2020: Now we have a new plan. I spent the last two weeks crafting it, rehiring so I had the right team to bring it into fruition, and I'm actually really excited about it! We would not be going forward unless I felt very good about this plan. Summers are important in a kid's life, and you only get so many of them. They need to count.

ADAPT & THRIVE: It might seem like a Traveling Players summer without the great outdoors is against our core mission. But the reason why we perform and rehearse outdoors isn't actually because the outdoors is awesome (and I want you to fall in love with it, to protect it for future generations). No, that's just a brilliant byproduct!

The reason why we perform outside is so that you always have **to solve new problems** (the weather, the prop broke) and **connect/adapt to different people** (different audiences, stages, tent buddies). These life skills will allow you to thrive on and off the stage. Performing is a fun, exhausting, unforgettable adventure, and it makes you stronger. People who can solve problems and adapt to change will ultimately thrive. This summer, we will adapt and thrive – together, like an ensemble...and unlike ever before!

Because social isolation is antithetical to being a kid, I have done everything in my power to ensure that we will all make it to the finish line. Like a good story, we want this experience to have a beginning, middle and an end — not an abrupt one, but one that ends when it should, after the last show is over. I want all of us to be there for it.

All the World's a Stage: This plan makes lemonade — extracting the best of this ridiculous situation that we have found ourselves in and exploiting it as an opportunity to do something different, new and challenging. So, I began with the question:

What can you can well on a computer?

- Reader's theatre/Radio drama – focusing on the voice;
- Monologues/soliloquies – highlighting the intimacy of thought;
- Film/TV – working with a camera;
- Textual analysis – taught better on a screen than in our outdoor classroom;
- Range of characterizations – from the bold & ridiculous to the nuanced & subtle.

(drumroll, please!) **THE NEW PLAN!**

THE SHOW: We are still doing *The Imaginary Invalid*. This is a super fun and funny play that will adapt well to Zoom. We will do a live Zoom performance of it. You will get a costume! (Keep a can of Lysol by the door, spray the bag and bring it in 10 minutes later. Or maybe you guys all meet at someone's house and have a socially distanced picnic in their backyard?). You'll also get props, and a digital set!

THE FUN: We are really leaning into the social and community aspects of Traveling Players. We will still have Revels (daily games), we'll leave the Zoom-room open before and after rehearsals and during lunch to hang out. Some folks will need time to decompress, so we'll have optional social engagements, too. We have a Fun Committee (is that an oxymoron?) that is planning scavenger hunts, song contests, and Houses (ala Harry Potter) that each of us will belong to. On the 3rd of July we'll.... wait for it...livestream ... *HAMILTON!*

THE OUTDOORS: You will be able to do rehearsals outside, if your internet is stable enough. Breathe outdoor air! Test your internet and find a couple options. Heck, pitch a tent in your backyard and sleep in it every Thursday (I'm seriously considering this...)

THE ENSEMBLE: We have always maintained an enviable **1:4 faculty to student ratio**. This summer, isn't any different. Instead of putting our usual 13 actors in *The Imaginary Invalid*, we will limit it to 12, and keep on our trio of skilled and compassionate directors. Digital theatre is, by its nature, much more language focused. We want to ensure each student gets the personalized individual attention they deserve.

THE STAFF: COVID brought us good people! The play will be directed by [Joe Godburn](#), who is an improv maestro as well as our resident Zoom master. By his side is [Katie Elliot](#), who has been teaching our Zoom improv classes and running her universities' student theatre, as well as [Maereg Gebretekle](#), who has a wonderful command of language. They are a dream team!

THE SCHEDULE:

- **10:00- 10:10** – Morning Revels- Fun & games with your ensemble
- **10:10-10:30** – Warm Ups- Physical & Vocal Training to get you ready for rehearsal
- **10:30-12:00** – Morning Rehearsals – Developing character & relationship, choreographing movement, practicing acting techniques, exploring camera angles, and running scenes and lines.

- **12:00-1:00** – Lunch – The Zoom-room stays open so students can hang out with friends.

- **2:00-2:50** – A different class each day taught by our talented faculty
 - Our talented **faculty** teach a rotating schedule of classes. A typical week:
 - **Mon:** Movement (Commedia or Laban)
 - **Tues:** Voice (Breathing, Resonance, Articulation, Projection)
 - **Wed:** Improvisation (Imagination, Group Mind, Impulses)
 - **Thurs:** Stage Combat (Unarmed, Swordplay, Slapstick – don't worry, no one gets hurt!)
 - **Fri:** Technical theatre (Dive into the world of design)
- **3:00- 4:30** – **Afternoon Rehearsals – More rehearsal time**
- **4:30-5:00** – Office hours. (*Optional*)

- **MONDAYS ONLY: 7-00-8:00** – Special skills – Juggling, singing, landing a punch-line, and more! (*Optional*)

- **THURSDAYS ONLY 7:00-9:00-** Cast or camp bonding. Play games, watch a movie, and get to know the other awesome people at camp! The best memories always come from overnights.

Students will receive several 10-minute breaks throughout the day, as well as participate in activities that will take them away from their screens to work on artistic projects (e.g. taking photographs to create a design reference journal, working to build props, or working on script analysis activities).

NEXT STEPS: Apologies again for the length of this email.

Please come to the **Thespians Check-In** tonight or Thursday (details at the top of this email). I'll be there to answer your questions, as well as some of our staff. Also, know that I'm happy to email or talk to each and every one of you on the phone. We are a small community and this is a big change. We will get through it together.

SEND ME YOUR IDEAS! I have a handle on the big picture (show, on Zoom, amazing artistic staff and exciting bonding events), but lots of the details can shift. I want to hear your voice! I think your kids will have great instincts for filming some scenes. This is their second language – the screen. It's going to be really fun to see what they create!

RSVP FOR THE SUMMER: [Fill this out](#). It will take 30 seconds. (You don't have to do this today, but I need to know by Friday, or at least we need to have starting talking.)

Maybe all your other plans have cancelled and you have MORE time in your summer? I still have couple spots in the Bards, who are doing a different Moliere with an amazing trio of directors!

NOT LOVING THIS PLAN? Send me an email, give me a call, or [fill out this form](#). This won't work for everyone, but it's the best, safest option we have.

Would a shorter program feel better? For those currently in 5th or 6th grade, you could do the [Mythology Ensemble](#) (only 2 weeks). You can use your summer tuition this winter, when maybe (?) we will be able to see each other again? Or next summer. We have options.

All IN? Here's a super simple [Health Form](#) you can do in 1 minute. You're done! (No immunization records or health insurance card needed this year.)

Got theatrical friends whose plans got cancelled? Send them our way! Heck, they don't even have to be local anymore! We have another [round of auditions](#) this Saturday, May 30 – they can join us then! Or register for any of our non-auditioned programs – like the Jesters!

Anyone who got to the end of this deserves an award. Not able to take all this in? No worries. Come to the Thespians Check-In and we'll go over stuff.

You guys – all of you – parents and students – have been thrown so many curveballs this year. I salute you all!

Sending you health – and see you soon!