

HCC spring play 'In These Times' inspired by pandemic

HOLYOKE – Most theatrical productions begin with a script.

"In These Times" began with a concept: ask students at Holyoke Community College to write first-person accounts of their lives during the COVID-19 pandemic; audition student- and alumni-actors to perform those stories; and complement the monologues with music and art contributed by other members of the HCC community.

"It's interesting putting something like this together," said HCC theater professor Patricia Sandoval, the show's director. "You don't know what you're going to get."

What she got and how it all fit together she calls a "brilliant collage."

"This is going to be a really unique production," said Sandoval, "because we are incorporating so many art forms. It's a really wonderful showcase of what students have done throughout the pandemic. All of the writing and art is original and some of the music. All of it was inspired by these times, which is where the title comes from."

Presented by the HCC Theater, Music and Visual Art departments, "In These

Times" opens on Thursday, April 15, at 7:30 p.m. The virtual show will be live-streamed on YouTube and performed again on Friday, April 16, and Saturday, April 17, at 7:30 p.m., with a matinee performance at 2 p.m. on April 17. The Friday night show will be ASL-interpreted.

Performances are free and open to all. The show channel can be accessed through hcc.edu/times-show

The shows will not be recorded for later viewing.

"This will be live," said Sandoval. "It's really meant to be experienced in real time, with a real audience, even though the audience is watching remotely."

The cast includes 18 student- and alumni-actors performing 40 different monologues that run one to four minutes apiece during the 90-minute show. Each actor will perform from their homes in front of their computers, with the video segments stitched together remotely in real time by streaming coach and HCC theater alumnus Corey Missildine, who performed the same role during HCC's fall 2020 production, an original, live-streamed play called "Fatal Fisticuffs."

"What's beautiful about these mono-

logues is that they represent the diversity of the college, whatever that can be defined as," Sandoval said. "Age, race, ethnicity – we've got everything represented in this production because that's what HCC is."

Eight student and alumni musicians pre-recorded performances for the show. That includes three original compositions: "Covid Suite," a multimedia, electronic piece by student Jim Gipe; "Nero (Live in the Time of Corona)," by student Elena Ciampa (piano and vocals) and "When," by HCC alumna Luci Mino '18 (ukulele and vocals).

"The other musical performances aren't originals, and aren't necessarily related to the theme of the show," said Elissa Brill Paskin, chair of the HCC Music Department, "but they are in terms of how the performances were put together. Just the fact that people are performing alone, in their homes instead of with others on a stage and often accompanying or backing up themselves, really speaks to the way we are all finding ways to make music during these times."

Approximately 45 students and alumni contributed artwork that will be used to

bind each of the monologues together on screen.

"The artwork is at times a direct response to specific moments or events of this past year," said Felice Caivano, chair of the HCC Visual Art Department. "For example, alumna Isabella Dellolio's photographs document friends wearing masks. Alumni David Czupryna, Samary Ramos, and Jamie Capps, among many student artists, present poetic interpretations of the times we have been living through while others created work abstract in nature providing an image of beauty that we can all use right now. This collaborative project has the potential to give the viewer pause to contemplate these times at many levels."

All the script submissions came from student work assigned last fall by professors in their HCC classes.

"The writing has exposed all the issues that are relevant across the globe," said Sandoval. "Mental health. Loneliness. Isolation. Remote learning. Fear. But the writing also shows HCC students as being resilient, hopeful, optimistic, and self-reliant. That all comes through, and it's beautiful."