BRINGING FRIENDS AND FAMILIES TOGETHER TO SUPPORT THE ARTS

CONNECTING FOR CULTURE

A GALA OF VIRTUAL TABLES
—ACROSS THE USA—
MAY 21

Lincoln Center

In response to the closures and cancellations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Lincoln Center created a virtual event called ***Connecting for Culture***. This virtual gala experience took place on **Thursday, May 21, 2020**.

EVENT GOALS:

- Bring our community together for an evening of meaningful connection
- Directly support artists in our network
- Offer a personalized experience with artists by inviting them to perform and interact with guests using Zoom "virtual gala tables"

KEY EVENT ELEMENTS

Below is an outline of what we considered when we started planning *Connecting for Culture.* More details about our finalized event format are included on the following pages.

AN HONOREE

- Select a donor, a community leader, or an artist to be the event's honoree to help expand prospect lists and increase event awareness

A FUNDRAISING PLAN

- Consider what pricing structure for event entry/access is appropriate for the target community
- Outline what different levels of support help fund in regard to our organization's mission/programming
    - If fundraising for or featuring an individual artist, consider sharing their personal Venmo account.

ARTISTS

- Hire artists from our community to perform at the virtual gathering and offer them an honorarium fee

OUTREACH

- Invite our board, donor network, ticket buyers, and broader community to support and participate
- Create an invitation with clear, compelling *Connecting for Culture* branding; share information on social channels and website
- Set-up an RSVP tracking system using a donor database or software (such as zkipster).

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LINCOLN CENTER'S "CONNECTING FOR CULTURE" FORMAT

HERE'S HOW WE DID IT:

- Our Gala of Virtual Tables was hosted via Zoom Video Communications
- Zoom provided an administrator for Lincoln Center's day-of event and our internal IT team provided support
- The event took place over three one-hour sessions (6-7pm; 7-8pm; 8-9pm).
- The time slots allowed us to manage approx. 10 tables per hour, totaling 29 tables, 390 guests, and 30 artists. (*We had "understudy" artists on call in case any main artists had to cancel due to technical issues, personal emergency, etc.)*
- Virtual table hosts were allotted up to 16 "squares" for their guests, leaving room for a Lincoln Center staffer, an artist and special guests to "drop by."
- On the day of the event, table hosts and guests received a video message from Lincoln Center President & CEO Henry Timms speaking about the importance of the *Connecting for Culture* movement and acknowledging the accomplishments of our honoree.

"VIRTUAL TABLE" STRUCTURE:

- Similar to a traditional gala, supporters had the option to purchase either a "virtual table" and invite their family and friends to join them; or they could purchase individual tickets and be assigned to a table by Lincoln Center.
  (We found that our individual ticket buyer tables would have benefited from a more structured experience. In planning future events, we would add additional programming for these groups, as it can be more difficult for guests who do not know each other to socialize, especially on virtual platforms.)
- The entire "virtual gala" experience lasted one-hour for each group.
- Each "virtual table" was assigned an artist to perform live from their home exclusively for that table. The artist entered the Zoom call approximately 20 minutes after it began to perform 2-3 songs and answer guests' questions.
- The table host, guests, and artist shared in a celebratory toast (including a screenshot photo-op) before the staffer and artist left the Zoom call, leaving the host and guests with time to chat for the rest of the hour.
- A Lincoln Center trivia game was shared with table hosts that they could play with their guests if they chose to.

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PAYMENT AND ENTRANCE:

- We manually tracked virtual table and individual ticket buyers in Excel.
- Donors had the option to send in a check to our P.O. Box, call in a credit card payment, wire funds, or pay online using **OneShoppingCart**.
- The platform **zkipster** was used as both a communication and data-collection tool.
    - Email solicitations to larger target groups (ticket buyers, etc.) were sent via a custom template.
    - Each host was emailed a link that they could use to directly input their guests' names and email addresses, which we requested to ensure a smooth and secure guest entry process.
    - Once the hosts entered the names into **zkipster**, we were able to pull lists for each time slot with all tables' guest names and email addresses.
    - Post-event, we were able to send a thank you email to all of the participants.
- Every guest received an email and calendar invite from their LC staffer with their respective Zoom link.
- On the night of the event, they were able to click their link and be directed to their host's Zoom table where they were promptly admitted from the Zoom Waiting Room by their LC staffer.

NOTE: **OneShoppingCart** and **zkipster** are software tools that Lincoln Center already uses for its events.

ARTIST EXPERIENCE:

- Lincoln Center works with an artistic consultant who produces our event performances, including all details related to the artists for this virtual gala.
- Artists were provided Zoom links for their respective tables ahead of the event and given the "GO" to enter their table's Zoom call approximately 20 minutes into the event time slot.
- Hosts and assigned LC staffers were prepared to welcome their artist at this pre-scheduled time. They both were provided with the artists' bios and decided in advance who would be responsible for introducing the artist.
- All artists received a technical FAQ, and took part in a virtual "dress rehearsal" on Zoom in advance of the event. Any special technical components were communicated to their respective LC staffers before the event (i.e. one artist joined using two different devices to create a two-camera experience).

STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Every "virtual table" had a staffer assigned from Lincoln Center's development office, who was responsible for communicating with their table guests ahead of the event, and helping manage the Zoom experience the night-of.
- All LC staffers assigned to specific tables took part in a detailed Zoom training session, which covered how to properly set up the Zoom call with the correct settings, how to take a screenshot of the room, and key areas to troubleshoot if guests faced technical difficulties during the event.
- All email correspondences that LC staffers used to communicate with their assigned host and guests were built and personalized for each table by the LC Special Events Team to keep information uniform, correct and clear.
- Members of the LC Executive Leadership Team were assigned tables and specific times (at top of the hour of each time slot) during which they entered Zoom calls to greet hosts/guests.

"CONNECTING FOR CULTURE" STAFF GUIDE:

PRE-EVENT

- Scheduled Zoom links and shared them with host and guests via email and calendar invite *(also shared links with Special Events leadership so they could be compiled for our artist management team and sent out to assigned artists)*
- Introduced themselves to table hosts, reviewed event timeline and decided who would introduce the table's artist
- Shared prepared emails with assigned host and guests and answered any questions
- Changed their Zoom icons to the event logo, added a custom Lincoln Center background to their screen, and customized their Zoom call's "Waiting Room" with the event logo and a welcome message (if possible)
- Selected a tidy, well-lit space in their homes
- Tested all technology needed for the event to run smoothly (WiFi, screenshot function, Zoom Meeting, Microsoft Teams channels)

DAY OF EVENT

- Sent final reminder email - recirculating Zoom link and reminding host and guests of their assigned event time slot
- Sent a "test" message to our all-staff Virtual Gala Teams channel
    - Included all LC staffers assigned to tables, Special Events leadership, IT staff, a representative from Zoom, and artist management staff
    - Used to communicate artist/special guest arrivals and departures from each Zoom call, as well as share any issues that came up during the event that needed to be troubleshooted
- Opened Zoom call 20 minutes before the table's assigned time slot
- Admitted host, guests, artist, and special guests into the Zoom call, making note of any no-shows and sharing arrivals/departures on the all-staff Virtual Gala Teams channel
    - Made the table host a "co-host" of the Zoom call, which allowed them to take over host functions later in the event
- Facilitated the artist's introduction (if requested by host)
- Used the Zoom Spotlight feature to focus everyone's screens on the artist during their performance and advised guests to return their screens to "Gallery View" post-performance
- Muted guests during the artist's performance and un-muted them afterwards for the Q&A session
- Reminded table host and artist about the group toast and facilitated if needed
- Took screenshots throughout the guest introductions, artist's performance and group toast
- Left meeting, but did not end the call post-performance (the table host became the primary host of the Zoom call)
- Shared event screenshots with Special Events leadership

TABLE HOST & GUEST EXPERIENCE:

HOST COMMUNICATIONS:

Upon Table Purchase Hosts Received:

- Personalized invitation to share with invited table guests
- zkipster-generated link with which hosts were asked to register guest names/email addresses
- Invitation to attend a table host orientation session offered via Zoom

One Week Pre-Event:

- Name of assigned artist, brief bio notes, suggested questions for the artist's Q&A, and conversation starters
- Introduction from assigned LC staffer with contact information, Zoom link and meeting details
- Calendar invite sent by LC staffer for assigned event time slot with Zoom link included
- Pre-Event email with recipes from neighboring Lincoln Square restaurants, an optional Lincoln Center trivia game, and Lincoln Center virtual backgrounds (with instructions on how to use them on Zoom)

Day-of Event:

- Event reminder email from LC staffer with contact information, event time slot, Zoom link and meeting details
- Video message from Lincoln Center President & CEO Henry Timms
- "Thank You to Our Supporters" list of event donors

Post-Event:

- Thank you email with links to Lincoln Center online performances and additional recipes from neighboring Lincoln Square restaurants

GUEST COMMUNICATIONS:

Upon Host's Request:

- Personalized guest invitation from host

One Week Pre-Event:

- Introduction from assigned LC staffer with contact information, Zoom link and meeting details
- "Zoom Virtual Gala Guest Guide"
- Calendar invite sent by LC staffer for assigned event time slot with Zoom link included
- Pre-Event email with recipes from neighboring Lincoln Square restaurants and Lincoln Center virtual backgrounds (with instructions on how to use them on Zoom)

Day-of Event:

- Event reminder email from LC staffer with contact information, event time slot, Zoom link and meeting details
- Video message from Lincoln Center President & CEO Henry Timms
- "Thank You to Our Supporters" list of event donors

Post-Event:

- Thank you email with links to Lincoln Center online performances and additional recipes from neighboring Lincoln Square restaurants

OTHER IDEAS:

- Send a bottle of donated wine/bubbly to each host so that they can toast with their guests.
- Invite hosts to set an "attire" for the evening such as Designer Pajamas, Floral Prints, Favorite Hats, etc.