

Report on the ASI Virtual Conference Summer 2020

At the announcement of the cancellation of the Star Island season due to COVID-19, a committee was formed to produce a virtual conference during the week of July 4-11, what would have been our week on Star. The committee members divided up the tasks and activities of the week with the goal of having 2-3 opportunities per day for people to connect on-line in addition to some activities that could be done at home off-line and in the Star Spirit. There was also focus on making sure the auction happened so All Star I could continue to provide the financial support that the SIC is accustomed to from us in this year of \$0 operations revenue.

Beth Corsa and David Yermack worked with the island to put together the auction details. Adam Osgood hosted the live auction virtually. We were the guinea pigs of the auction platform chosen by the SIC staff and there were some issues, making the administration more difficult for Beth than it needed to be. In the end we raised over \$17,000 for the SIC. The island staff has been apprised of the issues with the platform, should we need to conduct an auction virtually again in the future. David set up a PayPal account for All Star I which was not used for this (all proceeds went directly to SIC for simplicity's sake) but which we hope will be used in the future so people can pay immediately for auction purchases, reducing the time needed for the auction committee to spend collecting payments on island. It should also be noted that Cassie Yermack stepped in on the moment to help keep people updated on items and that was helpful.

Nancy Wood worked with a talented group of people to put on a Children's Chapel each weekday morning of the virtual conference- M-F. Several musicians put together a song and video to play at the open and close of each chapel. We learned that where the video streams from and how it is formatted can have an effect on the quality seen by viewers. The song was a great way to connect and bring everyone into a Children's Chapel mindset. The format of each day was the same with speakers changing each day. This worked very well.

Deb Weiner Soule and April Castoldi put together evening chapels with recorded opening and closing music/visuals that made the experience that much more sacred. Evening chapel also successfully included multiple engaging speakers. In both cases the visual and musical cues and the engaging speakers made for chapel experiences that were as close as we could get without being in the chapel.

Musicale run by Jeff Loewer, Betsy Berg, and Joel Fredricks was pre-recorded, which eliminated some potential technology issues and also helped get around the issue of Zoom not being built for music. Jeff compiled all recordings and checked for technical quality, he then added visuals between the acts and ran the entire performance using a universal video player called VLC. Joel and Betsy MC'd live and then the videos were run by Jeff. He notes that getting the best possible internet service is especially important with this (he went to a friend's house to run the show).

David Epstein ran the 15x 20, which lends itself well to the Zoom platform. This event was open to the full SIC public and we ran into one publicity issue where one of the attendees from another conference thought that anyone could speak and had worked on a presentation he planned to give.

Elizabeth Yermack and Bill Tibbs were able to run the book clubs via Zoom with great success. They were still able to feature Stafford Cohen's book with an appearance and commentary by the author himself. Zoom lends itself well to a book club setting.

John Stewart put together a Pelican Show with several Pels from ASI and other conferences. There were a few technology glitches and if done again in the future it may be more technologically successful using the same techniques as for Musicale. As always, the talent and energy was fabulous.

Suzanne and Dave Cook put together a virtual art barn experience that was fantastic. There was some cost involved and I believe donations collected for this purpose reimbursed Dave and Suzanne for as much of the expense as they were willing to be reimbursed for. The videos and Zoom meetings and Google Classroom provided a true art experience for all who signed up. This would be difficult for anyone else to replicate.

Scott and Annie Stewart put together a Talk on the Rocks. This activity lends itself well to Zoom and there were several people who asked about having Talks on the Virtual Rocks at various times throughout the year.

Suzanne Cook and April Castoldi put together a scavenger hunt that invited other conferences to also participate.

Jen Cook told ghost stories and Ben Soule gave a very informative presentation- both late adds to the schedule showing that Zoom and virtual conferencing, thankfully, allows for some spontaneity.

In addition we had a few chat sessions where ASI members could log in and join in chatting informally with each other. When the group was large enough, breakout rooms were used. This was also a special way to reconnect with each other. Ann Etter took photos from Larry Yermack and music from Kemp Harris to put together a little Independence Day video for viewing at any time. The SIC had a very funny Fire & Water video for viewing at any time.

A daily "Chalkboard" (kudos to Beth Corsa for the name) was composed by Ann Etter and Lisa Gresser and emailed via Susan O'Laughlin in her post as registrar. This included the day's schedule with all live Zoom links along with meeting IDs and passwords, a link to the auction items, the daily menu for meals and social hour, the Children's Chapel song lyrics, and any additional helpful information.

Off-line activities included eating a Star Island menu through the years courtesy of Deb Weiner Soule; recommended social hour recipes courtesy of Michele Cohen, Jenny Easter Nelson, and Cory Easter; and wearing your ASI swag. SIC encouraged all virtual conferences to leave time each day for people to be outside and engaging with friends and family- as we would do on island, so we did not do as many activities as we could have, keeping that in mind.

Louise Williams kept everyone informed on FB sharing all sorts of wonderful things throughout the week. Cathy Bertasi kept track of all events and volunteers and did an excellent wrap-up for everyone.

The Island had several events happening during the week that were open to all and we had our own conversation with Joe Watts at the beginning of the week.

Things we learned:

- 1) A committee to manage the virtual offerings should probably be formed to assist in the event we need a full virtual conference again and for potentially running events occasionally over the course of the 51 weeks each year we are usually off island.
- 2) The Zoom management piece of this is huge. Lisa Gresser (and Jamie) spent her whole week managing Zoom- and doing an excellent job of it. She also created all Zoom links ahead of time and input them into a shareable schedule which was distributed to presenters and audience. It would be more reasonable to have a few people working on the Zoom of different events- and perhaps even more than one Zoom account to hold a couple of non-competing events at a time. (For instance- there could have been some youth group offerings at the same time as more adult events).
- 3) If Zoom responsibilities are divided up, as recommended, then a point person is necessary to compile the links for distribution. This could be the same person compiling the calendar and other material to be shared with all, but we found it helpful to have two people working together on this.
- 4) There have been multiple suggestions that we do something(s) over the course of our off island time to connect the ASI community to each other.
- 5) There is a good argument now that we have the technology that certain on island events could be recorded or streamed for those off island to be able to participate and connect at least to a degree. Especially given that it may be more difficult for certain demographics to return to the island as soon as others.
- 6) The recording and saving of various events at the VC was a good practice and we could better use our website and YouTube to continue that practice for certain events. (I had to miss some events this past summer because of a family medical issue so was grateful for the recordings). A person to deal with collecting, storing, and distributing the recordings is essential.
- 7) If done virtually again, the auction would be better served with a different platform. Deb Weiner Soule had a suggestion on this.
- 8) The registrar is the best person to email the whole conference so should be included in planning- Susan O'Laughlin did a great job making sure everyone received the information.
- 9) Utilizing social media helps include those who may not have been on island this year or last but still feel connected.
- 10) Whether on or off island- All Star I flourishes because of volunteers. There were dozens more who volunteered- I listed only the coordinators of each activity- they also had behind the scenes help.
- 11) Practice is helpful- especially when an event calls for several transitions (e.g. Chapel, Children's Chapel, etc.). In cases where there are multiple transitions and/or presenters or those unfamiliar with the technology, a full rehearsal is essential for smooth performance.
- 12) Additional tech people should be on hand for each session- not necessarily the same people all the time, but someone the host can turn to for assistance. Any recorded items for use during a presentation should be sent to the back-up tech people in case a connection is lost.
- 13) The tech orientation was helpful and more should be added if we do a virtual conference again- perhaps each day or before each session.
- 14) Training for presenters on microphone, camera, etc.

- 15) All presenters and tech should log in 20-30 minutes in advance, where possible, to ensure that all tech runs smoothly. In back to back programming a second Zoom account would be needed in order to accomplish this type of overlap.
- 16) It is possible and desirable to offer more than we did.
- 17) A more robust website for the conference would be helpful for future online activities.
- 18) A post conference evaluation, perhaps with questions for both presenters/tech and viewers would be helpful.

Submitted by Ann Etter
Sept. 28, 2020