



CONNECTing to address a generational crisis



“Women in Sound” panel discussion with moderator Emma Alderman, featuring panelists Emily Porter, Kate Glen, Deanna Choi, and Kaitlyn MacKinnon.

IT WAS JANUARY 2020, the sun was shining, the snow was falling, and the Ontario Section of CITT/ICTS was hosting its annual networking and professional development event CONNECT in Toronto. The winter season of theatre was in full-swing, concerts and sporting events were playing to sell-out crowds, schools were running at full capacity, and the summer theatres were hard at work preparing for a busy season. Fast forward three years, and the landscape looks very different. There is a clear and urgent need for high-quality professional development programming in our industry, which is where CONNECT 2023 comes in.

Our industry is facing a generational crisis.

First, the pandemic hit right at the time when our most experienced members were preparing to hand over the reins to the

next generation of technicians, craftspeople, and leaders. We were already critically unprepared for the generational shift, but the pandemic caused us to lose much of the crucial time we had left for that knowledge transfer.

Second, the students graduating from our theatre schools lost a significant amount of in-person, hands-on learning. Our industry distinguishes itself from film and TV production by virtue of its live and in-person nature. It is very difficult to learn and teach those necessary skills by remote learning. The students coming out of schools are just as bright and keen and dedicated as ever, but they are missing some critical hands-on time in their craft. These issues are compounded by declining enrollment (it requires serious dedication to enroll in a program for an industry that specializes in gathering large groups of people closely together, in the middle of a



“Boots & Shoes” tutorial led by Connie Puetz.



“ETC EOS Console Training” with instructor Mikael Kangas.



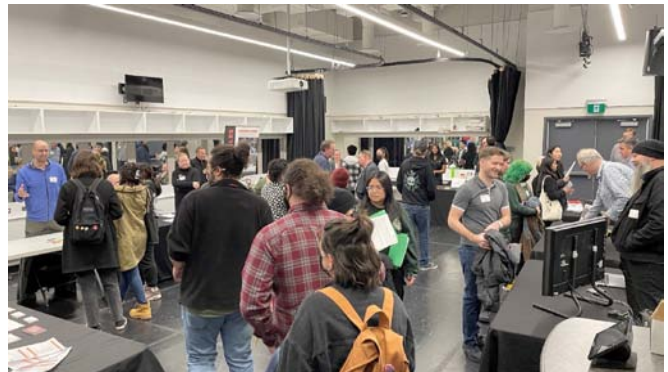
“Yamaha Rivage Console and Sound Design” featured John Lott and Kaitlyn MacKinnon.



“DiGiCo SD Console Training” led by Ian Robertson and Adrian Sterling.



“QLAB 5 Audio Training” with instructor Craig Kadoke.



The Job Fair was held at Toronto Metropolitan University School of Performance.

pandemic), and the threat of downsizing or elimination.

Third, we lost a number of mid-career members to the film and TV industry, which is booming in Ontario in particular. These are the people who would be shepherding emerging professionals on their first days, weeks, and years on the job, teaching them the ropes, and keeping them safe.

Finally, the people that remained in the industry quickly became overstretched, needing to fill in vacant roles, and train new, less experienced staff at the same time as doing their own jobs. People have started to burn out. We urgently need to address all of these issues to stabilize our industry and ensure that it continues to thrive



The Job Fair drew a large crowd during CONNECT 2023.

for generations to come.

It was with these challenges in mind that we programmed CONNECT 2023, held January 6 – 8 at the Toronto Metropolitan University School of Performance. We deliberately focused on the most in-demand skills, like sound and lighting console training. Our Job Fair was well attended, with a record number of employers looking to fill vacant roles. We also held some entry level sessions on what to expect on your first day on a call, ground rigging basics, and setting up AV for breakout rooms. All told, we had more than 100 people attend these sessions, gain valuable skills, and network with their colleagues.

We are grateful for the support of our industry partners, including CITT/ICTS National Office, USITT, IATSE Local 58, IATSE Canada, Gerr Audio, Phase3 AV, Bespoke AudioVisual, Christie Lites, PSI, Shaw Festival, Toronto Metropolitan University, and the Government of Canada through the Canada Performing Arts Workers Resilience Fund.

Finally, I'd like to thank the Board of Directors of the Ontario Section of CITT/ICTS, and the conference staff. It is a lot of work to put together a conference, and I am grateful for the hundreds of volunteer hours the board put in to make this very important event happen. ■



Paul Fujimoto-Pihl (he/him) is the Director of Production and Operations at the Grand Theatre in London, ON. He recently served as project manager for its newly-completed \$9-million renovation. Prior to the Grand, he was technical director at Tarragon Theatre and the Blyth Festival.

Paul is Chair of the Ontario Section of CITT/ICTS, Director of PMArts, and serves on the PAC for the Theatre Arts – Technical Production program at Humber College and the PAC for the Technical Production for the Performing Arts Industry program at Sheridan College. Paul is passionate about provide learning opportunities for all levels of professionals working in production, and is a champion of the apprenticeship programs at the Grand.

About CONNECT

Bringing together professionals from across the industry, students from multiple post-secondary programs, employers, vendors, and manufacturers, CONNECT seeks to build bridges within the live entertainment industry in the Ontario region. From the ever-popular Job Fair, where students (and professionals) can find their next gig, to educational sessions on the latest hot topics in the industry, there is something for everyone.

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