

NATEAC 2021 will be virtual

BY BILL SAPSIS

IT'S MID-NOVEMBER and I'm writing this article for the Winter edition of *Protocol*, which will come out in early January. What January will be like is anyone's guess, and predicting what will be happening in July is nigh on to impossible. There was a time when one could plan six weeks ahead and be relatively certain of the outcome. Along came 2020 and shattered those ideas.

Last March I postponed NATEAC until July 2021. The thought at the time was that the pandemic would most assuredly be gone by then and we'd all be back to business as usual. It's clear now that's not going to be the case. As I write this, many states around the country, including my adopted state of Vermont, are going into lockdown once again in an attempt to curtail a third wave of coronavirus infections. It is no longer prudent to think about a face-to-face event in July and that idea, for the most part, is being set aside.

NATEAC will happen in July 2021—and it will be virtual. There will be no face-to-face speeches, presentations, or sessions. I'm still holding out hope we'll be able to run the harbor cruise and the conference dinner, at least for those who live in the New York metropolitan area. However, those decisions cannot be made now or in the near future and so I'm adopting a wait-and-see attitude. COVID-19, and the New York City response to it, will have the final say.

In related news, I'm sorry to report that the Roosevelt Hotel will be closing later this year, permanently. Judging by the responses to our 2016 survey, a large

majority of the attendees enjoyed staying at the hotel and attending the conference there. The principle drawback, you may remember, were the elevators. Most weren't running and the ones that did were as slow as molasses on a winter day. Well, the hotel staff was very happy and proud to let me know they had renovated all of the elevators and that we wouldn't have any problems with them. Sadly, we won't get the opportunity to try them out.

... theatre can, and will, rise to the occasion once again and provide the ... support we all so desperately miss right now.

Another disappointment was our not being able to spring the big surprise we had planned. I had, with Neil Mazzella's help, arranged to have Lewis Black (yes, that Lewis Black!) give the after-dinner speech at Sardi's. That would have been something, eh?

Eamonn's Pub, where we held the elbow-to-elbow cocktail party in 2016, is gone. A victim of a neighborhood in transition. I cannot imagine that, in 2021, we'll be able to hold a cocktail party anywhere, even if the restrictions are lifted. I suspect it's going to be quite some time before many of us are willing to be in that sort of crowd again. Given the virtual nature of the conference, maybe we can hold a virtual cocktail hour?

I'll buy the first round, once I can figure out how to do that.

I could try to tell you, today, what to expect at NATEAC 2021, but the truth is, I'd be making it up. I had hoped Climate Change would be the center piece for NATEAC 2020 and I do want it to have a leading role in NATEAC 2021. But it would be foolish and naïve of me to think that the abominable state of affairs we've been living through won't have a long-lasting effect on the

entertainment industry. NATEAC will have to address those issues. The pandemic and the political and economic struggles we've been experiencing will most certainly be on the agenda when we meet, virtually, in July.

Live theatre is not going away. While it's probably true that live performances will look different once we reach the other side of the pandemic, they will continue. One need only look to the Internet now to see the innumerable live productions being produced virtually. The innovation shown by theatre groups around the country is startling and heartwarming. It shows that theatre can, and will, rise to the occasion once again and provide the emotional,

intellectual, and cultural support we all so desperately miss right now.

NATEAC's mission is to support and nurture this new life, in whatever form it takes.

NATEAC's mission is to support and nurture this new life, in whatever form it takes.

The NATEAC staff and I will be working with the presenters and sponsors to ensure that NATEAC provides an experience worthy of its reputation. We'll keep you posted on our progress.

Until then, please stay healthy and safe. Be kind to others. Wear a mask and wash your hands. ~ Bill Sapsis ■



Bill Sapsis, President of Sapsis Rigging, Inc., began his career in 1972. His work on Broadway includes the original productions of *A Chorus Line* and *The Runner Stumbles*. Bill opened Sapsis Rigging in 1981 and has grown

the company into a multi-faceted installation/production/service company with clients on six continents.

Bill's articles and lectures on rigging and safety can be found in numerous publications worldwide. He has authored two books; *HEADS! & Tales* and *Entertainment Rigging for the 21st Century*. Bill is the chair of the ETCP Arena – Rigging Subject Matter Experts and a member of the ETCP Council. He serves on ESTA's Technical Standards Committee and is Co-Chair of the ANSI accredited Rigging Working Group. Bill sits on the Board of Directors for the Behind the Scenes Charity.

Bill is a USITT Fellow and a member of ABTT. He is a founding member of the Long Reach Long Riders, an industry-based charity motorcycle group. He is the Executive Producer of BackStage Pass, a video interview series on YouTube and an organizer of the ESTA/USITT New World Rigging Symposium. Bill is also the Executive Director of the North American Theatre Engineering and Architecture Conference (NATEAC).