A BUNCH OF SCIENTISTS ON SPRING BREAK

A Play at Home play commissioned by Berkeley Rep
By Peter Sinn Nachtrieb
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(A gorgeous Mexican Beach on the Caribbean side. Fine white sand and a calm sea, with only a light breeze. Palm trees. [If you’re doing this on Zoom, use that palm tree beach picture as your background.] There’s some good music playing.

A BUNCH OF SCIENTISTS are gathered around some umbrellas. Maybe they rented a cabana. They are all wearing LAB COATS and glasses. They might not be holding them, but everyone’s got a clipboard somewhere.

SEVEN SCIENTISTS are holding 3 shot glasses. One is filled with tequila, one with lime juice, and one with sangrita [Google it, many recipe options online. Great home activity!].

TWO OTHER SCIENTISTS are tossing a beach ball back and forth from opposite sides of the stage.

EVEN MORE SCIENTISTS may be added to the Mise-en-Scene depending on the size of your sheltercluster/video posse. They can be engaged in any number of spring break activities, such as dancing badly, wading in the water, playing in the sand [making PG13-rated sand sculptures or burying somebody], or using their social media to promote their personal brands, etc… Whatever activity they are engaged in, they are doing it in their lab coats.

The SEVEN SCIENTISTS with drinks raise their glasses. The conversation has a brisk pace.)
SCIENTIST ONE

CHEERS EVERYONE!

Cheers!

EVERYONE

SCIENTIST TWO

(too fratty)

Spring BREAAAAAAAK!

(People look at SCIENTIST TWO)

SCIENTIST TWO

(less fratty)

I don’t know where that came from.

(They are all about to drink when–)

WAIT!

SCIENTIST THREE

What?

SCIENTIST FOUR

Do you shoot the shots or do you sip them?

SCIENTIST THREE

Shoot them!

SCIENTIST TWO

No, you sip them.

SCIENTIST FIVE

I think you can do both.

SCIENTIST FIVE

You just sip them, guys.

SCIENTIST TWO

Shoot them!

SCIENTIST THREE

Shoot the tequila, then the lime juice, then the reddish thing?
It’s called “sangrita.”

Sip them.

Yeah, it’s sip. Sip some tequila, sip some of the other stuff. Repeat. I saw it on a show.

You can shoot the tequila if you want though.

I’m not chugging lime juice.

What’s the red stuff again?

Sangrita.

Is it just tomato juice?

It’s sangrita.

Pulpy.

V8?

It’s not V8.

So what is it then?

I didn’t bring my chromatography equipment to break down the components.

Why don’t you just use your tongue, silly.
You’re silly.

No, you’re silly.

Save it for the lab, guys.

There’s definitely tomato in there but something else.

Orange juice?

Definitely citrus. And a spice.

Tabasco!

No.

Why not Tabasco?

Tabasco is from Louisiana.

I thought Tabasco was Mexican.

It depends if you’re talking about the state or the brand or the pepper.

Yeah. Be specific about your interrogation, people!

So nobody knows what’s in this?

According to a recent study in the New England Journal of Medicine—
 Scientists on Spring Break – Nachtrieb 5

SCIENTIST ONE
STOP! No studies on spring break.

SCIENTIST FOUR
I was kidding! I was kidding! Lighten up, scientists.

SCIENTIST ONE
We are not scientists right now, Carol. On this beach, at this time, we are whoever we desire.

SCIENTIST FOUR
I’m fine being Carol, thanks.

SCIENTIST SEVEN
If anyone’s interested in facts, the sangrita recipe varies. But it’s most commonly a mix of citrus juices, tomato juice, and some sort of spice.

SCIENTIST SIX
You know a lot about this drink.

SCIENTIST SEVEN
Yes. Yes I do.

SCIENTIST THREE
That’s still not enough detail for me.

SCIENTIST FOUR
Do you have an allergy?

SCIENTIST THREE
No, I just like to know what I’m drinking, that’s all.

SCIENTIST TWO
Why don’t you just enjoy the sum of its parts?

I could never do that.

SCIENTIST THREE
Where’s Albert?

SCIENTIST SEVEN
Windsurfing lesson.

Albert is windsurfing?
SCIENTIST TWO

Emphasis on “lesson.”

SCIENTIST FIVE

Is there even enough activation energy to windsurf?

SCIENTIST FOUR

You mean is there enough wind?

I mean what I asked.

You always do.

It’s why I get the grants.

SCIENTIST FIVE

No grant talk on the beach, please.

SCIENTIST ONE

Hey, has anyone heard anything from the latest round of N.I.-

SCIENTIST SEVEN

Are we sipping or shooting or what cause it is time we get this party started and this liquid gets in my Mouuuuuuuuth.

SCIENTIST THREE

We’re just trying to make sure we’re doing it right.

SCIENTIST FOUR

How do we know what’s right?

SCIENTIST SIX

What if we each take two shots of tequila? We shoot the first one, and then, we sip the second with the lime juice and the other stuff—

SCIENTIST SEVEN

SANGRITA.

SCIENTIST SIX

—And then we can make a comparison based on evidence.

Interesting.

SCIENTISTS ONE, THREE, AND FOUR
SCIENTIST TWO
I’ll get everyone a second shot.

(SCIENTIST TWO quickly begins to hand everyone an additional shot glass of tequila.)

SCIENTIST FIVE
Experimental design question: Won’t the first shot influence your experience of the second?

So?

SCIENTIST FIVE
Doesn’t that bias the data?

SCIENTIST FOUR
Always the stickler, Brenda.

I’m a scientist, Trevor.

SCIENTIST FIVE
Oooooo. What if half the group shoots first, and the other half sips, and then we switch?

I’m down.

SCIENTIST SIX
You guys are group A. We’ll be group B.

I won’t drink so I can observe.

Sweet.

SCIENTIST SEVEN
What am I observing?

Taste?

SCIENTIST TWO
Pleasure?
Significance?

Meaning?

Just observe what you can directly observe, sweetie.

If we are in the “shoot it first” group, do we have to wait for the sippers to finish sipping before we start our sipping?

No. | Yes.

(SCIENTIST TWO shoots their shot of tequila)

Oops.

Danny!

I was thirsty!

You’re going to noise up the data set.

We’re on Spring Break!

You’re saying that like it’s an excuse.

It is THE excuse. SO before anyone says anything else CHEERS everyone!

Which group am I in? Am I supposed to-

Just drink SOMETHING!
ALL

CHEERS!

(Half the group downs the tequila shot. The other half vigorously sips from the three shot glasses. SCIENTIST SEVEN, who has grabbed her clipboard, aggressively tries to observe what’s going on

AS they sip, SCIENTIST EIGHT glides by on a windsurfer moving very very slowly.)

SCIENTIST EIGHT

DUDES! DUDES! DUDES!

(SCIENTIST EIGHT disappears on the other side of the stage.

SCIENTIST TWO has raised up a tequila bottle)

SCIENTIST TWO

Now, who needs more data?

(SCIENTISTS Whoop.

LIGHTS DOWN.

LIGHTS UP. Time has passed.

A lot of empty glassware is scattered about the beach, plus some full trays of new shots.

THE TWO SCIENTISTS with the beach ball continue to play their beach ball game, with a slight bit more tipsy verve.

The party is going off. MUSIC is playing loud. The SCIENTISTS are dancing and holding drinks. EVERYONE is a bit more loose and lubricated.

DIFFERENT conversations are happening as they dance.
They all have to SHOUT above the music.)

SCIENTIST ONE
-And, like, when I told him what I did, I could just see his eyes go out of focus. Totally left the room, you know.

SCIENTIST SIX

OH, honey.

SCIENTIST FIVE

That’s awful.

SCIENTIST ONE
It was like, even though he wasn’t physically pulling out his phone and ignoring me, he was pulling out his phone and looking at it in his mind.

SCIENTIST SIX

Lay people are the worst.

SCIENTIST FIVE

Especially when you have to date them.

SCIENTIST THREE

Where’s my clipboard?

SCIENTIST SEVEN

Is Albert back?

SCIENTIST FOUR

I think he’s on a jetski.

SCIENTIST SEVEN

Albert knows how to jestski?

SCIENTIST FOUR

I don’t think so.

SCIENTIST SEVEN

I hope he doesn’t hurt himself.

SCIENTIST FOUR

Do you like Albert?

SCIENTIST SEVEN

What, I’m just, like, concerned for his safety.
Cause you looove him.

SCIENTIST SEVEN
I think you need some water.

SCIENTIST FOUR
Of course I need water. I’m a human being! God.

I can’t find my clipboard.

SCIENTIST ONE
I mean...I’m not sorry. I’m not sorry that I love what I love. That I am who I am. I’m a scientist and either you love me for that, or get out of my apartment.

A men.

SCIENTIST SIX
I would do the same thing.

SCIENTIST FIVE
Let’s just focus on dancing.

SCIENTIST ONE
It just hurts sometimes, you know?

Oh I know. I know.

SCIENTISTS SIX
(finding her clipboard mid sentence)
I swear I left my clipboard right oh thank god there it is. (SCIENTIST THREE clutches the clipboard with care.)

SCIENTIST ONE
I love science. (with great passion.)
I love science so much.

SCIENTIST SIX
We are lucky. We are so frikkin lucky to do what we love.
(SCIENTIST TWO runs out with two rolls of toilet paper.)

SCIENTIST TWO
Who wants to wrap me up in toilet paper?!

SCIENTISTS FOUR AND SEVEN
YAAAAAS!

(SCIENTISTS FOUR AND SEVEN begin to wrap him up in rolls of toilet paper.)

WHOOPS.

SCIENTIST EIGHT Jetskis by)

SCIENTIST EIGHT
Duuuuuuuuuuuuuuuudes!

(LIGHTS DOWN.

LIGHTS UP.

More empty shot glasses. More time has passed. SCIENTISTS are drunk.

A SLOW SONG is playing. A FEW SCIENTISTS are still dancing with a heavier weight in their legs and more sway. Some are coupled off slow dancing, perhaps just using each other to stay upright, while others are slow dancing with themselves. They’re all fairly clumped close together.

THE TWO SCIENTISTS with the beach ball are still playing catch, but their throws are erratic and neither of them is catching the ball any more.

SCIENTIST TWO is passed out on a beach chair, wrapped up like a toilet paper mummy.

SCIENTIST THREE is clutching their clipboard and seems to have gone into
some sort of crisis in her head. She’s doing something on her phone.

There’s a bit more sluggishness to everything, a drunken heavy weight.)

SCIENTIST ONE
This day...is still happening.

SCIENTIST FOUR
I don’t have a care in the world right now. In this moment...I seriously don’t care.

Where’s Albert now?

SCIENTIST SEVEN
I think he’s parasailing.

SCIENTIST FOUR
That can’t be safe.

SCIENTIST FIVE
Why does Albert not want to hang out with us?

SCIENTIST SIX
Sounds kinda nice to just be pulled around by a boat.

Everything sounds nice right now.

SCIENTIST ONE
I love you all. I love you all so much.

SCIENTIST THREE
I think I’m going to go home.

(A brief beat as that disrupts the mood.)

Jenna?

SCIENTIST ONE

No!

SCIENTIST FIVE
SCIENTIST THREE
There’s a flight at two, so I’ll be home by eight, in the lab by-

SCIENTIST SIX
Jenna, No. No no no. NO. You can’t do this to us.

SCIENTIST THREE
This doesn’t feel right to me.

SCIENTIST ONE
No, it’s fine! Jenna, you’re fine!

SCIENTIST FOUR
Yeah, you just need to chill.

SCIENTIST THREE
Chilling makes me anxious!

SCIENTIST SIX
Oh, honey.

SCIENTIST THREE
Don’t you feel anxious when you’re not doing science?

No.

SCIENTIST SIX
A little.

SCIENTIST THREE
I feel this...overwhelming burden. To do something important for the planet, for humankind. It’s up to me to discover something. The world is counting on me, on all of us, to make discoveries. And every time we’re not actually working to discover something, that’s more time before it gets discovered.

We have to discover things. Discovering things saves lives.

SCIENTIST FOUR
If anybody listened to us.

SCIENTIST SIX
Which they don’t.
Nobody listens to me.

My family listens to me.

They have to listen to you.

I have this recurring nightmare where I’m sitting on a beach, just like this, and there are lots of people swimming, when, I see these dark, moving shadows amidst the aqua blue, shadows of a hundred sting rays that are zooming, fast, towards the swimmers, and soon I’m shouting at the top of my lungs—

STING RAYS!
STING RAYS!
STING RAYS!
STING RAYS!

—and the swimmers just wave back at me and die.

I have the same dream! Except for me, it’s skiers and an avalanche.

Innertubers and a waterfall.

Farmers and a pollinator collapse.

Innocence and a hot tub.

What’d I miss?

Jenna wants to leave.

Nooooo Jenna!

I can’t just sit here, sipping or shooting tequila while the world is—
Jenna, whether you’re on this beach or in your lab, I don’t think the feeling of “not doing enough” is going to go away.

I know...

So try to enjoy a few moments of fun.

I guess I’ve never been fully comfortable with debauchery and reckless abandon.

I just read about a study—

- Shut up. It was a study that showed how reckless abandon has a reparative effect on neurons in the brain. So, Jenna, if you really want to discover something, that means you also have to take some time to discover nothing.

I also might have to throw up.

But what if there isn’t time? Because there isn’t time.

We are running out of—

(Scientist Two stands up suddenly. Toilet paper begins to shed off of them.)

We should take our lab coats off.

Huh?

S/he’s wasted.
SCIENTIST TWO
Yes I am. And so what. It is hot. We are on a beach. We are on vacation. And for these reasons, I think it is highly necessary for all of us to remove our coats of the lab.

No...

SCIENTIST THREE

Yes.

SCIENTIST SIX

Maybe?

SCIENTIST SEVEN

No but also Yas?

SCIENTIST ONE

If we all do it, it will be ok.

This is crazy.

SCIENTIST FIVE

Seriously. If this gets out-

SCIENTIST ONE

Yeah, no pictures. It would ruin us.

SCIENTIST SIX

Do we have enough sunscreen?

SCIENTIST THREE

Guys I’m really not comfortable with-

(SCIENTIST TWO has thrown off their lab coat, revealing whatever it is they were wearing underneath. Let’s say it’s a sensible business casual outfit.)

ALL

WHOA!

SCIENTIST TWO

(Throwing hands up in the air.)

I’m alive!
SCIENTIST FOUR
Oh S/he is!

SCIENTIST TWO
Hello, waist! Hello, sides of my body! Hello, upper arms!

(SCIENTIST ONE throws off their lab coat and puts hands up in the air.)

ALL
WHOA!

SCIENTIST ONE
Oh wow. There’s like, more air around me. So much more air!

SCIENTIST SEVEN
That’s not really an accurate statement.

SCIENTIST ONE
You guys HAVE TO DO THIS!

(SCIENTISTS FOUR through SEVEN take their coats off and raise their hands.)

SCIENTIST TWO
Forget everything you think you are and what you’re about.

In this moment, each of us is a...a creature! A creature on a planet who is here for a certain time and all that you need to concern yourself in this moment is how to be happy, to be present, to enjoy, with all of your senses, this gorgeous feeling of warm air around your body, while also avoiding injury or being eaten.

And in this moment, while we’re on spring break, we don’t have to understand this feeling. We don’t have to analyze it. We can just feel it. We can feel it until the feeling goes away.

Join us, Jenna.

SCIENTIST SEVEN
But I’m terrified.

SCIENTIST THREE
You’re a scientist, Jenna.
SCIENTIST THREE

I can’t believe I’m—

(SCIENTIST THREE takes off their coat.)

Oh. Wow.
Wooooooooow.

Feels nice, right?

SCIENTIST FOUR

Maybe too much.

SCIENTIST THREE

Close your eyes.
Open your bodies.
Just feel it all.
No control. Just observe.
Take some deep breaths and...feel.

(ALL OF THE DE-COATED SCIENTISTS have their arms wide, heads tilted up, eyes closed. Maybe one of them is peeking.

Even the BEACH BALL SCIENTISTS have stopped playing and are doing it.

SCIENTIST EIGHT floats above the stage in a parasailing contraption. THEY hold a bag full of fake snow and sprinkles it over the scientists below.)

SCIENTIST EIGHT

Dudes!
It’s snowing.
It’s snowing on a beach in Mexico.
And we are here for it.
We are here.

(With their eyes closed, SOME SCIENTISTS stick out their tongues to catch flakes.

THE SUN SETS in the west.

END.)