

Case Studies 2020

Design and Results of Online Conferences

March 2021

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The Project Team

The BC Museums Association and Heritage BC have embarked together on *Future Perfect*, led by Inga Petri, [Strategic Moves](#) with invaluable support from Lynn Feasey, [Points North Consulting](#), and Jason Guille, [Stream Of Consciousness](#) and Felicity Buckell.

The project took place from July 2020 to March 2021.

Documents Available

There are a series of three documents available online at

<https://digitalartsnation.ca/digital-playbook/how-to-create-awesome-online-conferences/>

1. Your Guide to Creating Awesome Online Conferences
2. Case Studies – Design and Results of Online Conference 2020

<https://digitalartsnation.ca/digital-playbook/how-to-design-events-for-blended-audiences/>

3. A New Breed: Blended/Hybrid Conferences and Events

A project undertaken in partnership with



Land Acknowledgement: *As organizations of provincial scope, we recognize that our members, and the local history and heritage they seek to preserve, occupy the lands and territories of B.C.'s Indigenous peoples. We ask our members to reflect on the places where they reside and work, and to respect the diversity of cultures and experiences that form the richness of our provincial fabric.*

We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.



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BCMA2020 Virtual Conference: A Case Study

Online Conference Design and Results

By Lynn Feasey ([Points North Creative](#)) and Inga Petri ([Strategic Moves](#)) in conversation with Ryan Hunt and Vanessa Gelhaar (BCMA), December 2020

In July 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the British Columbia Museums Association (BCMA), in partnership with Heritage BC, launched a project titled: *Future Perfect*. Canada Council for the Arts funded this project to research, develop and test new models of online, blended, and physical conferences in the Arts, Culture and Heritage Sector.

The main objective of *Future Perfect* is to learn how to create awesome online experiences for people, and for the organizations who present them. In conversation with Vanessa Gelhaar, Operations Manager and Conference Organizer for BCMA, and from the post-conference participant survey, many valuable insights were gleaned from the BCMA's 2020 Annual Conference.

About BCMA

For over 50 years, the British Columbia Museums Association (BCMA) has worked to create a bright future for British Columbia's museum, gallery, and related heritage communities through networking, advocacy, innovation, and professional development. BCMA delivers year-round programs and services to the benefit of its members and the sector at large, acting as the cultural and heritage information hub for British Columbia while providing a unified voice for the institutions, trustees, professional staff and volunteers. BCMA also delivers an annual conference in service to its members, and non-members alike, which is the subject of this case study.

Conference Design & Delivery

BCMA moved their annual fall conference online as a response to the uncertainty for in-person events due to COVID-19. BCMA has been successfully delivering professional development webinars online and felt confident moving the conference online rather than cancelling it. The team committed to delivering the type of conference that their membership has come to expect, including two social events: *Tales from the Trenches*, to open the conference, along with the *BCMA Awards Gala*, to close the conference.

BCMA's key objectives

- to create connection and meaningful engagement
- to keep the technology simple, and
- to make the 2020 Conference a memorable, special experience which they could learn from

BCMA chose a programming format that closely reflected past conferences (without most of the regular social networking opportunities). Knowing their membership, they felt any big changes would be best managed slowly.

Dates: October 6-8, 2020

Duration: 3 days

Platform: Zoom

Day 1: 1 hour conference kick off

Day 2: 4 hours conference material & 1 ¼ hours break time

Day 3: 4 hours conference material & 1 ¼ hours break time & 1 ½ hours gala

Registration: Through existing membership portal

Cost: Free to members and non-members for 2020 (a COVID-19 response)

Lessons Learned

Registration Increased Due to Digital Access, Relevant Programming and No Costs

Moving the conference online and removing registration fees opened the conference up to virtually anyone interested and able to join. Registration for the 2020 Conference more than doubled from previous years (140% higher than in 2019). In the post-conference evaluation online survey, 39% of survey respondents reported attending the BCMA Conference for the first time in 2020.

Asked about why survey respondents decided to attend this time, the four most cited motivators were that they could attend digitally (83%), the professional development sessions (68%), featured speakers/experts/panelists (66%) and no registration fee (63%). Networking was a motivator for only 26% of survey respondents.

When asked what has been a barrier or challenge to attending in-person conferences in the past, cost (registration, transportation and accommodation) was cited by 69%, followed by location of the conference (52%), time away from work (46%) and travel time required (37%). These results make clear that an online conference format can alleviate these barriers to attendance.

Lesson: In the future, BCMA wishes to use the registration process to capture more information about who is signing up for the conference. BCMA also wants to better understand audience motivation for registering / attending when designing future programming.

Effective Use of Online Video Conferencing Technology

The team wanted to keep the technology straightforward. Using Zoom meant participants were already familiar with the platform which reduced the learning curve an integrated online conferencing platform would have presented. Although the platform itself was stable – and 63% of survey respondents reported “no issues” – BCMA did have quality issues with audio and video files during screen shares that disrupted content delivery. About 1 in 5 survey respondents struggled with their internet connection: 18% cited

their slower internet connection as a frustration “because video and/or audio quality was poor” and another 7% reported keeping their video turned off due to low bandwidth.

Lesson: In the future, having pre-recorded material at suitable video resolution for reliable playback for lower bandwidth and slower speed internet networks may be an option to help avoid these issues and keep the conference schedule on track.

Global management functions within breakout rooms were limited. In particular, BCMA did not have the option to have co-hosts help manage breakout interactions. However, being able to monitor and see immediate engagement, particularly during social events was useful.

Asked how effectively various technical aspects of the online conference were used, breakout groups were seen as effective by only about half the respondents (53%), while using chat to participate was effective for 74%, only exceeded by screen sharing of presentation slides which 86% felt was effective.

Lesson: Make a clear determination about the purpose of breakout groups for various sessions/activities and then experiment with ways to manage the breakout room experiences more effectively. Many options exist including providing tools and tasks for self-facilitation by participants, for instance using online worksheets, white-boarding tools; or assigning volunteer or staff moderators. Consider various ways to capture the breakout room experience, if useful for reporting on conference proceedings, such as enabling a moderator to record the breakout on their computer, using written output from worksheets or white boarding tools; or using a verbal or chat window to report back after breakouts.

A large majority (88%) felt the visual layering of speakers, screen sharing presentations and seeing participant videos on their screens was effective use of the technology. 63% felt having live transcription/captioning available during a session was effective, but 84% felt having access to transcripts and chat recordings afterwards was an effective use of technology.

Session links versus a single conference link

BCMA set up each conference session with its own unique Zoom meeting link. That then required clear and effective communications to ensure all registered participants would know where to log on. 16% of survey respondents cited difficulty in finding these links. They would have preferred to have one link to all sessions, or links contained in one email, conference web page or scheduling tool.

In short, effective communications before and during an online conference are essential to ensure participants aren't left scrambling for the most basic need: the necessary log on information.

Lesson: A more reliable way to manage participant schedules will be important to ensure effortless, easy access and attendance. This can be a combination of: a single conference web page for participants on the BCMA website, re-emailing links before each session, or using an integrated online conference platform that manages the conference schedule and sends alerts to registered participants within the platform itself.

Managing the Schedule Requires New Level of Collaboration with Speakers

As an online conference experience, the program must now come to the participant. There is no longer the physical sense of arrival to ground participants and keep them and the speakers on track.

For online events, speakers must prepare in ways they did not need to before, and opportunities must be made for engagement in order to keep participants focused and interested. In 2020, conference organizers found that keeping speakers to their allotted time was challenging.

Lesson: BCMA will be reviewing the role of the speaker, how they interact with participants, the quality of presentations, and how they can best prepare and present the speakers to maximize their effectiveness. A post-event speakers' survey could be useful in gaining insight from their perspective.

Engaging Topics and Activities

Sessions were well attended, and most sessions and activities were seen to be of high or very high quality.

The most effective programming, according to registration and post conference survey responses, were topics related to current issues within the industry. *Beyond the Black Squares*, a bold and honest discussion led by Indigenous, Black and Persons of Colour (IBPOC) museum professionals was the best attended, most engaging session. This was followed closely by a roundtable on *Decolonization*, with a large majority of participants citing having learned something new, learned a lot, and being ready to take action.

Had these discussions only been offered in person, it would have been limited to the voices who were able to travel and fund attending, limiting engagement as well as the opportunity to simply listen. The online conference allowed people from a greater range of diverse backgrounds, age groups, and professional levels to participate, thus broadening the conversations and expanding viewpoints on these important topics.

Perhaps a result of this relevant and engaging content, 63% felt that the session length (most sessions were 1 hour long) was just right and 37% felt they were too short. No one felt sessions were too long.

Lesson: Content remains king. However, the strength of online conferences is the opportunity to create some new spaces for purposeful reflection in response to specific topics and sessions throughout the program. This could support participants to take action in their organizations. Specific times for facilitated networking is another opportunity for connection and peer learning.

Social Events

Conference organizers noticed that popular social events from previous, in-person conferences did not translate as well to the online format as some learning sessions. According to registration information, both social events drew less than half of the attendance compared to the average conference session.

Used to book-end the online conference schedule, *Tales from the Trenches* and the *Awards Gala* were considered valuable by the conference team. Both events are signature social events for the annual conference and, by including them in the online format, were meant to provide a sense of continuity and connection in a year of massive change. It was important to provide participants with a means to connect with their peers across the province, which was evidenced in a rapidly moving chat within the Zoom meeting during these social sessions.

To close the conference, BCMA hosted an online *Awards Gala*. In a year fraught with much uncertainty and change, it was important to honour peers and celebrate together. Most importantly, they wanted

the evening to feel special. The gala took place from 6:00-7:30 pm. A signature cocktail, created by a local distillery, and shared in advance with participants was created especially for the event and prepared by the evening's hosts, BCMA Executive Director Ryan Hunt and Program Coordinator Lorenda Calvert. Those who attended enjoyed the experience and reported a high rate of satisfaction, however attendance was lower than expected.

Lesson: In the future, BCMA may experiment with integrating social events throughout the conference program to keep people engaged in the conference mindset/experience, while keeping energy high.

Future Conference Format Considerations

BCMA's 2020 online conference experiment returned many valuable insights.

One relates to the design of the overall conference day. In the post-conference online survey the question about breaks returned important information (Question: "Some sessions took place back-to-back while others were run with an hour long break between sessions. What is your preferred time in between sessions to encourage you to attend all sessions that you are interested in?"). 73% preferred a short break of 15 to 30 minutes between sessions. 16% preferred a longer break (45 to 60 minutes) and 11% preferred back-to-back sessions.

Some survey respondents also encouraged ongoing conversations outside of the conference about hot topics, such as decolonization and the experiences of IBPOC people and how museums relate to these communities.

When asked about the format (Question: "This year, we had a total of 8 professional development sessions over two conference days. Ideally, how would you prefer us to deliver our annual conference?") 34% said they would want it exactly as it was done in 2020 because it was great. But there was also a desire for alternatives: 1) 27% said they would prefer stretching this conference into a one week conference with no more than two sessions each day and a long enough break in between them; and 2) 25% said they'd wish there had been spaces to talk about calls to action arising from some of these sessions.

The shift from pre-conference survey results to post-conference results requires some consideration here. The highest ranked format preference was a weekly session (35%), but that dropped to 5% after the BCMA conference. Instead a 2-day format which was the second choice pre-conference has been elevated to first choice; while the previous third choice, a one week conference with no more than two sessions and a long break, has moved to second choice.

In terms of length of sessions, pre-conference the one-hour format ranked highest for most kinds of sessions, with longer times possible if they include collaborative working sessions, and shorter if they are strictly networking. The post-conference feedback pointing to the one-hour format having worked well and in some cases being felt to have been short attests to the power of relevant content and speakers.

Finally, the question about “All things being equal would you prefer attending our annual conference virtually or in person?” shows that nearly as many respondents prefer a virtual conference (51% yes; 43% it depends) as an in-person conference (53% yes, 45% it depends).

“A virtual conference means that you can have an increased diversity in presenters from all corners of the province. Also, moving forward, it would be unlikely for me to get the time off work and the financing to attend it in person. Having it online missed the in-person networking benefit, but drastically increased accessibility, affordability, and educational value.” Survey respondent

“I would prefer attending the in-person conference but am not always able to because of time commitment and the cost. Sometimes I can come, sometimes I can't. For those times when I can't attend in person, it would be neat if the conference was simultaneously available virtually (if it were possible!). Certainly, if the BCMA organizes other virtual conference (i.e. instead of an in-person conference), I would absolutely attend, at least for the sessions I could fit into my schedule.” Survey respondent

“Virtual was good in a pinch, but I miss seeing friends and colleagues in person. Perhaps a hybrid model in the future would be interesting to explore? In the past, some of the conference locations have been inaccessible to attend for us, so then at least we could participate online if we can't make it in person.” Survey respondent

Toward a blended conference model: This feedback points indeed toward considering adopting a blended conference model, where there is both a live audience and an online audience.

The Bottom Line

BCMA learned a lot from planning and delivering its 2020 Conference. Amongst these lessons, it is clear that in-person connection cannot easily be replaced online, yet gathering online opens up new and exciting opportunities in terms of accessibility, affordability, and building a larger engaged community.

Hosting a physical conference, BCMA's attendance is somewhat limited, as organizations often register only one or two representatives, usually those in a senior management or board role. This is primarily due to the associated costs, and time away from the organization. The online conference format provides an opportunity for emerging professionals, junior staff, volunteers and other staff members to listen, learn and be included in any of the conference events they feel is relevant or important to their work.

This type of inclusion creates opportunities: More open access contributed to the higher registration, attendance, and perhaps engagement with some important sessions. This broader engagement can have significant positive impact on outcomes in the sector.

Gaining a larger audience also poses some challenges. One of BCMA's strategic priorities is outreach to smaller, more remote communities across the province of BC – one of the ways they achieve this is by hosting the conference in different cities across BC. In light of the lessons from 2020, BCMA will rethink how to best serve their members and consider whether and how they can successfully offer a blended in-person / online conference experience.

BCMA will need to look at programming to reflect the needs of new and growing audience. BCMA will also consider redesigning their registration and survey forms to collect more accurate, targeted data as to who is attending sessions, what their motivation is, and what their needs are.

“Well done! The fact that this conference was free was great. I would still have been willing to pay a reduced fee to attend sessions if you had charged it. Just a thought for the future because I imagine that while this is cheaper to offer than a face-to-face conference, I'm sure there are costs for the BCMA and I don't want you to go broke!” Survey respondent

Contact(less) East 2020: A Case Study

Online Performing Arts Conference Design and Results

By Lynn Feasey ([Points North Creative](#)). In conversation with Atlantic Presenters Association's

Executive Director Laurie Gillis, and Manager of Operations and Programs, Lisa Gleave. February 2021

About Contact East

Contact East is the Atlantic Presenters Association's (APA) hallmark event and Atlantic Canada's premiere performing arts booking conference. For over 45 years, this conference has brought together performing arts presenters and new and in-demand, tour-ready arts performers to showcase contemporary and classical music, dance, theatre, and youth-oriented programming. Since 2001, the conference has been successfully run by APA. Catering primarily to regional artists, this conference represents significant professional development and live showcasing for performing artists, presenters, managers and agents from across the globe.

Considered among peers as a 'do-not-miss' conference, many plan their year around the conference, relying on in-person networking and professional development opportunities.

In the performing arts ecosystem, personal relations are paramount. Presenters rely on live showcases to gauge how their live audiences may receive a particular artist or group. Agents meet artists, artists meet one another – the industry relies heavily on this event to cultivate and foster relationships.

Event components include high quality showcases, provocative speakers, professional development sessions, informal meetings and networking. Contact East provides an essential and inspiring experience for delegates, who encompass Canadian and International showcasing artists, performing arts presenters, managers, and agents from regional, national and international levels.

Conference Design & Delivery

Planned for September 2020, Contact East was set to host an in-person symposium and performing arts showcasing marketplace in Halifax, NS. Rather than postpone this annual hallmark event, APA decided to reimagine the conference, and move it online, to host Contact (Less) East. “Doing nothing was not an option”, stated APA’s Executive Director, Laurie Gillis.

Key Conference Objectives

1. to connect the sector when they weren’t able to gather
2. to provide meaningful professional development opportunities that did not necessarily focus on the pandemic
3. to produce an event that served the needs of current members

<p>What changed</p> <p>Platform: Conference moved online using Zoom</p> <p>Conference Fees: Reduced</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Past in-person conference: \$350 member and \$400 non-member / per delegate ▪ Online conference: \$50 / per organization <p>Schedule/Program: Professional Development only</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Showcases were not included (normally about 35 performing arts groups are showcased) ▪ Four professional development sessions over two days ▪ Two social events 	<p>What stayed the same</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Registration service: Ticket Pro ▪ Conference Communications: in-house ▪ Duration of professional development sessions ▪ Opportunities to ‘gather’ socially
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Funding Future Events

Organizers exceeded their expected revenues from online registration by \$1,000, for a total of \$3,500, as compared to \$25,000 for in-person registration fees. However, registration for the online conference did not cover the expenses, nor was there any sponsorship funding for 2020. Funding from the provinces was also diminished due to funding programs being frozen at that time. While APA was able to shift budget to cover the overall expenses, they did not receive the funding they would normally get for travel expenses, to spend on other activities.

This will need to be looked at for future blended conferences. Expenses incurred for the online version will need to be covered. At this time, it is unknown what this looks like in terms of offering both an in-person and online showcase conference. What type of expenses will funders cover? Will it be feasible to offer a blended event in the future? What opportunities exist now, that did not before COVID-19? What new opportunities are arising? What needs to be done now, in terms of advocacy, logistics and developing new event production skill sets, to address these questions?

Lessons Learned

Programming

Since a large part of Contact East is about showcasing and networking, APA had to shift gears in terms of the program they offered for the 2020 conference. They made a decision to focus on topics surrounding social justice/change in the performing arts and found innovative ways to connect people socially. The choice to spread the presentations over two days, to be mindful of people’s tolerance of screen time, proved to be a good decision.

“Two sessions per day would be about all I could take in of a web conference. This was paced perfectly.”

Contact(less) East participant

While the pandemic made it impossible to physically present showcases in 2020, COVID-19 did not drive the content of their programming. The conference team reviewed past survey responses, met with their professional development committee and landed on a conference program that balanced learning opportunities with highly relevant topics, such as social justice/change through arts presentation. The program was fairly straightforward to deliver through Zoom, leaving any significant technical issues from more complex event tools aside.

“Enlightening topics and unique points of view expressed. I don’t know where (else) I could have this engagement experience in Nova Scotia right now.”

Contact(less) East participant

Lesson: When organizers shift programming dramatically, it is important to choose highly relevant programming that addresses the practical needs and challenges of the community, and maximizes the opportunities of having everyone together in the same digital space.

Lesson: Event organizers can plan more of your conference requirements upfront, particularly around audience size and accessibility, by asking more detailed questions at the registration stage.

Review and update your registration process

APA has an established registration process through Ticket Pro, which they continued to use. Even though registrants received the login information directly via an “online ticket”, many felt the process was ‘a bit clunky.’ As a result, APA and Ticket Pro plan to make the process easier for future events.

Having organizations register versus each individual participant within an organization, they were unsure of the size and variety of their audience. Having this knowledge would allow for effective use of break out rooms in future, along with better informing speakers of who their audience is.

2020 Online Registration:

167 individuals from 77 organizations.

Revenue: \$3,500

Pre-Covid Target

Registration: 180

Revenue: \$25,000

They attribute the success of registered attendees being able to sign in and follow the schedule, to regular pre-conference communications. APA sent out emails about 10 days beforehand, along with reminders and sending the links on the morning of each day. In addition, the ticketing system they use, Ticket Pro, also sends out the information, so it can be found in two places.

Because this is a close-knit community, people feel comfortable to reach out to staff if they can't find a link or if they are missing information. Dedicated staff are on call prior to start times to manage any last-minute requests.

Accessibility

The immediate need to move online highlighted the importance of digital accessibility. APA is committed to ensuring content is accessible to everyone.

Post-pandemic, APA plans to continue offering online content and will need to look into digital accessibility aids such as ASL, closed captioning, screen readers speech to text software, so this does not become a last-minute request to providers or an afterthought. Identifying needs upfront during the registration process will help service the needs of participants and is part of APA's commitment to normalize the use/need of aids for participants.

Another step APA is taking to normalize accessibility, is to have session leaders provide a description of themselves for visually impaired participants.

"We're now looking ahead to a blended conference model where some attendees participate in person and others participate digitally. Even if an organization can't afford to send more than one delegate in person, the same sessions would be available online, and everyone can have a voice at the table, put their comments in the chat, and have their questions and comments be part of the bigger discussion taking place in a physical room", explains Lisa Gleave.

Another major issue that APA faces, is highly variable internet connectivity across the four Atlantic provinces. From satellite internet in Labrador, to parts of Nova Scotia that are in dead zones, there is no equitable internet access. This makes full digital participation unreliable, and for some, impossible. While organizers don't have an answer yet, they are exploring creative options and will add this ongoing issue to their organization's advocacy list.

Lesson: Organizers of online conferences and events cannot assume everyone has an internet connection. Contact East will be looking into creative ways to allow people to connect, such as providing satellite venues close to where people are, while following the necessary COVID protocols of physical distancing.

The Online Space Can Help Remove Social Barriers

Often during conferences, people tend to gravitate to people they know, especially in a tight knit industry such as performing arts. First time attendees can feel intimidated and end up being more of a spectator than a participant. In the online space, everyone stays together, forming deeper, richer connections after having spent significant time together.

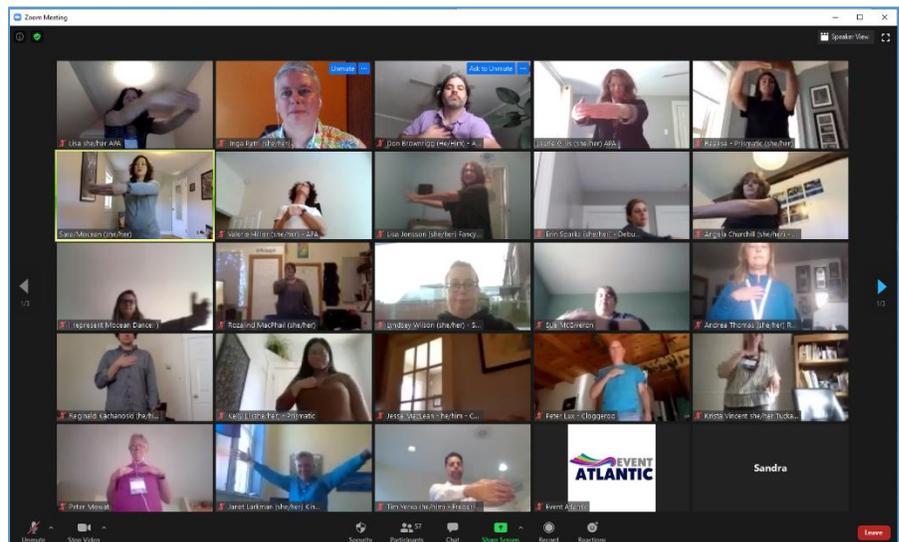
Similarly, participants got to know the organizers better as the design of this online experience removed a barrier that can exist in a physical conference with its hived off event management office.

Fostering Social Connection

It was important for the conference organizers to foster a sense of connection and social engagement - something expected and anticipated during a performing arts presenting conference. By choosing to experiment with a couple of different elements that would normally happen in person, they felt they were able to achieve this.

Organizers mailed the regular conference bags to each participant, to provide a tangible, tactile sense of arrival. This was well received, however not all people received their packages on time. Mailing earlier may have been a solution, but with a postal backlog due to COVID-19, this was beyond anyone’s control.

Programming was centered around relevant and timely issues that engaged participants in discussion, thus connecting people.



Guided movement breaks were used to start off each workshop.

Breaking Bread Together, and Celebrating

Social events such as a *Bring Your Own Pasta Dinner*, and a live art show, custom-designed by Halifax-based production company HEIST, was designed to bring people together to share, to celebrate, and to have fun.

“Sharing a meal is a simple and natural human way to connect. The pasta dinner was a surprising success that generated a feeling of warmth. You wouldn’t have shown up if you didn’t want to make yourself a pasta

“The closing party was the best ever. Disco lights! Costumes! Wigs! The greatest events group ever, Heist! A+++”
Contact(less) East participant

dish and hang out and play some ice breakers, have a few laughs, and glass of wine or whatever you chose”, explained Lisa Gleave.

The innovative live-streamed show featured a DJ set, live performances, a lip sync roulette and more, and was a resounding success. Moreover, the creativity and excitement generated from the show, really proved that there are some great things that can be done virtually, perhaps offering some renewed hope.

In a blended conference model, it becomes tricky to offer a social experience to both the online and in-person audience. What made the pasta dinner special was the fact that the people wanted to be there.

Lesson: Those who are looking for connection and socialization will show up. Be sure to create a place for that connection to happen.

Bottom Line

In the performing arts ecosystem, personal relations are paramount. Live presentation requires live interaction. Presenters come to discover showcase artists, agents meet artists, artists meet one another, the whole industry interacts, and this conference relies heavily on cultivating and fostering relationships.

APA has learned that the online conference model provides an affordable, accessible opportunity for emerging professionals, junior staff, volunteers and other staff members to listen, learn and be included in any of the conference events they feel is relevant or important to their work. As APA saw an increase in participation from organizations (additional staff/board), they will ensure the online option remains available.

While the conference experienced some surprising successes in its 2020 edition, for this industry, the value of in-person connection cannot be understated. While the online model will be useful as a secondary method of attendance, ideally, they aim to return their focus to hosting an in-person conference when possible.

“This was my first time attending and I thought you did a truly terrific job. I was so impressed by everything, from the sessions to the people to the cheeky title this year. There was an amazing balance of meaningful and sometimes challenging conversations and also so many fun moments.”

Contact(less) East participant

Performance and XR: An Experimental Conference

Delivering a Performing Arts Conference about Virtual Reality in Virtual Reality

By Felicity Buckell in conversation with Liam Karry, PXR2020, November 2020

Edited by Inga Petri ([Strategic Moves/ipetri@strategicmoves.ca](mailto:ipetri@strategicmoves.ca))

As part of our research into how to design awesome online conferences, workshops, and events, we spoke with Liam Karry, one of the founding directors of the [Single Thread Theatre Company](#), based in Kingston, Ontario.

Earlier this year, Single Thread, led by Symposium Director Alex Dault, partnered with the [Electric Company Theatre](#) to host [PXR2020](#), a performing arts meets virtual reality conference. Over two weekends in October 2020, Canadian artists and digital content creators entered a virtual world to interact and discuss how they are using extended reality in the creation of live performance.

Inception

Single Thread has been pioneering immersive storytelling techniques in site-specific, non-traditional



spaces since its founding in 2003. For the past decade Single Thread has been exploring the emerging media of XR—'extended reality' include technologies comprising the spectrum of real-and-virtual environments and interactions, including augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and mixed reality—as a means of creating immersive theatre experiences.

Several years ago, immersive theatre began shifting from the fringes toward centre stage. Concurrently, XR technologies were becoming increasingly available and affordable to consumers; around 2015, VR headsets became available for under \$1,000. It was this convergence, Liam describes, which sparked Alex's idea to hold a Virtual Reality Symposium for Canadian artists and XR technologies, exploring creation and performance in XR.

In partnership with the [Centre for Entertainment Arts \(Langara College\)](#), the [Vancouver VR Community](#), and [Outside the March Theatre Company](#), [Toasterlab](#), [Cohort](#), and [Playground Studios](#), PXR2020 (Performance and XR 2020) was born, with support from the [Canada Council for the Arts](#).

“The synergy between the VR environment and theatre is exciting, as theatre people know how to animate space, create narratives, and celebrate the human elements of location... and the technologists have their own skill set. This community creates the environment where both sides see the value of what the other side is offering,” Liam explains.

Real space (virtually)

Creating an approximation of real space in the virtual conference world was at the forefront of the event’s design. “We suspected that the real value to this would be providing an approximation of space,” says Liam, “with spatialized sounds, having to walk from room to room, going over there, stepping through this door, having someone say ‘back up, you’re too close to the stage.’ We wanted people walking and talking.”

Attendees saw the conference world from a first person perspective, with others seeing them as a digital avatar.

Interactive Immersion

With a VR headset connected to WiFi, participants used VR social applications to enter a three dimensional space online, using whiteboard markers to draw, watch presentations, experience VR artwork firsthand, and explore gallery and museum spaces.

Participants could pick up objects and pass them to others; they were able sit down beside someone, get up and walk into another room and leave the group, but still be aware of their presence.

Based on the reoccurring comment in post-conference feedback that ‘the best part of the conference was that we got to run into other people in the hallways’, it was a resounding success.



Approaching the stage during the workshop on [Cultivating and Audience for Digital Exploration and Innovation](#).

Strong Interest Meant Capping Registration

Hoping for about 70 participants, the innovative platform and broad array of programming quickly piqued the interest of over 100 individuals: artists from across disciplines who have worked with XR media (or want to), technologists (XR and other digital content creators, programmers, video game designers), educators, and curious minds alike. At that point, Liam noted, “we needed to limit the numbers because of the nature of the environment of the virtual world; the mechanics are not set up for giant auditoriums... and the best learning happens when there are 10 or 20 of us, when we can turn to one another and say ‘how are you?’”



Gathering around the campfire during the workshop on XR Performance Creation Experiment with Beth Kates.

Making Connection

Reviewing the [PXR2020 archival videos](#), one gets a feel for this; scenes include folks chatting on the balcony, sitting on the floor, and gathering around a campfire.

As Liam notes, being in this virtual space, purposefully crafted to approximate physical space and with spatialized sound, “...is so satisfying. You know it’s not real, you know you have a headset on, but it feels like you’re actually sitting around a fire with friends. It feels like a community in a way that a screen with pictures of faces just doesn’t. Emotionally, you are there.”

To approximate after-hours networking aspects, auxiliary programming included opportunities for spontaneous human to human connections to take place; during the weekdays between conference weekends, attendees could go world hopping, jump into silly worlds to play laser tag, or just hang out.



Tethering to the ‘warping orb’ from the balcony in preparation to jump together into another world.

Post-conference: building an enticing VR community

The community continues to develop. Since the conference PXR2020 has been hosting monthly events, “so the discourse remains active,” says Liam. Although intended as a means to connect Canadian performing artists and technologists, people from New York and Europe are knocking at the door of this innovative VR community.

And just about anybody can come in. Although it is very early days for the VR performing arts scene, conversations have begun around accessibility. Currently, one of the most significant barriers remains the price for the play back technology, the VR headset. In 2015, the price of headsets dipped below the \$1,000 barrier; in late 2020 they are around \$500.

“One of the joys of the global XR community,” Liam notes, “is the widespread dedication and advocacy for accessibility and inclusion, similar to that which existed in the early internet. There is an expectation that all those involved have an obligation to do the work required for XR experiences to be universally welcoming.”

Bottom Line: It’s About People

Single Thread Theatre, along with a few others across Canada, have been on a trajectory into the digital scene for almost a decade; the Covid-19 pandemic merely accelerated it. Along with great partners, Single Thread and Electric Theatre worked diligently to develop an amazing online conference that is making waves across the globe, the impact of which will no doubt extend far beyond the pandemic.

And so we can be assured that when designing awesome digital conferences and workshops, be they through a web browser using online video conferencing tools or in virtual reality, the key remains: set the stage for meaningful human connection, interactions, and learning to take place.

Liam concludes, “*people* are the best part of the VR experience.”

Possible and Impossible Spaces to Gather: A Case Study

By Rebecca Ballarin (she/her) and Laurel Green (she/her). February 2021



Rebecca Ballarin (she/her) and [Laurel Green](#) (she/her) are the Digital Catalyst Team for [Pat the Dog Theatre Creation](#) (PTD). In November 2020, we programmed and facilitated [Together But Apart: Digital Conference on Touring Theatre in Northern Ontario](#); blending digital tools with the use of physical materials and sensorial prompts to deliver a conference via Zoom that was participant-led, valued presence, energized conversations, and forged connections. PTD then served us our next challenge: to design and produce online their upcoming [Femme Folks Festival](#) (FFF).

FFF is a grassroots new works festival for femme-identifying creators in Kitchener-Waterloo that was first launched by Pat the Dog in March 2020. Envisioned as a month-long festival, it ran for one week before all events were suspended as the pandemic began. FFF 2021 will focus on opportunities for regional artists through professional development workshops, residencies, and the platforming of new works in process, including a site-specific, collectively created piece, *The Vintage Project*. Originally conceived as an immersive theatrical experience that welcomes audiences into Auburn Vintage Clothiers, this is a collaboration between six members of Pat the Dog's [Women's Room](#). *The Vintage Project* explores the connection between women's stories, women's clothing, and the ethos behind buying vintage, while piloting a collaborative model for femme-identifying creators animating femme-owned businesses in Waterloo region.

To translate this immersive promenade-style performance piece (think Punchdrunk's [Sleep No More](#)) to a virtual realm, we decided to move away from Zoom and re-conceptualize *The Vintage Project* using Gather; enabling the piece to be presented online during FFF for an audience, while maintaining the environmental, multisensory, choose-your-own adventure elements.

[Gather](#) is a web-browser based virtual platform that combines video-calling with a 2D map that you can explore as an Avatar. It renders familiar places into pixel art video game spaces; from apartments to parks, conference halls to beaches, bars, offices, and limitless customizable worlds. The site offers playful opportunities to build your own space, invite your (up to) 2,000 friends, and have smaller conversations through a proximity chat function where you speak to those you are closest to, and move around to start new conversations as you desire. Gather more closely approximates social behaviour, and gives you a space to explore, unlike Zoom or other video-conferencing tools. There's autonomy for guests to move fluidly; they can mingle in the hallways, run around between rooms, and share embedded video links, google docs, games, and a whiteboard. We are excited by the casual and incidental adventures possible in Gather, and the opportunities of producing performances here.



Caption: The Worlds of Gather

Photo: Gather.town

How to Gather

If you haven't tried Gather before, check out their [demo](#) (open on your computer using Chrome or Firefox, as Safari is in beta). Choose an Avatar from a menu of characters and, once inside the Space, explore using your arrow keys, and interact with objects by hitting 'x' when prompted. When you come into contact with another person, your video and audio will switch on so you can talk to each other. For a full primer, check out [Gather's welcome guide](#).

Based on our experiences of how Gather compares to Zoom as a video conferencing platform and meeting space we have developed this comparison chart. Note: updates are being introduced all the time and features are changing rapidly in both platforms.

	Zoom	Gather
DEVICES	Computer, Smartphone, Tablet	Computer, Smartphone & Tablet in beta
SOFTWARE	App-based, or web browser (with fewer features)	Browser-based (Chrome or Firefox)
HOW TO JOIN	Zoom link launches the app on your device or you can join in browser	Gather link takes you right into the space. Each Gather space has a unique URL.
SPACES	Main Room Breakout Rooms	Each Space can contain multiple rooms. Can create private spaces within rooms.
VIDEO	Camera on/off Visible to everyone in the meeting Virtual backgrounds Can re-name yourself	Camera on/off Visible to those near you No virtual backgrounds Can choose and name your Avatar
SPEAKER VIEW	Speaker View Gallery View Can pin and spotlight	Grid view Spotlight function
AUDIO	Mic can be muted/un-muted	Mic can be muted/un-muted Only hear others near you
CHAT	Ability to message everyone or send private messages. Can download chat.	Ability to message everyone or keep private. Pin messages Chat is persistent, saved to the space.
SHARING CONTENT	Screen-share Share device audio Share slides and other documents Link to Google Docs (opens in new window) for real time collaboration	Screen-share (in beta) Embedding objects with Google docs, videos, images etc. opens external websites without leaving Gather. Can collaborate in real-time.
RECORDING	Record meeting audio and video from within Zoom.	No built-in record function.
ACCESSIBILITY	Live-captioning by human and/ or live transcription through otter.ai. ASL Interpreter can be pinned or in spotlight.	Follow function for way-finding or to follow ASL Interpreter through the space. ASL Interpreter in Spotlight. Captioning not supported.

	Zoom	Gather
		Cannot move Avatar using voice commands. Does not work with screen-reader currently.
PRIVACY	Meeting ID and Password Waiting Room Webinar registration Block user	Password to enter space. Private guest lists. Block user.
EXTRAS	Participants can communicate via raise hand, thumbs up, emojis or indicate through chat for speakers to slow down, get a coffee and so on. Q+A function for webinars	Hit "Z" and a heart appears over your Avatar. Emoji reactions: waving hand, question mark, heart, thumbs up, hi-5, celebratory confetti. Locate feature to follow and find people in the room. Community of builders sharing open-source tile-sets, maps, and assets. Can visit the Gather office space...in Gather
Costs	Free version, up to 40 minutes. Various levels of payments plans based on number of seats starting at \$20/month that include full features.	Free version, up to 25 participants. Payment plans by number of participants on a per participant basis, and duration of event that include full features.

Building a Space in Gather

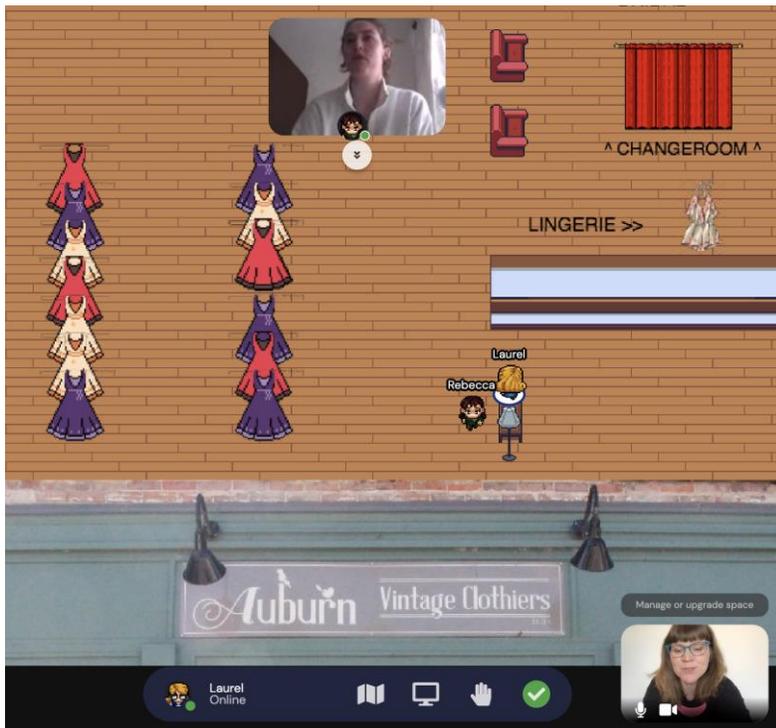
A Gather Space is a virtual world made of 1 or more Rooms. Everything in Gather is built on a grid system of Tiles, which structure Avatar movement, object placement, object interaction distance, etc. To create a Space, you can: select a pre-built template (from offices to rooftop patios and apartments); choose 'Custom' to start from an empty room template in Gather's mapmaker; or upload your own 2D map, which can be built using programs like Tiled. You can design your background (the image that Avatars walk 'on top of'), and upload custom foregrounds (the image that Avatars walk 'underneath'). See Gather's Guide to Custom Maps.

Starting with one of Gather's many pre-built templates still allows you to customize your Room(s) by adding **Objects**; some **basic** (like houseplants, chairs, and bookshelves), and some **interactable** (meaning you can embed them with videos, Google Docs, notes, websites, and external Zoom calls, etc.). You can also add or edit the **Spawn Tiles** (entrance to the room), **Impassable Tiles** (cannot be walked on), **Portal Tiles** (take you to another room or space), and **Private Space Tiles** (limit conversations). Once you've built your Space you can enter and invite others by sharing the link.

Building Auburn Vintage in Gather

The experience of entering Auburn Vintage is that of walking into a treasure chest. The space has an immediate warmth. With hardwood floors, exposed brick walls, and hand-crafted shelving, it welcomes you in, and invites you to explore. While the store isn't that big, there's seemingly no end to what you can see, touch, and try on. From floor to ceiling, clothing racks are filled with vintage dresses, bridal gowns, lingerie, blouses, and brimming with accessories: hats, purses, and shoes. There's a display case of hand-picked jewelry, and quirky selection of lamps, suitcases, typewriters, cameras, and hat boxes. The shop's proprietress Rachel Behling has exquisite taste, and the utmost care for the items she curates and their stories.

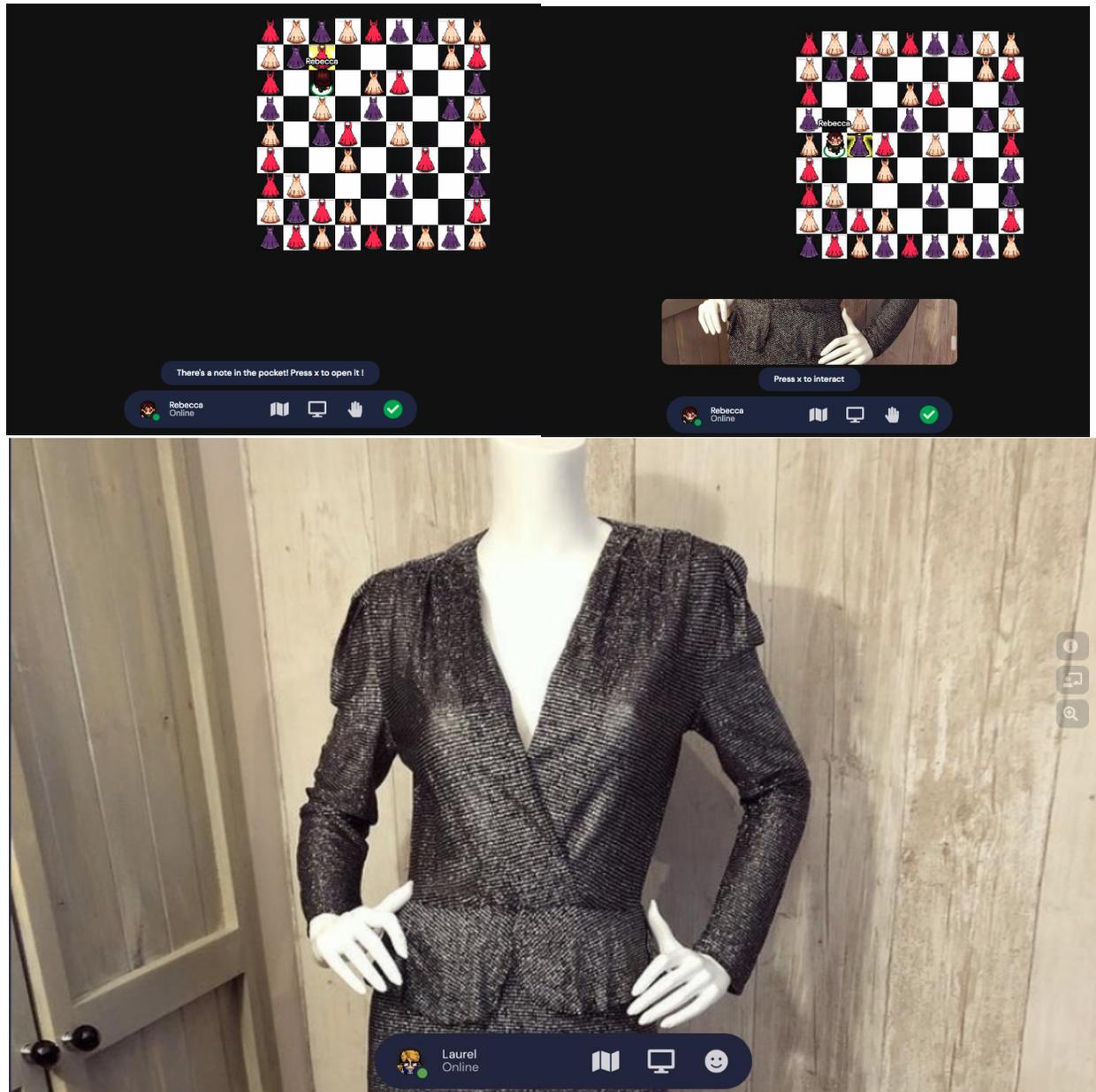
Using Gather's mapbuilder, we uploaded a picture of the Auburn Vintage storefront, recreated the architectural elements, and added furniture. We quickly realized that "clothing racks bursting with vintage dresses" or "piles of antique suitcases" or "intricately detailed jewelry boxes" did not exist in the tile set as pre-built 2D pixel art objects. The builder couldn't capture all of the unique, bespoke, one-of-a-kind items in the store. We began with realism, because that is where Gather begins, and quickly hit limitations.



Hitting the wall of verisimilitude while building Auburn Vintage in Gather.

We returned to the core artistic values of *The Vintage Project* to unlock our thinking about how Gather can expand the rituals of performance and the rituals of how space is used. The performance should give audiences the experience of visiting the shop and uncovering the stories of the objects within. Garments become characters, notes are planted in dress pockets, and the secrets of the people who wore them are revealed. Audiences travel through time, weave through clothing racks to interact with different pieces and performers, have one-on-one appointments with Rachel, visit the dressing room, and leave their stories behind. Does this performance actually require us to achieve verisimilitude, or can we use Gather to conjure the feeling of exploring Auburn Vintage in novel ways?

PROTOTYPE #1: THE VINTAGE DRESS MAZE



Bringing the racks of dresses to life as a playfully interactive experience.

Feels Like: Digging through dresses at Auburn Vintage, being in between worlds, peering into the hidden lives of the garments, and getting lost in seemingly endless racks.

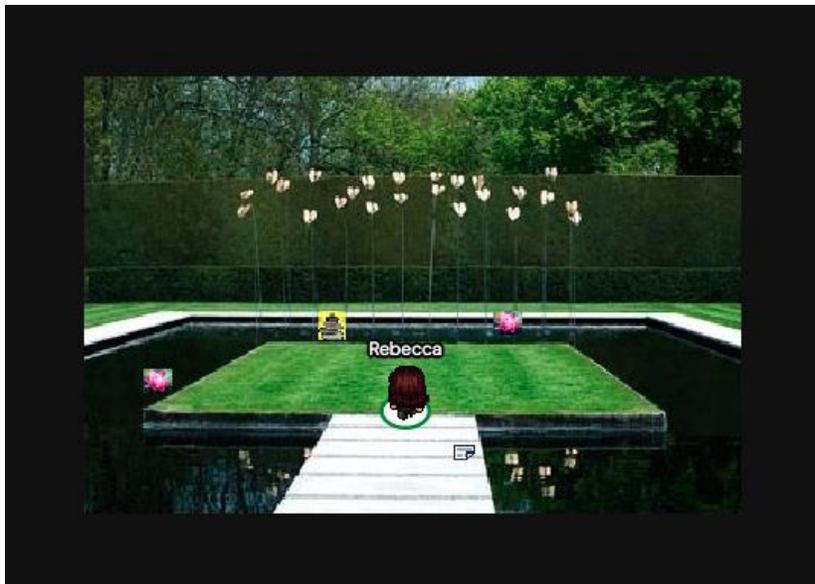
Audience Interaction: Individual and group exploration of interactable objects while navigating the game of the maze.

Gather Tricks: Using **Portal Tiles** to create the entrance and exit, and **Impassable Tiles** to build the path, scaling and importing images of pixel art dresses, embedding **interactable objects** with photos and videos, planting text notes, writing custom interaction prompts (“There’s a note in the pocket! Press x to open”). **Spotlight** used to communicate with everyone at once, and **Follow** to assist anyone lost.

Limitations: Embedding an image in an object causes a horizontal preview box to appear when your Avatar is nearby. At times these preview images block the section of the map where your Avatar is standing, making navigating away from the embedded object a challenge.

Further Possibilities: How challenging and how extensive a maze can we build?

PROTOTYPE 2: REFLECTION POND DRESSING ROOM



Transforming the dressing room.

the pieces she has chosen.

Gather Tricks: Uploading a photo with forced perspective as a background (front view vs. top view), using **Impassable Tiles** to limit where the Avatar can walk, and an interactable welcome **Note**. Objects appear and disappear in this Room using “**object active start time**” and “**object active end time**” settings to guide exploration: when Rachel chooses an outfit for the audience member from the store, she takes a picture of it, which appears in the dressing room beside the audience’s Avatar.

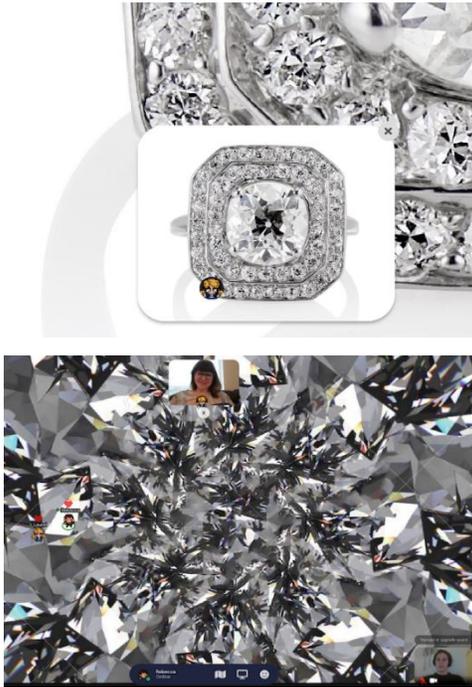
Further Possibilities: Embedding the image of this custom outfit with a link to an external platform that uses AR filters to allow the audience member to see themselves wearing the outfit. Audience members then have the option to purchase and items are delivered later that day to their doorstep.

Feels Like: Entering a private space that is peaceful and less over-stimulating than the rest of the store. There is potential for transformation here.

Audience Interaction: A personal experience; a moment alone with your reflection - in this case, a reflecting pool instead of mirrors. **Interactable Objects** prompt contemplation, and, after time spent, Rachel appears in the Dressing Room Space from her location at the actual store. She curates an outfit specifically for you, and shares stories about

PROTOTYPE 3: JEWELRY BOX

Feels Like: Bring inside one of the store's jewelry displays; climbing through drawers, picking up a piece



Travelling into the heart of the diamond.

of jewelry and using a jeweler's loupe (magnifying glass) to inspect it closely, determining its authenticity and provenance.

Audience Interaction: Solitary and group exploration navigating through the jewelry box, watching people appear and disappear from the drawers.

Gather Tricks: Scaling and importing **backgrounds** and **foregrounds**. **Rooms** that take you into pieces of jewelry. Playing with perspective and scale, your Avatar walks on the surface of a ring, noticing how it has tarnished over time, reads an inscription, and sits in a diamond.

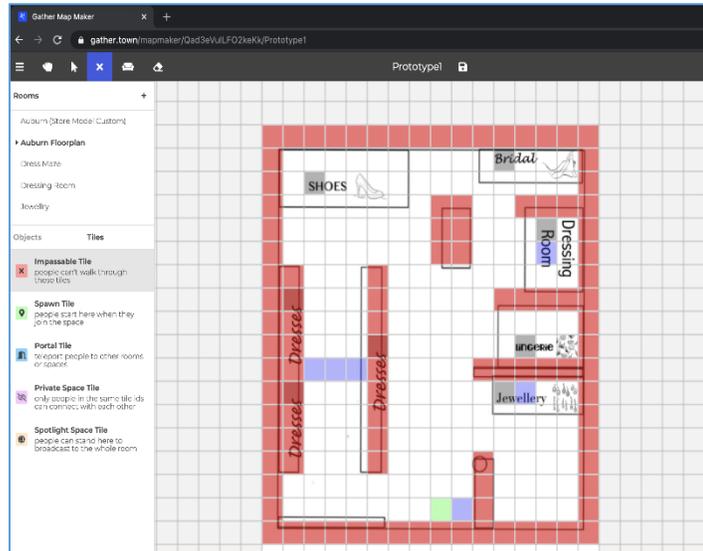
Limitations: Gather's maps don't allow users to 'zoom in or out' like you would on a Google map (your browser window zooms, but the map does now), so we are creating the feeling of getting closer to something through building detailed backgrounds/foregrounds. How can we better emulate the feeling of moving closer when you are really only moving forward?

Further Possibilities: To find the feeling of 'sorting through' the drawers and picking an object we want to create layers of **interactable objects** that you can travel between and move around; altering them for the others in the space.

The (Floor) Plan

We connected our three prototype **Rooms** to a rudimentary floor plan of Auburn Vintage, sketching in the various departments and adding **Portals**. *The Vintage Project* creative team tested our playful prototypes and, as they saw their concepts adapted here, realized the potential for new content that could play with the strengths of Gather's functionality.

The experience begins at the Front Desk, where guests are welcomed as music plays and given the opportunity to complete a Google Form about the outfit they have come in search of. They then navigate to the different departments and chat with other shoppers (both audience members and planted actors) along the way.



Building the Auburn floorplan in Gather's Mapmaker.

As they traverse the floorplan, the store comes to life in their imaginations and we play with their expectations through moments of serendipity. Upon entering the floorplan, Rachel exclaimed "that's the store, you got it!" This simple sketch is grounded in the familiar. Abstracting the architecture has earned us the element of surprise, and captured the feeling of the store's endless possibilities.

FFF's Festival Hub

Femme Folks Festival will run March 8 - 20, 2021 and be hosted entirely on Gather.

Our **Festival Hub Space** includes these rooms:

- Lobby: *where you arrive, find out what's on, and learn about the artists of FFF.*
- Pat the Dog HQ Offices: *where you can drop by and visit us.*
- Festival Lounge: *where artists and audiences can connect socially.*
- Workshop: *where artists meet for our professional development series.*
- Studios: *where Artists in Residence can use personal workspaces to fuel and document their creations throughout the festival.*
- Theatre: *where performances are staged in Gather or linked through to other platforms or livestreams. (The ultimate customizable "black box").*

And of course...Auburn Vintage is the site of *The Vintage Project*

Participants Speak About Awesome Online Experiences

In conversation with Sarah Albu, David Barnard, and Heather Daley.

By Felicity Buckell and Inga Petri ([Strategic Moves/ ipetri@strategicmoves.ca](https://strategicmoves.ca)), November 2020

As part of our research into how to design awesome online conferences, events, and workshops, we've looked to participants to tell us about their awesome online experiences. The result are a number of examples of digital experiences and performance events that succeed by setting the place for meaningful human connections and interactions to occur.

Providing Avenues for Connection

Sarah Albu, singer, performer, and vocal explorer based in Montreal, Quebec, has found that participation and interactivity are key to her enjoyment of digital activities, providing her with a sense of human-to-human connection that set her up for an enjoyable online experience.

In early October 2020, Sarah attended Carmina Escobar's digital performance, [La Cola De La Serpiente, No Te Metas Con Mi Cucu](#). Carmina established a direct connection with audience members long before the performance began: upon registration, Sarah received instructions such as directions to have a certain drink prepared, to have a light source and object at hand, and to be in character, with a name and costume, during the event. By feeling physically linked to the digital event, attendees were elevated to participants who felt connection and ownership over their own experience right from the start.

Carmina's event used Zoom as the video platform, with gallery view so audience members could see each other, and break-out rooms for participants to move between. Through the use of several cameras with different angles, the audience could enjoy a varied and intriguing performance. This attention to production quality, personal interactions between artist and audience, and tangible links to the event, combined to create a very powerful, very human performance experience, describes Sarah. "It was so lovey to be seen and heard; it felt like that magic fantasy from childhood where the people on the TV can actually see you, too."

High Quality Production and Intimate Performance Vibes

Heather Daley, a former festival organizer and arts administrator in Iqaluit, NU now operating [Raven Harmonies Consulting](#) from Ottawa, has been relishing digital performing arts events since March 2020. She attributes her enjoyment to the fact that artists have been able to present high quality online shows that produce a certain intimacy.

Watching James Ehnes' series [Recitals from Home](#), Heather felt as though she had been invited to experience a very personal, professional performance. James hired professional technicians to ensure a high quality production delivered directly from his living room; on his [website](#), James explains:

When the concert halls of the world closed in the middle of March [2020], I, like all performing musicians, found myself in a strange new world, with no opportunities to share music and no artistic outlet. I was completely unprepared to share music from my home, having no recording equipment

and, just as importantly, no understanding of the process! When I was contacted by several European festivals to create some content for online events, I reached out to some friends in the recording world for advice, and made an investment in some microphones (Telefunken M60 Master Set), an audio interface (Audient iD44), a few tripods and a studio light. I was delighted to discover that my living room made a rather nice recording studio, and my and my wife's iPhones made perfectly acceptable cameras (Filmic Pro is an app that has my absolute highest recommendation).

Heather notes that a comparable feeling of intimacy was achieved by the Indian River Festival and Music PEI's [Island Voices](#) through high quality production in a unique venue. The festival had a small live audience, excellent technical support, and was presented in an intimate setting: a gorgeous, acoustically renowned church on Prince Edward Island. Watching these "amazing performances with good quality sound in a beautiful venue" gave Heather a profound sense of satisfaction.

Performance Builds Community

Performing artists are in the community-building business; sharing performing arts experiences with like-minded people, audiences can feel connected to the artists and each other, part of something bigger. As it turns out, this can happen as readily online as it can in person.

Heather shared that she feels very much connected to other audience members who she sees on a regular basis attending performances. For example, [Side Door Access](#) shows, created by Dan Mangan, where artists and audiences join together on Zoom, [Whitehorse's Happy Hour Fridays](#), charming in their simplicity, and [David Myles' Myles from Home](#) evening talk show series with fascinating guests such as [Reeny Smith](#) and [Jeremy Dutcher](#), succeed at creating a sense of community, and a place where friendships, old and new, can flourish.

Participation Fosters Belonging

Heather explained the sense of belonging and community she has been gaining through her participation as part of [Wonderland Singers](#) led by [Coco Love Acorn](#). This weekly event is an 'online singing and creativity workshop series with a community choir spirit.' Each Wednesday evening folks gather from across the globe to learn from Coco through call and response, exploring 'melody, harmony, rhythm, creativity, improvisation, inspiration, and the joy of singing.' Despite the limitation of Internet latency, the lag time the Internet signal requires to be sent and received, the choir format works well as each singer practices alongside the leader while having their own video sound muted.

Sarah had a similar experience participating in a vocal workshop held in early October, [Praying for Rain](#). "It was amazing to take a singing workshop in real time with someone from Serbia... the series of six sessions added to the feeling of community, even with people I had never met in person." And yarn-spinning from her home with other spinners from across the world in the [Tour de Fleece](#), an online group that gathers for 'spinning yarn and all things related' during the Tour de France, gave Sarah a sense of community that she was very much missing when the realities of the continuing Covid-19 pandemic set in during early summer 2020.

Sensing a particular time and place

Sarah attended Winnipeg's [Cluster Festival](#) in May 2020, an annual inter-arts festival which pivoted to a fully online event once the realities of the restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic became apparent. Sarah notes that there is something special about live performance, knowing that "it doesn't exist forever." The Cluster Festival addressed this by having the festival content up for a limited time — in this case, one month — which in Sarah's opinion worked well, "otherwise events can drown in the wave of information we're adding to every day."

Similarly, No Hay Banda's 2020 [Fluxus Online](#), also planned originally as a live arts festival, chose to have their digital festival website up for only a certain duration. "Here the design of the website is interesting," describes Sarah, "built to create a sense of dimension so that participants feel like they're actually moving through time in a physical space."

Conversing Around the Table

David Barnard describes a deeply satisfying online experience as an attendee at [Global Toronto 2020](#) in June 2020. Like many conferences, the Global Toronto organizers took the COVID-19 shift to online as an opportunity to move beyond the traditional showcase conference model: the focus of the gathering became "good conversation about important subjects," says David. Deep discussions around significant issues relevant to the music world were led by knowledgeable, capable speakers. They were invited to exchange ideas and engage in dialogue with participants through small break-out sessions. This enabled the generation of bigger conversations with diverse and democratic participation, conversations in which everyone could be equally seen and heard.

High quality, intimate productions set in a particular time and place, open to diverse audiences that feel they are part of a community, set the stage for meaningful human interactions, enjoyment at the emotional level, and authentic learning to take place. Digital events, if well-designed, can achieve this.

The digital gathering table has been in place for almost half a century; for decades, we've been adding to, and polishing, the place settings. Whether you heard it as the tinkling of a dinner bell, or a resounding alarm, the Covid-19 pandemic has called us all to the table; 2020 has given us a smorgasbord of awesome digital events. Let's continue to reimagine our feast!