

“Never Alone”: A solo film made from a
personal study of COVID-19 and
collaborative performing arts

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1. Introduction

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the Novel Coronavirus Disease, COVID-19, an official world-wide pandemic. Performing arts students and professional performing artists found their whole lives uprooted, quickly dismissed from in-person theatre with no idea of what was to happen next. Many live-theatre performances were postponed indefinitely or cancelled. All classes, including collaborative theatre and film classes, moved online in hopes to keep everyone safe. Movie theatres had to close and filmed productions needed to work under new restrictions. These restrictions are still here today, and they help to keep the world a bit safer, but people are missing out on a fairly significant part of in-person entertainment. People cannot go to the theater anymore, which inevitably negatively impacts local economies. Students are having a harder time with their education, especially collaborative aspects of theatre classes, including, but not limited to: partner projects and scenes, movement-based projects, and applied rehearsals in plays. Live theatre came to a quick halt, and people still don't have a clear vision of when it will resume normal function. Now, performing artists have found themselves in the position to find new ways to maintain their skills and create new art, in order to make up for what COVID-19 has taken away from us all.

In the first part of my thesis, I will explore the question "How are performance artists affected by COVID-19?" In order to evaluate this question reliably, I have researched a variety of sources exploring topics of performing arts in this past year. My research dives into the monetary ramifications and emotional consequences from the lack of live theatre arts around the world. Even though COVID-19 caused a recent change in the world, I am able to compare today's world with other tragedies that have affected live theatre in the past.

In the latter part of my thesis, I will be answering the question, “To what extent can a performer create meaningful and professional art in isolation?” As an actor living in the world of COVID-19, I took this opportunity to create a one person short film. To explore the ideas of COVID-19 and the impact it has on the productivity of performers, I wrote, designed, directed, acted in, and edited my own film in isolation. I was able to experiment with new ways to perform, direct, and edit film without external interactions. I will go through my process of creating my eight minute solo film “Never Alone” (Appendix 1), and then evaluate the final result.

2. The Research

One of the major components to answering my question “How are theatre artists affected by COVID-19?” is understanding the implications of COVID-19 around the world on theatre and the people who perform. In this paper, I will present my findings from sources spanning from Colorado to Broadway to other places aside from the United States. Within these locations, I will present information on the financial and emotional toll COVID-19 has left on theatre performers and the general public. Lastly, I will also compare COVID-19 to other tragedies that may have yielded similar outcomes on theatre and performance. I will utilize theatre history to draw the conclusion that theatre will continue as an artform, just as it did before, and continue to help humans survive the cycle and thrive after tragedies.

2.1 The effects of COVID-19 on theatre around the world

The tragedy of COVID-19 has proven to be devastating across the globe, with over two and a half million deaths worldwide. Luckily, things are looking up, as vaccines have become available to a significant portion of the population. With that in mind, most of the sources in this section focus on the struggles for theatres around the world due to COVID-19, because there still isn't a way to know when theatres can safely open back up to full capacity, or if they ever will be able to. It is important to keep in mind that there is a knowledge gap when it comes to sources about COVID-19. Each source is from 2020 and on, because COVID-19 first became an apparent problem in early 2020.

2.1.1 COVID-19 in Colorado Theatre

On March 11th, 2020, COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization. The state of Colorado closed down on March 25th, 2020, with a government mandated stay-at-home order. This was two weeks after University of Colorado, Boulder and other universities in Colorado went online (Denton 2020). As the state closed down, so did theatres and theatre companies. From the beginning of the pandemic, people were overly optimistic about reopening their doors to the public, with high hopes of restrictions being lifted. Days were stated as potential reopenings, and with the days passing and cases not going down, people were left disappointed. Each prediction of reopening was inevitably postponed, sometimes indefinitely, in order to keep the greater public safe and at home.

Now, Colorado isn't really as well known as New York, Los Angeles, or even Chicago for theatre and film, but that didn't stop the local companies from experiencing firsthand the

problems brought from the pandemic. 95 theatre companies around Colorado have shut down and/or postponed one or more shows this past year. 230 shows were unable to be performed under the restrictions of stay-at-home orders and safer-at-home guidelines (Moore 2020).

Included in the closures was the Colorado Shakespeare Festival, one of the largest Shakespeare festivals in the US (Houser 2016, Moore 2020). Another company that was negatively impacted by the lockdown was the Colorado Renaissance Festival, which is where I was cast in and expected to work for the summer of 2020. Its postponement and inevitable closure devastated many.

Overall, theatres in Colorado and most places around the world have had to close down their theatres. Some Colorado theatres were able to combat these closures by moving online. For example, at the University of Colorado: Boulder, two online performances were presented last semester in Fall of 2020, and this semester of Spring 2021, there will be four posted online. A lot of colleges and universities have been doing this in order to keep up the performing arts and also maintain funding through ticket sales and donations. Though this funding isn't only necessary for schools, it is also essential in large performance spaces, like Broadway.

2.1.2 COVID-19 in New York

Broadway is the heart of performing arts in the United States. It brings in a lot of tourism, and stimulates the New York economy significantly, contributing approximately 14.8 billion dollars to the local financial resources (Windman 2020). Another interesting metric is that almost 16% of all Broadway-goers are over the age of 65 (Passy 2020). Since COVID-19 is more dangerous to the elderly, Broadway had to completely shut down to keep their patrons safe. This means

97,000 jobs that are attached to Broadway had to be furloughed, causing many people to become unemployed (Dilella 2020). But Broadway hasn't been the only place in New York to suffer. The Metropolitan Opera has also been forced to shut down, and they're expecting upwards of \$60 million in losses (Woolf 2020). A primary fear of theatre companies even after they can open up again is the possibility of consumers not being willing to spend their money in a potentially unsafe environment. 23% of theatre-goers over the age of 55 said that they were unlikely to ever return to the theatre after the pandemic. This is frightening when thinking about the future of live-theatre after the pandemic. Though, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. In the same study, it was found that 41% of frequent theatre consumers were more likely to come in to watch live-theatre more after reopening than before the pandemic, in order to help support the theatres from the losses over the past year (Weinert-Kendt 2020).

Some theatre operators decided their best option to combat extended closures was to move online. An example of online theatre is the early release of the filmed version of *Hamilton*, which was originally intended to be released in theatres in October of 2021 (McNulty 2020). This pleased viewers because it provided some live-theatre entertainment of a very large musical during the hard times in quarantine. Online performances are a sign of the times. They aren't guaranteed to be sustainable, since most online performances are by donation only, or completely free (Price 2020). However, we can keep the performing arts thriving with high morale and inspiration, even through global lockdown, thanks to online performances.

2.1.3 COVID-19 around the world

We live in an age now where anything and everything can be posted online. In some ways, the old institution of the theatre itself isn't strictly necessary when it comes to performance.

Performing artists around the world have been presenting forms of theatre online to help the spirit of the arts stay alive during these hard times. Many actors are also moving towards making smaller projects and posting online, like John Krazinski's *Some Good News*, and Patrick Stewart's daily sonnet readings (Connor 2020). Some classic shows are being filmed and presented online, and some scripts are even being adapted specifically for Zoom theatre. Though, this is a lot easier for solo projects and small scale productions, due to social distancing guidelines. Large theatres productions, due to the number of people involved, haven't been able to move online as easily. Cirque du Soleil, one of the largest and most profitable travelling theatre shows, has had to cancel all of their performances until further notice around the world (Cole 2020).

Other large companies like the Globe Theatre have called for urgent funding in order to maintain their business, stating a need for around £5 million in donations (BBC News 2020). The Society of London theatre has closed and postponed all performances on a rolling basis (Wood 2020). These United Kingdom based theatre groups are dealing with more than just closures. Just like the US, the UK is suffering with governmental complications between lockdowns and has resulted in the second largest daily death toll from COVID-19 around the world (Tallis 2021). This devastating fact pushed around 1,100 English playhouses to close down (Beard 2020). In previous years, London's West End theatres brought upwards of \$1.1 billion in revenue to supply the local economy (Solt 2019). Most theatres would require 60% capacity to break even

financially, so it is not viable to work at the 25% capacity or less requirement mandated by the British government (Beard 2020). Luckily, the British government has set aside almost \$677 million for the arts industry, as a part of the Culture Recovery Fund (Rea 2021). There are concerns that the smaller theatres would lose out on some of that while the larger theatres were staying afloat from the government funding (Beard 2020).

On a smaller business scale, in March of 2020, headlines were trending about people in Italy singing, socially distanced, from the balconies of their apartments. Soon after, artists in companies like Spazio Franco began performing “delivery” theatre for people to watch from their balconies. This really illustrates how small theatrical productions can be performed easily during times of struggle and isolation, but the financial and health concerns of larger companies still remain. Italy is the most severely-impacted country from COVID-19 related deaths in continental Europe (Euronews 2021, WHO 2021). Therefore, the safest thing for the Italian government to do was close down all theatres, movie theaters, and concert halls. In response to the closures, places like Rome's opera theatre and Accademia Nazionale di S. Cecilia took to social media to keep morale and finances up (Devane 2020).

Unfortunately, poor morale and lack of finances are the bulk of the problems affecting theatres and performers, and there's only so much social media can do. The lack of freedom and ability to perform and make money through performing has caused a significant upset for art and culture around the world, and has greatly affected the economies of countries with large theatrical prevalence.

2.2 Other Tragedies and Theatre

This isn't the first time live theatre has been hit hard by disaster. A little over a century ago, in 1918, the world was hit with a different pandemic: H1N1 Influenza A, commonly known as the Spanish Flu. The two year pandemic resulted in the deaths of 50 million people across the planet (CDC 2019). Back then, the performing arts that had to be cancelled were those of live theatres, new cinemas, and vaudeville houses (Wall 2020). Theater owners and producers lost upwards of half a million dollars, which translates into around \$8-10 million now (Canning 2020). The most interesting thing to compare to now is the fact that playwrights chose to not write plays about the pandemic after it came and went. There are few mentions of it in literature of the time, though there were many pieces about World War I, which happened at the same time (Canning 2020). This contrasts greatly with what we have already seen in the past year. Many devised pieces about isolation and quarantine have been made and shared to help viewers, and performers, go through these hard times.

Another example of a major disaster for people and for theatre was the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001. It took over four years for Broadway to start selling out shows after 9/11 had occurred (Passy 2020). COVID-19 and 9/11 are frequently related by their emotional disturbances to theatres, though Broadway had opened up only 72 hours after 9/11 on September 13th (Jones 2018). Even through the grief and fear from the terrorist attack, actors and technicians were putting on shows like they had before. In times of distress, theatre was an outlet for the people to have some positive moments in their day. People took their children to see *The Lion King* on Broadway to put a smile on their faces. Unfortunately, fears of seeming insensitive for hosting comedies after a tragedy, and an inability to fill shows up past half or two thirds their

capacity led to poor morale across the board for performers. Americantheatre.org credits *Metamorphoses* by Mary Zimmerman for bridging the gap between the real world's struggles and the performances on the stage after the tragedy on 9/11 (Jones 2018). The play was able to use ancient Greek myth to focus on transformation, which was cathartic for viewers.

This can be related to the way that performances have been online during COVID-19. One main difference here now, however, is COVID-19 has stopped performer's abilities to perform live for the audiences who want to pass the time away from the loss in the pandemic. Luckily, at this point, the US is technologically advanced far enough that there is a new outlet for theatre and the arts, online. Now that people are home all the time, they're turning to online entertainment to keep themselves busy during this time. It's definitely different than in 2001, but we can still use the similarities of the situations to understand how Broadway and consumers might react after the pandemic.

This research helps to answer the question "how are performance artists affected by COVID-19?" and also goes on to predict that performers will be able to continue their artform, even after the pandemic. The research about the impact of COVID-19 and other tragedies on the performing arts exemplifies how much theatre is valued around the world. Even through pandemics and disasters, theatre helps unify people, and it helps performers unleash their creativity in meaningful ways.

3. The Process

Theatre artists are relied on to artistically comment on current events, and currently, there are many things to talk about. This left open a lot of options for the performance aspect of my honors thesis. Though I am specifically a theatre acting student, I am especially interested in film. Because of this fact, I knew, no matter what, that I wanted to make a film for my capstone senior project. Originally I had the idea of utilizing different actors, having an entire audition process, and writing my own script. However, during lockdown with restrictions and safety protocols, that would be very difficult, and potentially unsafe. I was tasked with figuring out how to create a piece of art in isolation. Though it wasn't hard to figure out what to do; who better to make a film with than myself?

3.1 Preparation

Fall semester in 2020, I took an Acting and Directing for the Camera course, a theatre and film upper division credit. In this class, I gained a lot of experience and knowledge about the film process, and how we can create art by ourselves. The final assignment for this class was to make a solo film. Because of social distancing protocol and online classes, we had less access to peers than we originally would have in years prior, so we had to do our final completely on our own. I chose to make a self reflective film. My focus for the final was portraying multiple characters through a mirror, with the person in reality being a different person than those in the mirror. In the end, I made "A Copy of A" (Appendix 2). My professors Geoff Marslett and Chip Persons mentioned that if I ever had the opportunity, they would have loved to see me perform and edit this piece again, with some adjustments. I decided to do just that for my thesis film.

This decision happened after some hesitation however; it was actually my “plan B”. Originally I was anticipating to write and perform my own script, including multiple versions of myself as actors. I wanted to write a script that incorporated all of the characters I have played in the past in other productions, and have them interact with my real self on film. Inevitably, I felt very overwhelmed by this topic; I attempted to do an improvised script, as per a suggestion from my advisor, Chip Persons. Unfortunately, this didn’t work out for me, because it’s very difficult to improv a conversation between yourself when the other side of yourself isn’t talking yet. I found myself filming parts of this original concept and feeling extremely downtrodden and disappointed because it wasn’t as clear of an idea as I needed it to be. I had a vision, and I did not have the resources at my disposal to make that vision come to fruition. I lost all of my enthusiasm for this film idea, and knew I needed to go back to what makes me feel inspired.

I’ve learned through these past semesters in college, my best, most inspired work comes from performing to music by Nine Inch Nails, the solo band created by Trent Reznor. It was necessary for me to use Nine Inch Nails music for my final thesis project because it properly sums up my development as a college student and my ability to find my own style as an actor, performer, editor, and director. I also felt emotionally connected to the fact that he worked as a solo artist for so many years, and I was making a solo film. I frequently joke about angst being a central topic in my projects, though it really is a theme across most of my devised work. I define angst as an intense, edgy style that follows themes with anxiety, depression, and anger. I’m a pretty happy person on the outside, but I’ve always loved edgy, angst in music, and it is what makes me feel inspired. Looking back at my artistry in my previous work from the semester prior, my best idea was to use Nine Inch Nails music as part of the focus. My goal became to create a music

video-style short film with no dialogue. It relieved some of the pressure from myself because I know writing scripts is not my strong suit.

Though I didn't have to write any dialogue, I still struggled with formulating a compelling story for my film. I already knew exactly what shots and angles I needed during the actual filming process. I knew what order I would be filming everything to best allocate my time efficiently. The actual point of the film's imagery and story, however, eluded me. Usually, my process is well defined by asking myself questions. I know I am ready to continue to the next step in my process when I have those questions answered. For a while, before filming, I could not answer the question: "What do I want viewers to get out of this?" I was struggling with coming up with a definitive story *after* I had a plan for all of my shots, because the changes for the storyline were fairly minor, and the broad, logistical plan was already figured out. It wasn't a matter of what would work, it was a matter of what I wanted. Sometimes it is hard to reign in my creative ideas, which can be troublesome especially when I was already feeling fairly indecisive.

It took a lot of brainstorming to figure out what I needed in my story. As a verbal processor, I have a hard time telling myself what is good or not without saying it out loud. The best way for me to understand anything is to talk it out with someone who's willing to listen. I had my advisor along the way helping me, and I also had my family and friends. If I did not have these people there as my support system to talk to me as I was thinking through my purpose of this film, the film would be entirely different than it is now, and not as well thought out. I was only able to come up with the ideas because I had bouncing boards to throw ideas at and get others in return. This is an entirely solo film; I wrote, directed, acted in, filmed, and edited everything in this film,

but I do need to credit my family and friends, and my honors thesis advisor Chip Persons for helping me solidify the story I needed to tell.

After a while of deliberation, I had two primary ideas for the story of my film. One idea was what my final project became, and I'm happy for it. Even so, my other idea was still valuable to my process. I considered having my reflection be extremely different from the very beginning, instead of easing into it and climaxing with changes at the end. My idea was to have my reflection stay consistently different every time I look in the mirror; each time I would look in the mirror, there's the same looming figure. Then, in the end the characters in and out of the mirrors would become one. This idea would have greater initial eeriness and horror aspects, but a more wholesome ending where the reality character accepts her perception of herself in the mirror, comes to terms with it, and recognizes the validity of what she sees.

3.2 Filming

What majorly held me back from pursuing this storyline was the complexity of the filming process. In my final film, I didn't have to worry about keeping camera angles as consistent as I initially planned. All of the weird things that would have been in the reflection would be in the edit, instead of in the shot order. If my reflection had to be consistently different in the other film style, I would have needed to keep my tripod in the exact same position so my camera was in the same position with the same lighting, with myself as the actor looking completely different. This would have been virtually impossible, especially for a filming crew of just one person. I would love to be able to pursue that other vision in the future, but I would need more resources available to do it. Also, I think the story that I chose for the final is more interesting and a little

more sinister. It fits in well with my thematic style as a director, using angst and edgy themes to my advantage.

After making a definitive choice between the two storylines, I wrote down my official plan for my order of operations on the day of filming. I was lucky enough to be able to travel to my home in Castle Rock, Colorado to film over a weekend. I recognize the privilege I have, especially in that I had the space available to me that I wouldn't have if I didn't go home to film. Also, at home, I had access to my father's video camera. My dad used to be a photographer, and he still is in possession of a camera that takes high-quality pictures and film. Without his professional camera, I would have only been able to shoot off of my phone, which would have made things significantly less efficient. At home, I filmed the entirety of my shots on February 20th, because I only had one good day to film.

In Appendix 3, the order of the shots that I would be filming is listed. I filmed three days worth of content in one day. In order to optimize for efficiency, I had to film all of the shots out of linear order of the story. I also filmed a time lapse by propping an iPad with a time lapse app open in the corner of my room during my entire filming process. This time lapse (Appendix 4) will be presented as background visuals to my thesis defense. After one full day of filming, with some 30 minute breaks here and there, and one large break between the dusk and night time recordings, I had all the recordings I needed for my editing process to begin.

One of the most important things involved in filming was setting up the cameras in meaningful locations. Based on what part of the story I was filming, I would make sure to either have one or

both of the characters in the shot. This meant I needed some wider angles so the person out of the mirror could be seen along with the one in the mirror, or close-up shots with either character as the focus. Some of the most interesting shots, however, are the ones where it is a wide angle with only one character involved, as it subverts the connection between multiple characters and wide angles. My favorite shot where this happens is during the third morning where the person in the mirror can be seen looking directly at the other character, who

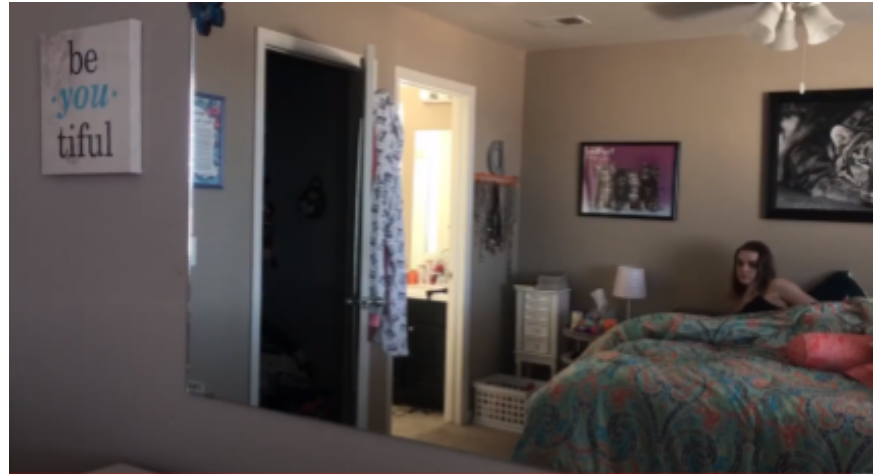


Figure 1. Solo character in mirror wide shot, looking at other character

cannot be seen, even through the wide angle (Figure 1). This can be found at [6:01](#) in the film.

Another important thing about filming with mirrors is avoiding seeing the cameras in the shots. This meant that most of the film is at sharp angles facing the mirrors, and never are the cameras pointing at the mirror straight on. That would give away the illusion, and also show that I didn't have a videographer there! The camera placement mostly came naturally to me, but there were definitely some moments where I struggled with seeing the camera, which is where some guess and check work went in.

During filming, I had to wear three different hats, with a touch of a fourth. I was primarily the actor. Without an actor, we'd have no film, or at least, nothing interesting to film. Aside from acting as the camera was rolling, a heavy focus of mine was ensuring my hair, makeup, and

costumes fit in with the plan I had for filming. I needed a strong directorial vision to maintain that on top of the out-of-order shot list. So, secondarily, I was the director. Third, I was the videographer. With direction from the director, I'd move the camera before and after each shot, occasionally checking the film to see if I got what I needed. This was thinking ahead also as the editor. I had to know if my shots would be able to work in my editing program, or if I needed to change something right then and there to save some trouble for the future me, the editor.

3.3 Editing

The editing process didn't actually begin until many weeks later because I found myself very busy, especially over the weekends. I knew, based on my editing habits from previous experiences, I would need the time to sit down and work on my edit from start to finish, with few breaks in between. The weekend of March 12th through the 14th, I spent two days straight editing my film. I am inclined towards instant gratification, and watching my edit come together as I went along was one of the most instantly-gratifying things in the world. I saw the amalgamation of all my hard work coming together when editing, and that was very inspirational for me.

I used the free editing software, Davinci Resolve 17, which is based on Adobe Premiere. I was able to edit a professional level film on a free program, which made this whole process even more rewarding. It proves that not everything in professional theatre and film is based on monetary value. Though, I'm sure there are some struggles that could have been alleviated by using a more expensive, well-developed program.

The first step for the editing process was to upload my film to my computer. This took longer than expected. After having all of my video clips ready, I went through and downloaded original copies of the songs I wanted to utilize in my film. I used an online transcribing service to change the tempo of both “01 Ghosts I” and “09 Ghosts I” to fit with my final song, “Right Where It Belongs.” From there I was able to make my own remix using Davinci Resolve 17. I am no musical expert, but the sound editing was still extremely fun for me. I added a new drum beat to continue throughout the span of the three songs, and this was the major part of the mashup that tied all the pieces together. I had a total of 170 clips worth of drum beats added to the songs, which can be in audio tracks 5 and 6 in Figure 2.

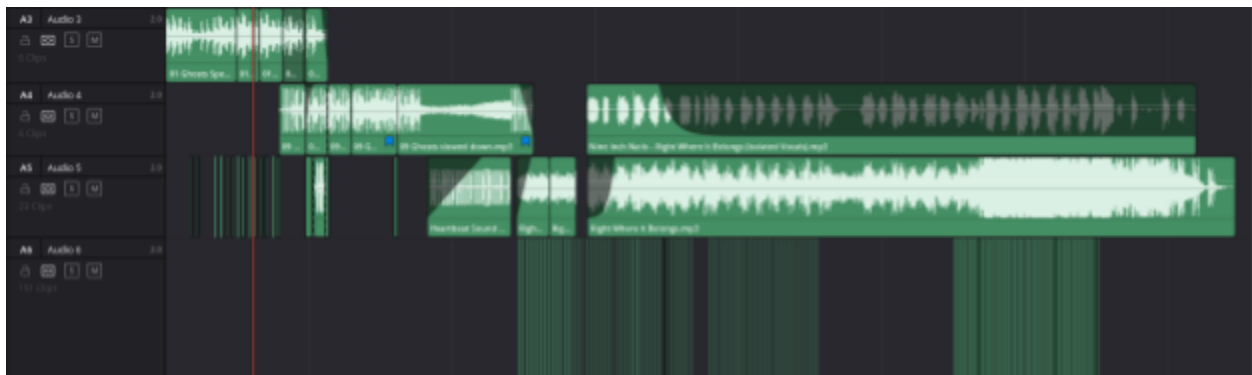


Figure 2. Audio tracks with the three songs and drum beats. Other sounds included, like the heartbeat and the isolated vocals.

My video editing style centers drastically around the music playing in the background. My favorite thing to see in an edit is when the cuts of film match up with the beats of a song. I utilized jump cuts all throughout my film along with the music and the drum beats I added to incorporate that style that I love. I’ve also had some experience in my classes last semester which helped me understand and solidify my editing style.

I edited this film linearly. From the start, it was necessary to establish jump cuts as a norm in the reality of the film. This was valuable in order to not take away from the abstract nature of the movements in the mirrors. I wanted the mirrors and the jump cuts in reality to remain separate so the audience can recognize the differences in the two locations, in and out of the mirror. I started with very small jump cuts, and gradually became more aggressive with the changes in my positions with jump cuts. This was also helpful because I had a lot of film and I was able to condense it down easily with these jump cuts.

The way I was able to edit the mirror tricks was by overlaying two clips of video on top of each other, with one of them cropped to only show what is in the mirror, covering up what is originally in the mirror of the other clip. For the movements in the mirror to be offset from reality, I would copy the clip, extend the duration, and shorten it from the beginning, and put it on top of the other clip, cropped. This would make the mirror appear to be delayed from reality. The interface I worked with for the mirror tricks can be seen in Figure 3. This was very fun to do, though difficult to see in the preview of my editing program, because the extra layers of film would end up causing a bit more lag on my computer. I wasn't able to see the tricks exactly as they were until after I exported my first draft of the film.

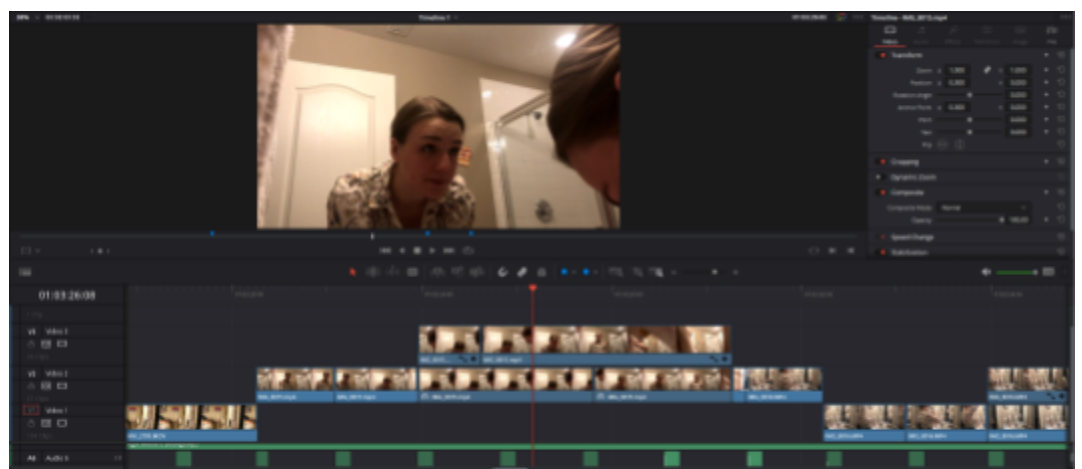


Figure 3. Full display of Davinci Resolve with layers of film and the preview.

I originally edited a different ending for the film. It was fine, but it wasn't what I initially planned. I decided to continue with it, for the first draft, just to see what the outcome would be. It kept the focus on the character outside of the mirror, and it didn't transition to anything other than the person outside of the mirror exiting the frame. It ended up being a nice way to see my process after my first export, and it made for a good framework for my true ending. I was then able to quickly make the new version, which had a more concise and powerful ending, with the world flipping to show the perspective of the person inside of the mirror, changing places with the person on the outside.

During this whole editing process, I had my family and friends to show my drafts to. I was able to maintain my excitement about my film because I was able to show it off along the way, which helped me stay motivated through the whole process. Any time I was excited about my editing process, I sent videos out to see reactions and share my creative procedure. My eight-minute solo film "Never Alone" was an extremely rewarding project, and I'm very proud of the end result.

4. The Result

The title of my film is "Never Alone." I find this title is a double entendre for the fact that I played two characters in my film--the person in the mirror and the person out of the mirror--but also for the idea that even in this solo project, I was never entirely alone. I was able to create a film I am proud of because I had help along the way. I would not have done this project if it weren't for the thesis project to begin with. I was able to come up with my story because I had my advisor, friends, and family there to listen to me brainstorm. I had experience editing because

of my classes in the previous semester, and encouragement from my professors who saw my ability to go further with my filmmaking. In the end, I was able to take a collaborative art form, make it a solo project, but still maintain that collaborative nature. Through this, I was able to make new discoveries about what I can do as an artist in isolation, and I have learned a lot about myself and potentials for my future career in film.

4.1 The Film

The film's meaning is left up to audience interpretation, though there are specific themes I want to highlight. This film is not directly about the pandemic, though it isn't explicit in showing if the setting is during, before, or after the COVID-19 pandemic. I want this piece to be timeless, without a specific setting, so any viewer at any time could relate it to their personal experiences. With this in mind, there are themes that are influenced by my research about the pandemic and theatre arts.

A major theme I focused on was the idea of a cycle. The film is cyclical in nature, as it shows the daily routine of the characters, ending in a switch of reality and perspective to the character in the mirror. I wanted the audience to be able to replay the film and recognize that this may be a cycle in itself; the constant relationship between these two characters where they switch between who is the focus and who is in the mirror. This relates directly to how pandemics and the arts are in a cycle. Any tragedy may harm the performing arts, but the arts are always there to support people when they are down, and they always get back up again.

Another theme that was meaningful to me in the process is the idea of self image and perception of oneself. Our bodies and our minds are the only things guaranteed to stick with us our whole lives as people, so there has to be some comfort in understanding ourselves. In this film, reality and perception are skewed, potentially to show the separation in the character's mind and body. I was able to make commentary on my self image through this film because I am confident in my understanding of myself and my reality, unlike the character(s) in the film.

4.2 What have I learned?

This filmmaking experience has taught me a lot about theatre in a pandemic. I was able to push myself to keep creating even when motivation levels are low from staying at home most of the time. This is an important aspect of being a performer because our careers are what we make of ourselves. Our bodies are our brand, which we need to be constantly working on to maintain jobs.

Careers are not the only focus though. Theatre and film help the greater population stay positive during tragedies. I learned that doing a solo film helped reinvigorate my passion for my craft, even when I felt unmotivated from COVID-19. Researching the implications of COVID-19 on theatre helped me respect the arts even more, knowing that people are still willing to create art, even in tough times. I also learned that you don't always need a huge group of artists to create something meaningful, though support from others is necessary to maintain morale through the process.

I also learned that pride is one of the most important emotions to feel while making something so personal. My pride in my work was what kept me excited about filming and editing. It made me want to show off to others what I had been working on. But being proud of myself helped me with so much more than just that. During the editing process, I had to be able to look at myself objectively and separate my opinions of myself from the opinion of what would work best for the edit. I also had to accept some of the flaws inherent in my film in order to stay positive about the work. I could not nitpick every detail because there were things within myself that just couldn't change. I learned that I had to be comfortable with myself and proud of the work that I had done in order to keep a positive attitude throughout the project. Having pride in myself let me keep that positivity without shutting down by trying to remain "humble."

4.3 What would I do differently?

Looking back, I wish I started the process a bit sooner so I had more time to fumble and fall. I had some struggles throughout that would force me to postpone the next steps of work. When I would mess up, I would feel so frustrated and would have to take time to release that frustration and try something else. My original plan was to film during winter break, but my first film idea wasn't working, so I got frustrated and did not film again until late February. If I had started sooner, I would've felt more comfortable taking that time to rest in between attempts, and had more time overall to develop throughout the project.

I would also do it with music that doesn't have copyright restrictions. Of course, I am very happy I used music that invoked my passion so strongly, but it does make it hard to share my film

across all platforms. I would even be interested in taking the time to try and make my own music in a simple program like GarageBand, so I could have ownership of the music as well.

One other major thing I wish I could have changed is the devices in which I recorded my film. The professional camera I used had a much higher quality than my phone camera, which created some discrepancies of continuity in my final film. I would like to have invested more money into the project, if I could, to make it more professional in the end. I wouldn't go back and refilm what I already have done, but I wish I could have done it with a second, higher quality camera.

4.4 Would I do a solo film again?

I felt so much passion while working on my film. It reinvigorated my desire to perform and create. This solo project was very important to me for my thesis because it allowed me to have a purpose to take the time to make art. I don't know when else I would have a similar opportunity to this, but if I did, I would. Though, in the future, I would prefer to be able to work with others more openly. I would love to do another film project, but with dialogue between two actors. I want to stretch myself further in the future as a filmmaker by focusing more on the story and less on the logistics, especially since I usually film around what will look cool and edit around the music.

I am very happy to have a piece of work that I can call entirely my own. But I missed out on the true collaboration with a devised piece of work between multiple theatre artists, and I don't want to lose out on that again if I were to do another project like this.

4.5 Final takeaways and conclusion

Solo films are great for personal development and growth, as an actor, director, editor, and filmmaker. That does not mean that it can replace the art of in-person, collaborative theatre and film. While I felt personally reinvigorated by the whole process, it did make me want to do more “real” theatre again. There is no replacement for working in-person with other highly passionate artists to create something beautiful together. Even Zoom theatre and online performances miss out on one of the most important elements of performing arts: community.

I kept reaching out to my community during the process of my film to try and maintain that element. There are ways to bring in people in the process while still being isolated, but it loses the personable nature of performing with other people in person.

Of course, we still need to do what is safe for ourselves and the general public, and right now, that means staying socially distanced and staying home when possible. While the pandemic is still a concern to the safety of our community, solo theatre can be utilized to keep performers active, but I still would recommend incorporating some sorts of collaboration to keep the heart and soul of live-theatre alive. By doing so, performing artists can and will persevere, even through tragic events.

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Appendices

1. The Film: “Never Alone”



The YouTube link is hyperlinked to this image. Click on it and it will take you to the film.

2. “A Copy of A”



The YouTube link is hyperlinked to this image. Click on it and it will take you to the film.

3. Planning Documentation

Music:

The Wretched

The Four of Us are Dying

A Warm Place

01 Ghosts I	61	F
02 Ghosts I	110	D#/Eb
06 Ghosts I	122	F
08 Ghosts I	112	F
09 Ghosts I	160	F
19 Ghosts III	160	C#/Db
20 Ghosts III	140	A
21 Ghosts III	142	D
28 Ghosts IV	120	A#/Bb
Right Where it Belongs	140	F

Horror

Getting ready in the mirror, super dolled up and stereotypically feminine

Maybe getting ready in the morning, going to the restroom, going to bed at night, multiple days, every time you see a mirror throughout the day, seeing yourself but its not yourself

Sense of being followed, use gimbal facial recognition. That made people excited before

That editing trick where the focus moves but the reflection doesn't! Also a bit of lag between mirror and real life, could be super interesting

Got to figure out a shot pattern to make sure that I'm not going insane and keeping the cameras in the same spot. Lighting issues.

No music from the beginning, natural sounds? Extra eeriness? Does music take away from the horror aspect? Do I want horror or just ANGST?

What if there is no reflection?

Get up in the morning

Get ready in the mirror

Business casual? For work? Where am I going? What if I don't go anywhere? Am I trying to pretend that covid isn't a thing or is it in this universe?

Go home, wash face, look scary at mirror, say, be sp00ked

Wake up

Same routine

Come home (?); put on more makeup, get more sexy for maybe a party? Bar? What if I'm drinking alone? If in covid

Go to bed without taking makeup off

Wake up lookin cray (curled hair but messy from sleep, makeup smeared)

Get ready, maybe out of the shower? Put towel over mirror, or do the fog bit where you wipe away the fog and reveaaaaal somethin in the mirror, be sp00ked and then cover the mirror.

Try and cover every mirror, put on makeup haphazardly. Unlike A Copy Of A, the real life person is the crazy one, the one in the mirror is steady and realistic.

Order of Events:

Night before- put on makeup, curl hair

DAY

Wake up and get ready to film

Put on party dress, wake up "hungover" (day 3)

Shower

Do finale freak out scene

Get in pajamas

Wake up (day 1)

Get ready with mascara and brow gel

Do hair in a way that covers curled hair later

Get dressed with outfit 1

"Leave"

Put hair in bun, put pajamas back on, wake up (day 2)

Get ready again (more makeup this time, avoid taking off mascara from before)

Different outfit, straight hair down

Leave

DUSK

Come back in second outfit, film changing into party outfit, do makeup and curl straight hair

NIGHTTIME

Film party return home (don't wash face)

Remove eye makeup, get ready for day 1 return from "work" (mascara only, bun in hair, outfit 1)

Film return from work day 1, get ready for bed (put hair in bun for continuity for day 2 wakeup)

DONE

4. Time Lapse



The YouTube link is hyperlinked to this image. Click on it and it will take you to the film.