

Let's act as bravely in the world as we do in our rehearsal rooms

By Jacqueline Goldfinger (she/they)

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I love theater people. SO. MUCH. Our heart. Our faith in the art. Our faith in each other. The ephemeral rehearsal jokes and the eternal heartbeat of living history on stage.

But for all that I love our community, no community is perfect, and neither are we. In general, we are not great at adapting. And adaptation – or forced revolution – or getting our shit together – is what is required in this Great Moment.

We know that we probably won't have a vaccine for COVID for at least 12 months, if not longer. We know that the public will probably be wary of any large gatherings this fall/winter, and that social distancing will probably still be required. Plus, as with all pandemics in recorded history, there will be a second wave. Possibly a third wave. These waves could roll through 2021 and 2022. In fact, many regional theaters and Broadway have already announced that they will not open until January 2021, at the earliest.

So, what if we changed it up this fall?

What if we do what we do in our rehearsal rooms?

We embrace our fears, and we conquer them.

We are great at taking chances in private, let's take them in public.

Here's one possible solution:

What if we ran typical fall-winter shows live for only one week each with limited audiences and only in the fall (before winter and another major round of COVID hits).

During the shortened run time, each performance is filmed multiple times, and then a really nice production video is produced. For examples, see *PASS OVER* on Netflix, *PIPELINE* on Lincoln Center Live, or any National Theatre Live performance.

Then, this winter, we slowly release and stream the videos online for a fee.

This would require special union agreements, I know, and that's not easy. But if we step up now, and embrace forward-thinking season planning, then there is plenty of time to work out details. This is especially true since we now have model agreements to build on thanks to programs like The Geffen on BroadwayHD.

This unique season schedule gives audiences an opportunity to see shows live and a way to stream them later. Plus, those who saw it live will have a chance to re-live the experience, much like purchasing a concert film or downloading a live album.

This also means that artists involved would get paid twice for the same show; once on an abbreviated contract to perform it in the fall, and once later in the winter during streaming.

(It would also mean that theaters would need to invest in protective measures during filming. For example, we might have to think strategically about getting healthcare granters to fund COVID testing and other measures for theaters.)

I know that there is a tremendous amount of fear around streaming our work, but that fear has been disproven many times in live performing arts forms such as concerts, musical theater, stand-up comedy, installation performance, and more. There is no substitute for a live experience. By capturing our work on film, there will simply be more theater love to go around, more audiences will be able to engage with it, and more artists able to make a living from it.

This is only one new idea for shaping a season, and there are many more out there. But we have to begin the conversation somewhere. And I am beginning it right here, right now, with you.

Let go of the fear.

Let this time of uncertainty be our rehearsal room.

Let's jump off the artistic cliff once again my friends. Only by jumping, will we soar.