

First kisses are... awkward to say the least. But a first kiss over Zoom 3 years into a pandemic? Now that's a new level of excruciating embarrassment. In Langley High School's student-run production of *The Party Hop*, the cast and crew took us on a Zoom adventure with secret Tik Tok gestures, plenty of background changes, and, of course, the ever so awkward pauses that accompany virtual settings.

Written by Natalie Margolin when the COVID-19 pandemic first struck, *The Party Hop* reveals what it's like for three college sophomores, Ava, Emma and Nancy, who have lived in the pandemic for three years. On a mission to acquire Ava's first kiss, they jump from Zoom link to link and party to party.

Popping on to the screen first was Ava (Tess Jannery-Barney) and Emma (Abhaya Tyrka). With a sparkly shirt on, Tyrka's bubbly attitude as Emma radiated through the screen. Matching drinks for "togetherness" with her best friend Ava, Tyrka's characterization of Emma perfectly encapsulated the hopeful spirit one needs when facing quarantine. Juxtapositioning such a spirit through her hardened personality is Ava. Whether it was her gradual breakdown after her cringe-worthy first kiss or the subtle confidence boost with a blue wig on, one could relate to all of the brilliant emotions Jannery-Barney portrayed on screen. Then enter the CEO of background changing: Nancy (Talia-Rose Diorio). From swift background changes to her stunning singing voice, Diorio gracefully portrayed how one's eccentric personality can be a facade to the harsh reality of quarantine. With their relationships shifting and growing throughout the play, all three actresses exceptionally demonstrated how Zoom life can alter one's connections.

The first Zoom bash the girls click into is a cocktail party. Shouting at her kids for disrupting the annual event is Victoria (Isabella Montesinos Davis). Davis' hysterical gestures and booming voice allowed the audience to chuckle at the all-too-familiar scene. When the three girls join the next party, a surprise birthday party, Mary (Katie Murchison) gracefully captured the energetic theatre kid, her energy bursting through the seams. After doing the secret Tik Tok gesture, the girls are off to the next party for Ava's long-awaited kiss with Jackson (Nicolas Kristensen). Throughout the awkward breakout room scene, Kristensen's disinterested facial expressions only added to the peculiarities of an attempted Zoom kiss. In every scene, each cast member was engaged with unique reactions, which allowed for every moment to be entertaining.

Yet, such an astounding performance could not have been done without the phenomenal technical aspects. The directing by Elizabeth Tippens enabled each Zoom encounter to be very natural and relatable. Other notable features included the set with the hilarious "Saturdays are for the Boys" flag behind Jackson as well as the very fitting costumes. Additionally, the remarkable editing by Phia Colabatistto allowed for each scene to run smoothly and engaged the audience through aspects such as party music. Most impressive was the virtual playbill, designed by Austin Young, which beautifully included information about the production, cast, and crew.

Challenging us all to be the “brightest box” on the screen while we fight this pandemic together, Langley High School’s production of The Party Hop brought to light how we can still persevere and find connections in a virtual setting... even if it’s a little awkward at first.