



# SMPTE 2020: "Game On"—A Win All Around

**E**ven as the final minutes of SMPTE 2020: "Game On" ran out, it was clear that the remote conference experience was a win. A win for SMPTE, its partners, and exhibitors and for the many attendees who took part in this year's first-of-a-kind technical conference.

The typical participation rate for virtual events normally ranges from 20% to 54%—according to the blog Bizzabo and Liz King, chief executive officer of Liz King Events—however, SMPTE hit a remarkable participation rate of 84%. The event also scored high in attendance, with 60% growth in conference attendees, and a marked increase in global participation.

"The SMPTE 2020 program committee, program, speakers, and attendees were all more diverse than in the past, bringing forward a broader array of topics and perspectives," says SMPTE Executive Director Barbara Lange. "It truly, truly was a global event."

## Redefined and Renewed Conference Program

SMPTE 2020, from 10-12 November 2020, offered a diversity of content in both returning and new formats that combined to enhance the learning experience and foster interactivity among presenters and participants.

These 150 sessions included technical paper presentations, interactive roundtables, poster sessions, partner presentations and training, storyteller events, core concept tutorials, and more. In another first, SMPTE made all of this content available to participants for on-demand viewing after the event.

Global participation was evident not only in conference sessions, but also on social media, where posts in multiple languages pointed to different aspects of the SMPTE 2020 program.

"While SMPTE is headquartered in the U.S., we have members all over the world, and producing a conference that represents everybody and is accessible to everybody has been a fantastic step forward for the Society," says Kylee Peña,

co-chair of the SMPTE 2020 program committee. "That the conference more accurately reflected the community SMPTE serves was also significant. Just seeing all kinds of people talking about their areas of expertise on this global stage will help others to see that they are experts too."

A new Asia-Pacific (APAC)-focused element of the SMPTE 2020 program delivered time-zone-friendly presentations and live Q&A sessions, so the event unfolded hour by hour around the globe. Coordinated by Raji Krishnaswami, the SMPTE 2020 APAC program included the conference's first presentation (in Mandarin) by a non-English speaker.



Tu Duu-Chi provides demonstration during his presentation.

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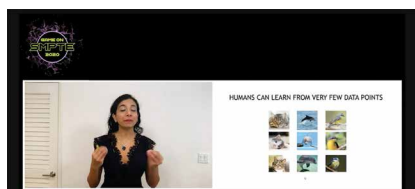
An Audio Engineering Society (AES) partner session hosted by Iris Wu featured a presentation by Tu Duu-Chih, who created the sound for notable Mandarin-language classics and earned a National Award for Arts for his significant contribution to the arts and science of films in Taiwan. SMPTE is already exploring ways to incorporate live translation into future events to enable presenters to speak in the language that best allows them to convey their thoughts and ideas.

Roundtables held throughout the event were a surprising success, given the virtual format. Although many participants started out with their cameras off, they quickly warmed up to the idea, turning on video to exchange thoughts and ideas. In the end, the roundtables provided a meaningful—and, right now, quite unusual—opportunity to connect with peers who also care very much about a specific topic or technology.

Keynote presentations looked closely at the technologies shaping the future of media and entertainment. Hanno Basse of Microsoft Azure discussed cloud and data-driven content workflows, Anima Anandkumar delved into machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI), and Michelle Munson explained the potential of blockchain in media.



Hanno Basse.



Nonny de la Peña.



Paul Debevec.

Paul Debevec of Google described the latest efforts at Google and the University of Southern California Institute for Creative Technologies to bridge the real and virtual worlds through photography, lighting, and ML. Marcos Gross provided an overview of DisneyResearch|Studios' core research programs including digital humans, story technology, interactive content creation, video processing, and audience understanding. Presenting as part of the esports-focused program, Editor Ian Sansavera gave attendees a closer look at the narrative opportunities within esports and the gaming industry.

In another premier keynote session, SMPTE officially kicked off the Creative and Technology Advisory Council (CTAC), a group of industry-renowned technologists and creatives formed to engage creatives about the challenges they see, technologies they need, and the standards SMPTE should develop to support their work as storytellers. Rob Legato, ASC and visual effects (VFX) supervisor, joined Paul Debevec of Google Research and Nonny de la Peña, “The Godmother of Immersive Journalism,” to discuss the intersection between creativity and technology. In particular, they explored how immersive technologies enhance the art of storytelling and news.

### All About Esports

The third day of SMPTE 2020 was dedicated to esports, and there were many “Aha!” moments during the day’s presentation. In addition to

detailing the connections between esports and SMPTE’s standards and education work, presentations explained how and why esports will be an important part of the future for SMPTE, and the media and entertainment industry as a whole.

Capped off by a live Rocket League esports competition between the Rochester Institute of Technology and Team Liquid of the Netherlands, the day demonstrated that, like many traditional live sports broadcasts, esports is driven by realtime content production magic. As SMPTE President Pat Griffis explained, “It’s broadcasting on steroids, the next step in super-broadcasting replacing traditional cameras with points of view and even adding content protection.”

“The speakers for our esports-focused day were great and told a phenomenal story,” says Chris Witmayer, co-chair of the SMPTE 2020 program committee and organizer of the esports presentations. “We had a lively keynote from Ian Sansavera of IUP Studios and engaging questions in the follow-up Q&A session. Anyone who missed it and wants a better understanding of why esports is the future can watch the on-demand videos, starting with early sessions that lay the groundwork and moving into greater technical detail with each subsequent presentation.”

See full article on Esports day in this issue.

### Memorable Awards Gala

“We love doing the Annual Gala in real life, complete with the red carpet,

so we weren't sure that we would be able to give people the real honor they deserve in an online world," says Lange. "But the virtual format actually allowed us to take a closer look at the amazing stories of our honorees. The presentations were just lovely."

Honorees were able to watch along with friends and family, some of whom sent notes of thanks to SMPTE for the moving presentations. Many of the awards presentation videos were produced from locations that helped to tell the story—Bruce Devlin in his English garden and Hans Hoffmann standing in front of the Jet d'Eau in Geneva.

"The international flavor of the Awards Gala demonstrates the global network that makes SMPTE unique," adds Lange. "We're fortunate to have a tight community and family though we live and work around the globe, and that really showed."



SMPTE Engineering VP Bruce Devlin.



SMPTE Executive Vice President (now President) and Chair of the Progress Medal Committee Hans Hoffmann.



SMPTE President (now Past President) Pat Griffis.

## SMPTE 2020 Experience

The platform and format for SMPTE 2020 helped the Society to deliver a truly interactive and immersive experience.

Presentations benefited from a very consistent format, and moderators were well prepared and comfortable keeping the conversation flowing smoothly. Because many moderators joined from home, there was a unique personal element—a living room with the fireplace going or home office with its bookshelves and art—that added a sense of sharing not just a conversation, but also a common space. The immediacy of on-demand content allowed participants to pick and choose their sessions, and never miss a thing.

Participants noted that one of the most valuable aspects of the event was that they could, for the first time, connect easily with people in the industry whom they consider to be important. The live Q&A sessions following presentations, both live and prerecorded, provided that opportunity.

"I think what contributed to the immersive feel was partially emulating the structure from prior events, where we had multiple tracks, and keeping the peer-reviewed technical papers, the gala, and other familiar events—but adapting those to the online and global environment," adds Peña. "The building blocks that make this conference so desirable were still there, but in a format that gave everyone more opportunity to participate."

The SMPTE team orchestrating the event was likewise participating from home. For months, the SMPTE staff built this event, without any previous experience, all with high quality and a good sense of humor. Thanks, in particular, to Sally-Ann D'Amato, Joel Welch, Frank Kunkle, Maja Davidovic, Lisa Kehrle, Erminia Fiorino, and Joyce Cataldo for their efforts to bring this event to fruition.

"Seeing the team of people who put this event together—never having done it before, and basically

building an airplane as they were flying—pull it off was just unbelievable," says Lange. "They did it without a major hiccup, and they should be very, very proud."

SMPTE 2020 also enjoyed strong backing not only from partner organizations, but also from the broader community. More than 70 exhibitors and sponsors supported SMPTE's virtual conference.

## Looking Ahead to Future Events

In executing its three-year strategic business plan, SMPTE has been going through a metamorphosis. The change encompasses the whole organization: its members, board, staff, and standards and education work. SMPTE 2020 is part of the significant forward motion of the past year.

"In so many ways, SMPTE 2020 showed that the Society is moving toward the goals it has committed to pursuing," says Frank Kunkle, director of marketing at SMPTE. "We featured a more diverse slate of presenters and a broader range of perspectives, and we made them more accessible for everyone, everywhere. We still have a lot of work to do, but it's exciting to see real progress taking place."

Going forward, SMPTE anticipates leveraging its remote event platform for other types of meetings and educational programs. With the architecture already in place and tested, the Society is also positioned to support other industry organizations in producing virtual events.

Next year's event, 1–4 November 2021, is currently being envisioned as the old-fashioned kind of event, that is, in person in Hollywood. Though plans are still being discussed, SMPTE will incorporate learning from this year's virtual event. But no matter what, SMPTE will be ready. This year showed that being able to react quickly to changing circumstances is critical to a successful event.

