

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC**  
**Annual Meeting 2015**

**Greetings from the Association Européenne des Conservatoires  
(AEC)**

**Stefan Gies**  
Chief Executive Officer, AEC

Dear Executive Director, Dear President, Dear Members of NASM,

Good morning.

As AEC's recently appointed new Chief Executive Officer, it is a privilege and a great pleasure to be with you at your Annual Meeting and to have the opportunity to address you. Our sister organisations, NASM and AEC, have devoted themselves to a shared task. Music is our mission and our passion, and our commitment is to enable, to maintain and to improve the quality of higher music education at its best.

It was only a few days ago that I, as the new CEO, for the first time managed my organisation's annual meeting: the 2015 annual congress of the AEC, the Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Music academies and Musikhochschulen, which took place last week in Glasgow, Scotland. I'm glad to be with you now in the role of an observer and committed participant.

We very much appreciated that your President Mark Wait came to Glasgow, where he made a splendid and meaningful speech at the opening event. He concluded his speech by quoting an American politician: "If you want to go fast, go alone! If you want to go far, go together!" This is a wonderful metaphor for any kind of cooperation, and this is also true for the collaboration between NASM and AEC.

That opening night in Glasgow, another famous American was cited, Leonard Bernstein, who once said, "If there is violence, let the music speak." That was on Thursday, the 12<sup>th</sup>, and no one could at that time imagine what would happen the next day in Paris. It was no coincidence that the terrorists of the so-called Islamic State had chosen a musical event as a target. They were aware about the power of music to unite people, to raise emotions, to create mutual understanding and peace in our hearts. We bow in mourning for the dead, but we also draw strength and confidence from what music can give us: The power to stand!

Dear colleagues and friends, I bring warmest greetings from many, many dedicated friends from across the ocean: from our President, Pascale De Groote, from the AEC Council, from AEC's General Manager, Linda Messas, and the whole Office Team. Last but not least, I wish to bring greetings on behalf of nearly 300 Music Higher Education Institutes all over Europe and beyond, who are members of our association. And that means a great deal, as AEC represents almost every European institution active in this field.

I have studied your Annual Meeting program. It's really impressive to see both its breadth and depth, to learn which topics you will be discussing, and to observe that you are addressing them all with the utmost professionalism. Most of the issues you are addressing, and even many titles of the sessions, remind me of our own conferences. For instance:

- Evaluation and quality assurance
- The role of the musician in the future society
- Fundraising
- Governance issues
- Legal issues

... to name just a few examples.

Yet, there might be a different understanding hidden behind these common titles. In Europe, culture, musical education and education in general—at whatever level—is described and regarded as a task of public authority. In my home continent, public funding and government responsibility are considered to guarantee the political and economic independence of higher education institutions. If you, as a potential student or teacher, are looking for high-standing quality, for a renowned institution and for a spirit of open-mindedness and freedom of thought, you would in Europe almost always go for a public institution. Of course, AEC also represents the interests of private institutions. You can find them also in Europe, they are also members of the AEC, and they offer an important contribution to complement the European landscape of Higher Music Education. But our deep belief that education in a democratic society must be above all a governmental task is not up for discussion.

In that sense, America might be different. But such differences are not bad; one is not superior to another. Quite the contrary: that is what makes—in a positive sense—the diversity of the world. When we realize that something is different, that always means that there exists an opportunity to learn. But this will only succeed if we recognize and acknowledge what is different. This requires respect and it requires humility. I think we can do still more to promote transatlantic exchanges. One of the most significant outcomes of this learning process might be to strengthen our own identities, even if it's only by knowing better than before why we like and appreciate that to which we are accustomed.

NASM and AEC have maintained regular and friendly contact for many years. We enjoy and benefit from the communication and discourse between our associations, and this is perhaps not despite the different geographical and cultural context in which we operate, but—to the contrary—due to these differences. The bonds between our sister associations are rooted in shared values and common concerns and they are deepening through an ongoing exchange of views and through joint projects. Of course, these bonds are further strengthened by personal relationships. Let me take the opportunity to express my gratitude for the warm welcome that has been given to me by your Executive Director, Karen P. Moynahan, and your President, Mark Wait. Thank you Karen, thank you Mark. I am confident in the enduring strength of our capacity to move forward into even closer cooperation. I hope that, through that close involvement, I shall also be able to maintain the valuable and deeply appreciated links that I have established with colleagues from your organisation until now.

I wish you a successful and productive meeting and look forward to joining you during its various sessions and networking events. I am sure I shall bring back a rich storehouse of experiences, insights and inspiration to my colleagues in AEC.

Thank you very much. I wish you all a good time here in St. Louis.