

No Stage? No Problem!

Students can direct, act or write for *Not So Staged Readings*, a group dedicated to providing theatre opportunities during the pandemic

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Starting at the top and from left to right, Walden Marcus, Madeleine Cooper, Gabi Gilbride and Will Eames rehearse for "Bacon with a Side of Eggs" by Max Koh. // Photo courtesy of Boomer Lusink and Sophia Tuell

By [Emily Bishop](#)

On March 23, a Facebook page called [Not So Staged Readings](#) made its first post. The post said the purpose of the page was to help organize live readings of plays streamed for free. On April 2, auditions for the group's first play, Henrik Ibsen's "Ghosts" was posted. Not So Staged Readings has since produced five plays.

Boomer Lusink, a third-year Western student studying theatre and chemistry, and Sophia Tuell, a third-year Western student studying theatre, international studies and French, are the co-founders of the group. They are not sure where the idea to start the group came from and said that it seemed like a natural thing to do.

"It's an attempt to try and retain some level of normalcy and provide an opportunity for student theatre artists to continue writing, to continue directing, to continue acting in a time where it would be basically impossible to do so the way that we normally would," Lusink said.

Not So Staged Readings started with the plan to only produce plays in the public domain, but since starting, the focus has shifted to produce more student-written plays. The majority of their productions have been plays written by current Western students or alumni.

Every aspect of a production is carried out online. For auditions, students email audition tapes to Not So Staged Readings. Second-year Western student Madeline Cooper said the video audition process can be challenging.

"With video submissions you can nitpick every little thing and do it over and over and over again," Cooper said. "That's kinda challenging, just having to learn to be okay with what I did and not overanalyze every little thing in the video."

Auditions are open to all students and no acting experience is required.

The productions are streamed over the webinar feature on Zoom, a video conferencing program. The performances are not recorded in order to maintain part of the live theatre feel.

"I am really hesitant to do recordings because although it's not the theatre we would normally do, an aspect of it that we would like to keep is that it is live," Lusink said.

Cooper said that the performances, similar to a live theatre performance, are stressful, but they also have a casual element. The performers cannot see the audience at all through the video chat, which Cooper said can cause a feeling of disconnect.

"You're like, 'Oh, I'm just reading it on my own,' but I would have my friends text me throughout the performance, which made it a little more real," Cooper said. "I was like, 'Oh, right someone's watching this.' It was low stakes, but it felt very real in the moment even though it was just me in my dorm room."

Not So Staged Readings' productions are open to the public and are free. The group does, however, have a [GoFundMe](#). Lusink said the funds go towards paying for the webinar feature on Zoom. This version of Zoom requires a paid membership.

Lusink and Tuell encourage anyone with an interest in theatre to get involved with Not So Staged Readings. Forms on the group's Facebook page allow students to audition for plays, request to direct a piece, or give suggestions for pieces they'd like to see performed.

"Even though we can't have our standard theatre life and be able to be in the spaces that we love working in, it's always good to keep up the practice," Tuell said. "It's kinda a nice stress relief in a way. It's having fun doing something you enjoy."