

A virtual Rendez-vous

AT THE CITT/ICTS STRATEGIC PLANNING RETREAT in February 2020, the board took the decision to migrate all of our Rendez-vous content to being available online by 2023. However, events overtook us somewhat and we found ourselves in the position of implementing that three-year plan in six months instead.

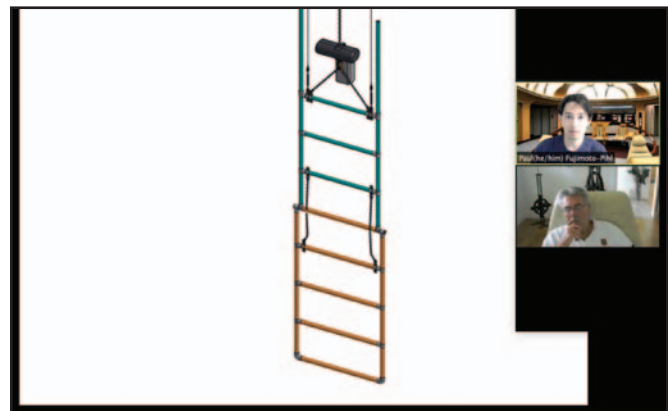
But we are, at heart, people who are used to changed plans and rapid deadlines, and the Rendez-vous 2020 team rose to the occasion well. We were able to convert many of the planned sessions to an online format, and the increased interest in online seminars during the lockdown period meant there was a lot of great content that became available that we may not have had access to before.

We realized we would need help with the technicalities (if anyone can recognize the need for technical support, surely it's us!) and received a very interesting proposal from JST Productions and Frampton Productions to help us with that. It showed a fundamental understanding of what made the Rendez-vous conference unique and after some negotiation of what we were able to do with the new format, we contracted JST Productions and Frampton Productions to manage the “behind the scenes” work. Their work was pivotal to the eventual success of the conference.

We also are very grateful to our friends and colleagues at SMArts whose experience and advice following their conference earlier in the year were invaluable. In particular, we drew heavily on their experience of managing and moderating roundtable-type sessions.

The conference ran over a four-day period, starting at 12:00 p.m. Eastern Time (to accommodate attendees from the West Coast) and ending each day with a more informal roundtable or social session. Many of the staples of Rendez-vous programming were reinvented for the all-online format, including the New Product Showcase, TD Roundtable, AGM, and even Swag Bingo. There were also webinars, talks, and even a tour of the new Stratford Festival Tom Patterson Theatre. Swag Bingo 2020 was probably by far the most fun we've ever had on a Zoom call.

Partway through the conference, we received some feedback that people missed seeing who was in the session with them, so we hit upon the idea of “turning up the house lights” where we would make all the attendees of the webinars into panelists for the Q&A session—allowing them to ask their own questions directly and also permitting them to see anyone else in the session with their camera



Grand Theatre Rigging Renovation with Rick Boychuk and Paul Fujimoto-Pihl

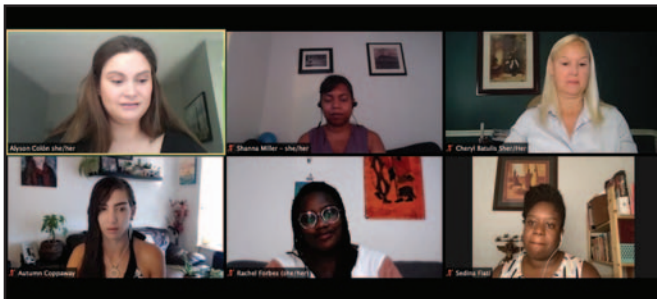
turned on. We found this approach to bring the “best of both worlds” allowing the presenter to concentrate on their presentation during the main session, but have a great sense of interaction for the Q&A.

Our next challenge is to work out how we plan to make the recordings of the sessions available to the membership. We weren't able to record all of the sessions for various reasons but we have a permanent record of about 75% of them. That isn't yet resolved and again, we will be learning as we go.

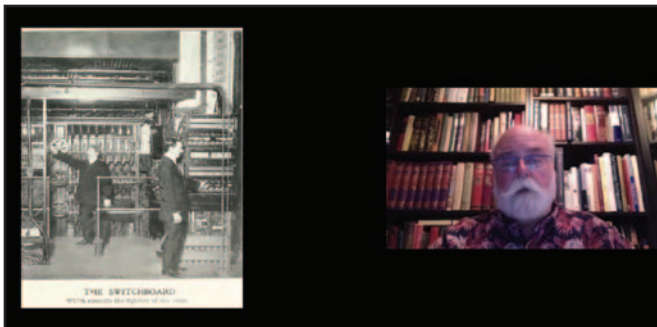
Overall, while the online conference was eventually quite different from the in-person conference we had originally envisaged, it was overall a success, due to the hard work and dedication of the organizing team. We learned a lot about both the mechanics and the philosophy of presenting a conference online and we hope to use that knowledge next year, where hopefully we will be presenting Rendez-vous 2021 in a hybrid online/in-person format, which we



Tom Patterson Theatre tour with Greg Dougherty from Stratford Festival



Hiring for Diversity panel clockwise from the top left: Alyson Colón, Shanna Miller, Cheryl Batulis, Autumn Coppaway, Rachel Forbes, and Sedina Fiati



Whistling in the Theatre with Peter McKinnon

are sure will have a whole new set of challenges!

CITT/ICTS wishes to thank all the presenters, the panelists, and the moderators for their contribution to the programming, and its sponsors for their support of Rendez-vous becoming virtual: GerrAudio Distribution, Novita Techne, University of Toronto and Sheridan College Theatre and Drama Studies Program, GC Stage Equipment Ltd., Moose Rigging, NewRoads Performing Arts Centre and the Town of Newmarket, and Theatre Alberta. ■



Matt Frankish is the new President of CITT/ICTS. Originally from the UK, he lives near Toronto, ON. After 20 years working as a theatre technician and technical director, he now serves as a Theatre Consultant, designing new and renovating older theatres and other performance spaces.