

By MICHAEL PAULSON

Inside a former firehouse in Richmond, Va., a lone actor performs "The Picture of Dorian Gray" for audiences as small as two. In a Denver parking lot, theatergoers in cars watch, through their windshields, four performers costumed as grasshoppers. On a 600-acre property in Arkansas, a cast of about 130 re-enacts the story of Jesus for several hundred ticket-holders spread across a 1,000-seat outdoor amphitheater.

The coronavirus pandemic has shuttered Broadway through the end of the year (at least), and the nation's big regional theaters and major outdoor festivals have mostly pivoted to streaming. But even as infections surge in the United States, many theaters are finding ways to present live performances before live audiences.

Of course, there is social distancing. Also, in some places, masks. Temperature checks. Touchless ticketing. Intermissionless shows. And lots of disinfectant. At the Footlights Theater, in Falmouth, Maine, actors will perform behind plexiglass.



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Staging "The Great Passion Play," with limited, socially distanced seating, in Eureka Springs, Ark.

But these precautions mean there is dinner theater in Florida. Street theater in Chicago. Drive-in theater in Iowa.

"Our commitment is to do live theater — there's a huge difference between that and seeing something on a computer screen," said Susan Claassen, managing

artistic director of Invisible Theater in Tucson, Ariz., a state that has emerged as a Covid-19 hot spot. The theater, which has been running a four-character play called "Filming O'Keefe" indoors, installed an air ionizer, allowed patrons in only one-quarter of its seats, mandated that they wear

masks, and put on a show.

"Our theater got its name from the invisible energy that flows between performers and the audience," Claassen said. "Even with 22 people in the audience with masks on, that energy is so strong."

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