

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC**

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**Address to the Association:**

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It is truly an honor to have been asked to speak with you today at this conference of the National Association of Schools of Music, especially when I consider all the work done by NASM member institutions, their administrators, faculty, and students, to advance music and its study throughout our nation over the last 85 years. As many of you know, I have only recently joined your world formally, but my entire life in music has been one with a strong attachment to music education, and indeed for the past eight years I have taught at the Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University. And there has never been a time when I didn't think about the roles of music education not only in preparing the future musicians of our society, but in helping to establish the place of music in that society.

I am sorry to say that I think that most schools of music have focused perhaps too strongly on the preparation of musicians part of that mission, and not thought enough about the second part, even though tremendous efforts continue to prepare P-12 music teachers and otherwise build support. But there is no question in my mind that a crucial part of our mission is, in fact, to work harder and smarter toward the establishment of an important place in society for the music we teach. And given the way that place has gotten smaller and more distant from the center of society in recent years, we had better focus on it.

Any careful examination of newspapers across America over a fifty-year span, will demonstrate dramatically the shrinking of arts coverage. Fifty years ago, every small town newspaper had an arts critic, sometimes more than one. Now, many smaller communities have let that lapse completely, and even many large cities have offered buyouts to retire their music critic, and chosen not to re-fill the position. If you attend a gathering of the music critics' association, one of the main topics of conversation is the shrinking space they are given to cover the arts.

Look at Public Television if you want further proof of the decreasing importance of the arts in America. Public Television was started precisely to broadcast programming that would have too small an appeal for commercial TV (never mind that in my youth, classical music was seen regularly on commercial TV—the Ed Sullivan Show, Leonard Bernstein's Young People's concerts, the Voice of Firestone, the Bell Telephone Hour, and live operas on NBC). Now, PBS considers Sarah Brightman, Andrea Bocelli, or André Rieu to be "highbrow" programming. The number of symphony concerts, quality jazz, dance, and even staged operas, available in this country on television has been declining at an alarming rate.

The federal and local governments have contributed to this decline—the National Endowment for the Arts support for arts organizations of all kinds around America has, in real dollars, declined dramatically in the past twenty-five years. State, city and county funding has also dropped significantly in recent years. And then there's our public education system, which for the past twenty-five or thirty years in city after city has been reducing or abolishing music and the arts, in order to concentrate on testable, quantifiable results like math and science scores, and/or in response to periods of severe budget stress, when the arts are often among the first things to be eliminated. All of this is a sign of the marginalization of the arts in America.

More and more, it seems to me, there is a growing climate of anti-intellectualism in America, and with it a trend to diminish the importance of our cultural heritage. This includes not just Western classical music, but folk music, jazz, blues—the whole range of the musical arts.

I want to share a story with you—a true story, and an instructive one. In 1987, the Chicago Symphony (which I managed at the time) was on tour in the United States. On the way from Arizona to Austin, Texas, the truck carrying our instruments turned over. I wouldn't allow the instruments to be moved until I and our stagehands were on the scene to assess damage and oversee the process—so a new truck was ordered, the Orchestra flew to Austin, and the stagehands and I chartered a small private plane to fly us to Junction, Texas, which was ten miles from the site of the accident. (The proprietor of the small airport lent us his pickup truck to drive to the site). The pilot of the small plane was right out of central casting for a Texas pilot—tall, silver-haired, sixty-ish. In fact, he was Lyndon Johnson's private personal pilot after Johnson left the White House. Because the incident had already made national news, he knew about it and began to chat with us during the flight. He said that he had never been to a symphony concert, was sure that the music was too stuffy for him, that he didn't know anything about it and in fact would be somewhat intimidated by the idea of going to a symphony concert. I told him that if we in fact got the instruments to Austin in time on a new truck, I would like him to be my guest—and he somewhat reluctantly agreed. So here, at the age of approximately sixty, this man experienced his first concert—and it wasn't a beginner's program: Schubert's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony and Mahler's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony, with Georg Solti and the Chicago Symphony. At the end, he came backstage visibly moved, saying that he had no idea that this music could reach him the way it did, and that he had just had a transforming experience. He actually became a subscriber to the Austin Symphony that very week, and remained so until he died a few years ago.

Now—I don't believe for a minute that by sheer coincidence, I happened to run into the one person in America who might have loved a symphony concert but who was somehow intimidated by the way the classical music industry has presented itself over the past hundred years or so. In fact, I know that he is typical of hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of people, people who feel that they don't know enough to enjoy or relate to art music—and that to a large degree this fact is a major reason for the increasing isolation of what we call art music from a central place in our society. Ten years ago the League of American Orchestras conducted focus groups of people who went to the theater, to museums, but not to symphony concerts—and throughout the country, in large cities or small towns, the predominant reason that these people stayed away from "classical music" is that they were intimidated. They felt they didn't know enough about it to appreciate it; they felt that they might embarrass themselves by, Heaven forbid, clapping at the wrong time; they felt that this music was for "the stuffed shirt crowd," or was "stuffy." Those words appeared over and over again.

So what does this have to do with us? Plenty! When some of us speak about “advocacy,” we think narrowly, in terms of influencing funding decisions, or government decisions. But we do *not* think enough about proselytizing, about how those who make music actually talk about it and present it, as part of advocacy—and traditionally many of us haven’t thought of it as part of our job in preparing musicians to make their way in this world. And we had better change dramatically and rapidly. We are beginning to, but too slowly. I am pleased to see efforts developing in schools and in NASM. But, we need to grow our capabilities rapidly.

There is a serious distortion of values in the world—a set of values that puts the short term ahead of the long term, which puts financial achievement ahead of ethical standards, and a set of values that increasingly diminishes the worth of intellectual achievement and of human expression. In fact, when future generations look back and judge the civilizations and societies of the past, it is first and foremost the cultural and artistic achievements of those societies that are spoken of. To be sure, engineering and scientific achievements are major parts of the picture of any society. But whether it is Homer, Shakespeare, Mozart, Rembrandt, Picasso, James Baldwin, Garcia Lorca, Duke Ellington, Woody Guthrie, or Leonard Bernstein—the artists and the art they created express the deepest and most profound thoughts of the civilizations in which they lived and worked. And it is the achievements of those artists that, in fact, define civilizations, define humanity. It is, in fact, the arts that distinguish us.

But it is typical of artists to decry this trend in society, and to blame society—rather than to understand that we who care about culture and music, and who make that music or train those who do, have a very real and critical role in establishing society’s impression of what we do. We need to understand the role that the classical music world has played in isolating itself—just a few examples:

- Although it is changing now, for many years we presented program notes filled with musicological jargon that the general public could not follow—“the retrograde inversion of the principal fugal theme, resolving on the harmonic seventh...”—an approach guaranteed to make people attending concerts feel inadequate to appreciate the music.
- We refer to 25-year-old assistant conductors as “maestro.” An off-putting word if ever there was one.
- Classical music announcers or lecturers who speak in deep, reverent tones, to let us know that we are doing a good and hallowed thing by listening to great music.
- Enforcing rituals—such as not clapping between movements. This is a 20<sup>th</sup> century invention, historically wrong, but designed to show that “I know this piece isn’t over yet—and you don’t.” I even saw a conductor visibly admonish an audience for applauding after the first movement of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Scheherazade*, not even a structured symphony! How many more times will people pay money to be humiliated by the people they are applauding?
- I could devote a whole other speech to the issue of diversity. It is of course a national scandal that it took until 1947 for baseball to accept Jackie Robinson. But it was eight years later, 1955, when Marian Anderson was to be the first Black singer to appear on stage at the Metropolitan Opera. And it was two years after that—1957—when major American orchestras finally integrated, with a cellist named Donald Whyte in the Cleveland Orchestra. It took another five years for a second, a violinist named Sanford Allen in the New York Philharmonic. I served on panels with the late Donald Whyte, and he told the story of being

told by some of our most prestigious orchestras, in the 1950s, not to even apply because “we don’t take coloreds!” That was only about 50 years ago, not ancient history—we’re talking about the parents, grandparents, uncles of today’s young African Americans! And we wonder why so few African Americans have thought of classical music as a career!

So why am I telling you all of this—you didn’t commit those sins, after all. However, I believe that as a field, those of us who educate musicians, those of us who present or perform music, those of us who not only have a vested interest in the success of our art form in this country but who also should believe passionately in the inherent cultural value to a civilized society of what we do, we have had a tendency to function as if we had no roles in fixing the results of a century of bad practice. *That must change.* Simply saying that we are now open to all is not enough to correct the past behavior of our field.

“Advocacy” to me means that in addition to giving technically accomplished and emotionally communicative performances of a wide music, everyone who is involved in music *must* understand that he or she has a role in breaking down those barriers that we all watched be put up. Everyone must understand the social and cultural context in which we will make our music—our students must be taught that context, and they must be prepared to think and speak about it, and think and speak in a way that tears down those barriers. And I don’t think we challenge our students anywhere near enough to even think about this side of being a musician.

Too often, someone says to me “why should we care about music that was written by dead, white, European males?” My first response is to ask this: “what city in the world has the largest number of professional symphony orchestras from which musicians actually make a living?” After they guess Vienna, or London, or even New York—I tell them that the answer is Tokyo. Then I might ask in what country today are we seeing the most explosive growth of orchestras? The answer is China. The people of those countries do not seem to have worried about the fact that western symphonic music is European based, not Asian based. The same is true across many musical forms and idioms. People of many backgrounds can and do appreciate and relate to jazz. Look at the worldwide audience for the music of the Silk Road, and the incredible non-Indian audience held rapt by Ravi Shankar. The tired old cliché that the music we believe in is universal, and that it has transformative powers on human beings, is a tired old cliché because it is true. But too few of the people who actually perform that music understand the cultural and social context in which they are currently functioning, and thus do not think about much beyond the art of performing the music.

Another problem, I believe, in America today is that people in power, people who shape the civic thinking in our country, want simple and quantifiable answers—graphs, charts, numerical indications of progress. So when you talk about the non-quantifiable human qualities of music and the arts, when you start talking about the way in which an understanding of great art leads to a greater understanding of other cultures and peoples and reflects and illuminates the human spirit, you are asked to prove it. Well...I can’t document it with graphs—but every year of my life spent in music makes me more certain of it. And exhibit A for me is not a chart—it is an orchestra, a very specific orchestra. Many of you, I am sure, have heard of it: it’s called the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, and it is now in its eleventh year of existence. Founded by Daniel Barenboim, it consists of Arabs, Palestinians, and Israeli Jews—and every year for three or four weeks they live together, eat together, rehearse and perform together. My wife and I were a part of that orchestra from the beginning—and that first year was an experience I shall never forget. Daniel Barenboim, and famed cellist Yo-Yo Ma working with him, assembled this group of young musicians, ages 17-25, and

brought them together in Weimar, Germany. In addition to forming an orchestra, Barenboim and Ma invited them to form chamber music groups which *they*, Barenboim and Ma, would coach in preparation for a chamber music concert to take place the night before the orchestra concert. There was only one rule—no all Jewish chamber group, and no all Arab/Palestinian group. The resulting chamber music concert was 3½ hours long—and each group played only *one movement*, not whole pieces—or it would have gone on forever. To sit there and watch, for instance, a movement from a Brahms Clarinet trio, played by an Egyptian, a Syrian, and an Israeli was one of the most moving experiences of my life—to see these kids working out musical problems together, leaning into each others' phrases, and embracing each other while receiving applause—this was all the charting and graphing I will ever need to demonstrate what it is that music can do that nothing else can. We know this—you and I and those who are in our fields know this. The question is how can we work together to help the rest of the world to know it—and to get the value, the *human value*, of this art form across to those who determine what we teach our future citizens?

So the question is “are we preparing our students to go forward in this world and help to shape the America of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?” If we are going to build an America that is something more than faster computers, bigger buildings, more productive factories, and certainly about something other than more devastating wars and conflicts, then we cannot exist in a self-made plastic bubble, unaware of, and unwilling to try to change the society in which we live.

As I mentioned previously, some schools of music are definitely beginning to address some of these issues. However, I think they are in the minority and those efforts are still in their relative infancy. NASM is urging greater attention by all music schools. What are some of the things that I believe we need to think about in our preparation of the next generation of musicians? And what are things we need to think about *ourselves*?

- We personally need to involve ourselves with arts advocacy efforts in our own communities, and we need to encourage our colleagues and our students to do the same. Virtually every state has a state arts advocacy organization—in Illinois we have the Illinois Arts Alliance—that brings together *all* of those who create art, who present art, who educate, and who believe in the centrality of arts to any civilization. My friends who work in that area nationally and locally tell me that arts educators are traditionally under-represented in those arts alliances. I am told that many professional educators in the arts do not feel welcomed as strategic partners in these settings. This needs attention and change because local and state advocacy organizations help to ignite and keep alive a public dialogue about the importance of the arts in our communities, whether advocating to governmental forces, to school boards, or to those who shape public opinion. Those of us who are committed to a thriving arts community should involve ourselves in their efforts and seek their involvement in promotion of what we do.
- It is imperative that we teach musicians to think not just about the music itself, but its place in society—in this particular 21<sup>st</sup> century American society—and about their role in ensuring and enhancing that place.
- Musicians need to learn how to speak about music to *all* constituencies—not just to other musicians. They need to engage with audiences and potential audiences, and they need to be trained to do this effectively.

- Musicians need to understand the need for formal advocacy—for communicating to those who set public policy, whether it is educational curricula in our school systems or our politicians—and they need to be trained in *effective* ways to make the case for music as an essential component of any civilized society.
- Musicians who are being trained to be orchestral players need to know how orchestras work, and how they can and must play a role in orchestras’ advocacy efforts, fundraising efforts, and audience development efforts. Now most musicians get into orchestras with only one bit of assumed knowledge about orchestras—“the management is the enemy.” To say that that is not helpful to the successful operation of a symphony orchestra is an understatement. I teach such a course at Roosevelt—and I’ve had graduate students who were surprised to learn that members of Boards of Directors don’t get paid to be on the Board! There is a long history in America of separation between those who make music and those who administer and/or present it—that separation is unhealthy. Administrators must welcome musicians into the decision-making and governing process, and musicians must be trained to function in that process.
- Musicians need to be sensitive to, and supportive of, efforts to diversify our world—strong, proactive efforts that will help to overcome a century of actual, real discrimination. While that situation has improved dramatically in our lifetimes, it is a very important and real part of our field’s history. Musicians need to hear from people like Aaron Dworkin of the Sphinx Foundation whose organization does a terrific job promoting string playing among young musicians of color, on the need for greater change in this area.
- Musicians need to be sensitive to changes in society. Today’s society is very much more visual oriented than was the case even thirty years ago. We have the first generation of 50-year olds who grew up with television as a constant in their childhoods. That simple fact has re-wired people, and enhanced their expectation of some kind of visual stimulus as they experience music. Yet if you try to explain to orchestra musicians the importance of, say, risers—so people on the main floor can see something other than the socks of the front row of string players—they get angry at the thought that anything other than the way they play the notes should matter. They need to be exposed to thinking about all manners of the presentation and delivery of music—including electronic and the internet—and to engage in discussions about what that might mean for the future.
- We need to encourage exploration, debate, discussion about the history of classical music in America—how it was, in fact, used for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to actually separate social classes in this country—and how as our society has thankfully moved to a more democratic spirit our field has been slow to adapt, and rid itself of some of the ritualistic trappings with which the music business surrounded itself.
- In the performances that we present on behalf of our schools, we need to think about, and experiment with, all aspects of concert presentation. Educational institutions should be on the leading edge of experimentation—we should be laboratories for new approaches to the presentation of concerts. After all, we can easily afford an occasional misstep much more easily than a multi-million dollar orchestra, and we cannot be as glued to *tradition* as they are. We can be a catalyst for change, actually helping the industry, the professional orchestras and opera companies, progress. And in the process we must teach musicians to be open to new approaches to presentation, to experimentation.

- If we're going to be true advocates, we must confront the fact that ticket prices are a barrier to symphony orchestras, opera companies, and many classical concerts. A recent experience that I have had consulting with the Sao Paulo Symphony Orchestra, which almost completely sells out every single performance of a full 30-week season with three performances a week, plus additional chamber orchestra concerts—in large part because the heavy government subsidy they receive allows them to keep ticket prices very low—has underlined the importance of this issue for me. We are of course not in a position to lower the prices that our nation's orchestras and opera companies charge—but we *are* in a position to raise the issue, engage the subject in serious discussion, and perhaps even partner with business schools and others in coming to grips with this issue.
- In short, musicians that are being trained for the future need to be made aware of the societal and cultural climate into which they are being sent, and they need to be made aware of the fact that they will be central players in changing that climate. This is absolutely essential if we are not to see a continued marginalization of art music in the future.

In June, the NEA released its national Arts Participation study for 2008, and in case nothing else I have said gives you cause for worry, that study should. It shows a dramatic decline in arts participation and attendance across the board, at all age levels, over the past six years. While we might wish to blame some of that on the economy, reading this study in detail indicates, I think something deeper—a continuing trend toward a distance between Americans and the arts. If we, at the higher education level, continue to train artists without dealing with the climate into which we are sending them, we run a very real risk of contributing to a continuing trend toward irrelevance.

Now that I am a college dean, I look forward to working alongside all of you on these very pressing issues that confront us all. We must work to bring more and more people to our institutions and our country's concert halls. We must expand our audiences so they can experience all of the joys and passion every one of us experience in the concerts halls and opera houses we frequent.

The peak of human achievement, in civilization after civilization, is represented by its artistic and cultural achievements—and any society worthy of respect is a society that respects and preserves the great art handed down to it from the past, and adds to that heritage by the creation of new art. And that society must accept that bringing great art to the center of society is a responsibility that to a great degree rests with its artists. Since our government will not likely be the body to do this, it becomes the obligation of all of us who work in music to do this critical work.

The great playwright Arthur Miller may well have put it best: *“When the cannons have stopped firing, and the great victories of finance are reduced to surmise and are long forgotten, it is the art of the people that will confront future generations. The arts can do more to sustain the peace than all the wars, the armaments, and the threats and warnings of the politicians.”*

Thank you very much for listening.

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