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Report of the President

Mark Wait

Dean, Blair School of Music
Vanderbilt University

In the past two years, I have spoken of NASM's longstanding and time-honored mission, and of the importance of institutional citizenship. This year, in my last report to you as President, I would like share a few thoughts about the future and about renewal—personal renewal, institutional renewal, and even renewal of this Association.

Throughout my career, I have enjoyed asking students and young faculty members what they hope to be doing five or 10 years into the future. What are their hopes, their dreams? Lately, I have been asking the same question to people over 50, and even to people over 60. And the answers, both from those in their 20s and those in their 60s, are strikingly similar. Almost everybody has plans for the future. For our students, their dream may be to teach in a high school or college, or to play in a professional string quartet. For those of us whose careers are more advanced, we may dream of that big project we've been putting off for years. Learning that Schubert Sonata we've never gotten around to, or writing that book we've been thinking about for so long. Time to get that done. Time to do something new, something different. In a word: renewal.

We could use another word: change. But for some, the word "change" has baggage. People resist change, but everybody welcomes renewal. Why? Because "change" means having to do something in a different way. It's not what we're used to, not what we're comfortable with. It means something unknown, possibly difficult. The reference point is the past—the way we've always done things. But "renewal" means something fresh, a new horizon. It means the future, not the past. Everybody welcomes renewal. So when we talk about things becoming something else, evolving, let's call it renewal rather than change. It is a cliché to say that change is all around us. But in fact, it is renewal that has always been all around us. All those changes that have occurred over the years have really been consistent, ongoing renewal.

So let's consider some of the renewals that have occurred in our profession over the years. They seem to have accelerated in the past 10 years—renewals in concert dress, the accelerating shift away from traditional forms such as opera and orchestras toward chamber music and innovative smaller ensembles. There have even been fundamental changes in venues—Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center and their counterparts still exist, of course, but so do Poisson Rouge, National Sawdust, Redcat Theater in Los Angeles, and blackbox theaters throughout the country—informal, intimate venues that feature many types of music and technology for smaller, highly engaged audiences. These new venues have certainly renewed the vitality of our concert life. And young, energetic artists have renewed our profession, as well, as soloists and in ensembles. Our leading ensembles now include Roomful of Teeth and ICE, the International Contemporary Ensemble, and numerous other innovative smaller groups. These are often the role models for today's students, who increasingly seek *those* kinds of experiences—experiences fundamentally different from the ones we trained and hoped for. Renewal.

And our own curricula are changing and being renewed, little by little. In general the curriculum tends to lag behind actual emerging experience. Circumstances change before our curricula do. And so our curricula are constantly playing catch-up with real life. A curriculum is hard to change—it's usually

rooted in tradition, and so renewal means changing processes and habits, which is hard, and changing hearts and minds, which is harder. Still, many of you in this room have embarked on curricular change, and for nearly a decade, NASM has encouraged such change. As you must be tired of hearing, our Standards represent a foundation for creativity, not a ceiling to be aimed for. The last revision of our Standards was undertaken nearly ten years ago, precisely to give individual music units—each of us—greater flexibility in our own planning and in our own aspirations. And as an Association we are making progress: Gradually, bit by bit, we are achieving renewal through our individual curricula and their cumulative effects.

So renewal is everywhere around us—concert dress, venues, artists, repertoire, curricula. It is constant, it is everywhere, and it is inevitable.

Sometimes we find it in unexpected places and in unlikely people. We *expect* to find creative energy and innovative, progressive, cutting-edge imagination in young artists like the members of Roomful of Teeth.

But in recent years we have seen renewal in two leading world artists whose greatest contributions to music developed and blossomed late in their lives, in their 60s, precisely when renewal did *not* have to occur, and when nobody would have predicted it.

Claudio Abbado and Daniel Barenboim were already leading artists when they were young, in their 20s and 30s. Both of their careers were stellar. By the time Abbado was in his 50s, he had been the Music Director at La Scala, and had led the London Symphony Orchestra and the Berlin Philharmonic. By the time Barenboim was in his 50s, he had recorded the complete Beethoven piano sonatas twice, and was both a prodigious pianist and conductor of symphonic repertoire and operas.

When they were in their 60s, both Abbado and Barenboim could have kept doing, for the rest of their lives, precisely what they *had* been doing. But both found renewal—renewal of inspiration, insight, and energy. Abbado's renewal came after surviving stomach cancer in 2000, at the age of 67. Both his physical being and his musical persona changed dramatically—even radically. And despite his frailty, there was a burst of new activity. In 2003 Abbado founded the Lucerne Festival Orchestra, and in 2004 the Orchestra Mozart—two of the *six* orchestras he founded in his life. He became a different kind of conductor—not the abrupt, directive personality of his earlier career, but an open, collaborative partner who *invited* performers to give their very best, and then gave them the freedom to do just that. This was renewal that was profound, renewal that touched the musical world and established a new role model for scores of young musicians who played in these orchestras.

Daniel Barenboim, like Abbado, has also attained new heights of achievement in recent years. In 1999, Barenboim and the social philosopher Edward Said formed the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, consisting primarily of young Israelis and Palestinians. Quite apart from the geopolitical uniqueness of this orchestra, it achieves an amazing level of musical artistry. These young musicians, mostly in their 20s, give technically accomplished and musically compelling performances not only of the Beethoven symphonies, but also of works by Schoenberg and Boulez. Inspired by the energy and technical assurance of these young musicians, Barenboim has found even deeper mastery, and is unquestionably now a great conductor. In his 60s and early 70s, he has achieved a new, higher level of artistic excellence and renewal.

So, these two great artists changed dramatically. And here's the point—*they didn't have to*. They could have finished their careers doing the same thing for the rest of their lives. But they didn't. Instead, in extraordinary acts of will, they renewed themselves. And as a result, they helped transform and renew the world of music.

What does this have to do with us?

Simply this: whatever our age, whatever our place in the profession, we all have the capacity, individually and institutionally, to transform music in higher education, to open the door to the future. That is what we should be doing. We talk about fostering excellence, as we should. And we talk about maintaining traditions, as we should. But we seldom talk about *creating* the future—actively, aggressively, and energetically. Not merely *meeting* the future, but *creating* it. Renewing ourselves. Being active agents of renewal—for ourselves, our institutions, and our art.

Our role as music executives is to be the fulcrum—the hinge-point, the tipping point—choose your own metaphor. The point is that *we* are the critical agents, the point at which renewal occurs. *We* are the place that allows new wisdom to emerge, that opens the door and allows fresh air in. And for that to happen, we have to imagine and experience and feel that renewal in *ourselves*. If we cannot feel that within ourselves, we cannot transmit it to our faculty colleagues.

Let me return now to the curriculum, the one area of renewal that we all face at one time or another. I choose it precisely because it's the hardest area in which to effect change and renewal.

So how do we manage this? We have been talking about this in sessions the past two days, with excellent ideas and perspectives. To these, I would like to add some practical suggestions. Some of these may have been mentioned, some not. I speak simply as a colleague who has experienced this process at my own institution and who has seen these suggestions work at others. So here are six suggestions, as you contemplate curricular renewal.

1. **Think Big.** Think about what a music school can and should be. Think about the *totality* of the curriculum, and how its parts work *together*, not as separate islands. Think about how chamber music and large ensembles really are the same thing, musicians working together. An orchestra is chamber music on a larger scale—that principle is what Abbado brought to the Berlin Philharmonic, and to all his orchestras. And think about chamber music *today*—not merely the traditional string quartets and wind quintets, but the myriad medium ensembles, the Pierrot groups, the richly diverse combinations that we see in ICE and Roomful of Teeth. Think, too, about what your music unit means to the university at large, and what it *can* and *should* mean. Look to the horizon, to the rest of the university and to society at large, not merely the boundaries of the music building. Think big and think wide!
2. **Think Ahead—Far Ahead.** Think *not* of *revising* the current curriculum, but rather far into the future—30 years ahead, to what today's students will need then, in mid-career. If you think merely about revision, you will get only a mild variant of what you already have. You won't get change or renewal. Instead, think decades ahead. Doing so will break you and your colleagues out of the past and will launch you into the future. It requires an extraordinary effort of imagination to project into an unforeseeable future, but that's what we owe our students, our profession, and ourselves.
3. **Think Young.** If you are contemplating curricular change and renewal, and if you have a committee doing the work, then stack the committee with *assistant professors*, because they have the most at stake. It's *their* future. *They* will live with the new curriculum the longest, and they have a more immediate sense of the cutting edge of our profession—the technology, the global perspective, the evolution and melding of styles, and the quest for excellence, whether in scholarship or in performance. So think young, and empower your junior faculty.
4. **Take Time.** Don't set a time limit on planning your curricular changes. It takes time to get it right. Here's why: Everybody on your committee—each faculty member, and you yourself, will have to get used to thinking differently, and to seeing the world through a new lens—the lens of our students 30 years from now—and to doing things in a different way. And even when you do become accustomed

to thinking differently, you will find yourselves changing your mind, possibly several times, on any given issue. That is what happened in my own institution. Our committee took four years to plan the curriculum before presenting it to the entire music faculty. It was time well spent. So concentrate on doing it right, not doing it Tuesday.

5. **Think Together.** Think not only of your own institution, but of all the institutions in our Association, and of how we can strengthen each other by sharing with each other. Great institutions have the means and the clout to make significant changes occur—in our own institutions and by extension in our profession. Great institutions have the power to illuminate the future, through institutional citizenship and leadership. Throughout our 91-year history, we have learned from each other, and have renewed ourselves and our Association through shared experience, vision, and wisdom. The need for shared perspective and mutual inquiry among ourselves has never been greater than it is today. Whatever challenges your own institution may be facing, you will find fresh insight and perspective and empathy among your colleagues in this room. Let us recognize our capacity to learn from each other, and to help each other. Let us be catalysts for each other, and nurture each other’s creativity and imagination. If your institution has initiated something big, something you think could benefit others, share it. Tell others so that it can stimulate their own thinking. Conversely, if you see or hear of a great idea at another institution, steal it, and tailor it to your own institution. There is no copyright or trademark on great curricular ideas. I am grateful to Peter Witte for calling my attention to something the Mayor of Kansas City, Missouri, Sly James, said: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” That’s good advice. So let’s all take it. Thus do we sustain and renew and strengthen this Association.
6. **Think of Your Students, and Trust Them.** Obviously, our students are our primary focus. They are the musicians who will take music into realms unforeseen, possibly even unimagined. It is *they*, not we, who will live the future. And let us be honest: it is they who are often a step or two ahead of us, whether we know it or not. We should trust them, and listen to them, while giving them the skills they will need to negotiate at least part of that future. In them we will find the optimism and the courage for the future. They are our *raison d’être*. They are our focus, our horizon, and that is where we must keep our vision fixed, steadily and surely.

So those are my six suggestions. Now, let’s go back to my opening question: what do *you* hope to be doing in five or 10 years? What are your hopes and dreams for your institution, and for your students? Whatever your station in life, whatever your place in your career, whether at the beginning or near the end, I invite you to think about renewal. What do you want the future to look like? How far can you go in making that happen? Ask yourself the question that has become a cliché, but it’s still a great question: what would you do if you had no fear?

As I conclude my term as President, I give you my heartfelt thanks and admiration for all that each of you has done—and will do—to advance music, and to lead our profession—our art—into the future. And I urge you to embark on the journey of renewal. We’re all going to end up in the future anyway, so let’s make the most of that journey. Thank you, and *bon voyage*.