

ADDRESS TO THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC
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The Work of Music

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Mr. Hope presented the following keynote address on the occasion of his final NASM Annual Meeting as Executive Director, following 38 years of service.

Introduction

In 1949 American author William Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. His acceptance speech in Stockholm on December 10, 1950, remains famous to this day. It began as follows: "I feel that this award was not made to me as a man, but to my work – a life's work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit, not for glory and least of all for profit, but to create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before."

The work of music is what we all do, individually, in our institutions, and collectively in NASM. We do the work of music in many other settings as well, as do our thousands of professional colleagues in all aspects of our field. Over the next 50 hours or so, all of us are going to be engaged in the work of music as we address the various topics scheduled for this meeting, topics that name and annotate major issues of importance to music in higher education and therefore to music as a whole.

We face conditions that provide opportunities, issues that provide challenges, and developments that are deeply frustrating. We also face ideas and situations that gnaw and scrape against what we believe in our minds and souls to be right. Whatever we face, the work of music is our center. It remains our way through, our transcending instrumentality, our guide, our anchor, our greatest positive, our bridge to the world of spirit and light.

There are hundreds of musicians in the audience. Individually and collectively we have a thorough knowledge of the work of music. No matter how gifted we are, we understand the connection between incessant, dedicated work and achievement. We know in our souls what Faulkner means when he talks about "agony and sweat."

The work of music makes possible everything else that music is and does. It always has, and it always will. Nothing can replace it. The work of music is a gift that we have received, and it produces the gifts of music that we give to others. It is in receiving and giving these gifts that we reach the deepest regions of the human spirit, what we often call "the power of music." This power, in its highest manifestations, produces that glorious wrenching move from this world to another, one that floods us with intimations of infinity and connects the human spirit to eternity.

As this meeting proceeds, and the opportunities and challenges of our time are discussed, it is crucial that the work of music remain our first and most basic reference point.

Let us interact as we always do, remembering that the work of music is a tapestry where every thread is important, every musician, every institution, every student, everyone involved in the work of music in every specialization is important. Every thread in the tapestry must be as strong as possible. We are here to pool our resources in thought toward action, to help every institution and its administrators, faculty, and students to be as strong as possible – not “for glory...[or] for profit, but to create out of materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before.”

Context

Each of us does the work of music in a context. We share national and international contexts, but each of us also works in a unique local context. Each of our contexts is dynamic with many interactions among what changes and what does not. So is the work of music. Most of the people in this room have responsibilities to manage the relationship between what changes and what does not in ways that advance the work of music in their institution and beyond. It is under the aegis of this responsibility that each of us faces and resolves specific questions of leadership and management, teaching, evaluation and assessment, frameworks, future directions, building projects, and all the other issues that are on the agenda for this meeting.

Contextual conditions are complex and full of detail, but they are created and sustained in large part by foundational ideas and by relationships and collisions of foundational ideas.

For example, take proposals, realities, and extant trajectories regarding operational systems and governance. In any instance, ask yourself the extent to which the basic underlying idea is freedom or control. Of course, both must be present, but in any situation, what idea dominates, what is the proportion? To what extent and in what ways are authority and responsibility distributed? How compatible are the freedom and control proportions with the specific nature of the issue, problem, or task at hand?

We all know three things: (1) questions of freedom and control are extremely complicated, a basic subject of human interaction, and sources of disagreement and conflict at every level; (2) deep and bitter divisions now roil the American context over questions of freedom and control; and (3) once left primarily to govern itself, higher education has become an increasingly visible freedom-versus-control battlefield in the larger cultural and political war.

In education, the forces supporting the idea of centralized control have been advancing since the mid-1980s. These forces created a rhetoric of permanent accusation. Their control acquisition trajectory began with outcomes and then proceeded to assessment, accountability, and accounting. If left alone, it is poised to advance fully to the already visible next stages of curriculum standardization, centralized federal control, bureaucratic enforcement, and a new educational economy driven by crony assessmentism and justified by the rhetoric of transparency. These are all just ideas shaped toward certain objectives, but the operational results of their advancement surround us every day.

No wonder many of you come to this meeting bearing concerns about rising bureaucratization and top-down standardization that are slowly eroding conditions enabling you and your faculty, your colleagues in other disciplines, and your upper administration to decide what is right for your particular students, institution, time, and place.

Thankfully, there are signs that more and more individuals throughout higher education are beginning to see the strategic nature of the trajectory, not just its individual tactical elements. The endgame is becoming clearer. More are beginning to see that the idea of centralized control is harnessed to a goal they oppose. This goal is to turn higher education from a sensitive, nuanced, institutionally administered instrument for advanced individual development in matters of

disciplinary content and integration to a centralized, highly regulated, technical utility fulfilled primarily by roboticized means. One clear manifestation of this effort is the highly funded public relations attempt to move the purpose of higher education from civilization building in all its artistic, humanistic, and scientific richness, to the salary of the first job.

In *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare has Ulysses speak about what happens when societies lose their balance and sense of proportion about questions of power and control: “Then everything includes itself in power, / Power into will, will into appetite; / And appetite, an universal wolf, / So doubly seconded with will and power, / Must make perforce an universal prey, / And at last, eat up itself.” We may have to listen to the wolf howl. We may be coerced to feed it, but we don’t have to let it dwell within us.

In great contrast to all these troubling conditions, we have the freedom and independence ideas behind the enormous historic achievement of American higher education, including the achievements of music in higher education. We can see what happens when we do the opposite of what many are proposing we do now. In an overall sense, advancements in capacity, capability, and results have been spectacular over the last century.

Our challenge is to manage in the present and evolving context in ways that preserve conditions that advance these capabilities, capacities, and results, and keep the work of music in higher education moving forward with all of its creative force.

Transcendence for the work of music is our responsibility, our challenge, and our joy. Today, I want to explore with you one conceptual approach to fulfilling this responsibility.

To get started, let us each create an imaginary table. Let us place upon it sets of big ideas in relationship and collision. Let us place upon our table the first set containing freedom and control. I will ask you to put other idea sets on the table as we connect the work of music, contextual realities, and the concept of big ideas to several topic areas that we will begin to consider in depth immediately following this session.

Leadership and Management

Leadership and management are vast topics. Let us look at just two contrasting big ideas.

Think for a moment about the differences in the way a farmer works and the way a factory manager works. Both the farmer and the factory manager are interested in results. Successful farmers and factory managers have to be knowledgeable and technically proficient at what they do. Both use the benefits of science, applicable technologies, and analytical knowledge and skills. But there is one major difference. The factory manager is operating a highly engineered technological system; the farmer is nurturing a dynamic, organic system.

In the factory, as long as raw materials arrive and the machines work as they are designed to, identical product will roll off the assembly line. Manufacturing will occur. Local knowledge does not matter.

The farmer is at the mercy of constantly changing weather, and other variables. Livestock farmers are responsible for individual animals that do not post schedules for getting lost or sick or having their young. Each farm is different. If the farmer makes thousands of good case- and time-specific decisions as conditions change, cultivation will occur in the present, and conditions for future cultivation will be protected. Local knowledge is essential

Many of the challenges that we face today can be traced to policy preferences for the manufacturing idea as the governing education policy generator. The idea of education as a

cultivation enterprise is deeply discounted. Those interested in centralizing power naturally gravitate toward the factory model with its illusions of predictability and portability, its single yes-or-no answers, its numbers-dominated accountability structure, and its claims of scientificness. Subjects and ways of working that are incompatible with the factory model are marginalized. The STEM movement is Exhibit A.

But cultivation as idea and process is a transcending reality in the world, an idea deeply embedded in the work of music. If repressed where it is the appropriate approach, failure is usually right around the corner.

Let us now return to our imaginary table and add a set of ideas containing manufacturing and cultivation to the set containing control and freedom.

Teaching

The contrast between the idea of teaching as manufacturing and teaching as cultivation is abundantly clear, especially to musicians.

The manufacturing mindset has placed the world of P-12 education under terrible stress for over three decades, some would say for over a century. There is a parade of panaceas each of which lasts about 3 years. These conditions are deeply troubling far beyond their inconveniences, costs, and dysfunctions. When factory model after factory model does not work, the answer is always a newer and more elaborate factory with improved theory, better machines, newer technologies, and more publicity assuring success in advance. The factory model itself is not questioned.

Our colleagues doing the work of music in music education face difficult decisions about how they will proceed to protect the study of music under the many difficult conditions that these views of teaching continue to create, especially as they are translated into ever-changing policies and requirements that divert attention from teaching content. At this meeting there will be several sessions that address these very questions in terms of both national and local contexts, with a particular focus on music teacher preparation.

The manufacturing ideal also informs a variety of commercial and political forces interested in turning as much of higher education as possible into one big education factory.

Returning to our imaginary table, and continuing to think about transcendence, let us add a third ideas set, puzzles and mysteries, to those containing manufacturing and cultivation, and freedom and control. It is often said that puzzles have specific solutions, but mysteries have answers that expand and deepen the mystery as more is learned. The factory solves a specific puzzle. The farm is a place of mystery.

Which big idea – puzzle or mystery – best characterizes the nature and pursuit of teaching?

Evaluation and Assessment

It is one thing to believe, as we all do, that assessment is a critically important part of educational efforts where the center is subject-matter content. It is quite another to believe that assessment trumps content, that content only matters in relationship to assessment procedures, processes, and results. Consistent with the control, manufacturing, and puzzle views of education, we have all seen assessment being morphed from something that is applied by those cultivating specific disciplines, habits of mind, and specific individual students in specific institutions to something mechanistic, standardized, and centralized.

This brings us to the secular religion of assessmentism. Our president will say more about assessmentism tomorrow, but for our purpose today, let me observe that assessmentism is a cult that sees assessment as the purpose of education, lives by permanent accusation, accepts no questioning, refuses to negotiate, and thrives on the fiction that the student has little responsibility for educational results. Challenged, the assessmentist will accuse you of not wanting to be accountable or transparent. Usually the assessmentist is neither. Assessmentism is pernicious not only in terms of its effects on policies regarding individual student testing, but in terms of its narrowing influences on other more holistic types of academic evaluation, such as institutional accreditation.

I know many of you are concerned about this issue. Here is one reason why.

Each of you is able to assess in music based on knowledge of what the thing you are assessing is and what it does and how it works, and what is necessary to do that thing at a professional level in various specializations of the field. Assessmentism refuses to accept the kind of content-based expertise, experience, and intuition you possess. Its default operating position is procedure. Assessment consistent with the natures of specific fields and their content no longer counts.

Methodologies of collecting and reporting assessment become the most important thing. Success is gained by pretending that assessment is a puzzle, not a mystery; following the required standardized, often content-poor process; producing the right symbols of compliance; and never, ever saying that the emperor has few or no clothes, or that the process is a waste of time and resources.

As musicians, we and our colleagues and students are focused on assessment and evaluation in all their richness and service to learning and artistry. But in the world of ideas, we recoil from assessmentism, seeing it as incompatible with the way that music works, and with the work of music.

Continuing to think about transcendence, let us place on our imaginary table a fourth idea set containing two types of problems: problems with single answers and problems with multiple answers. In assessmentism, all evaluation is considered in terms of single-metric answers: a graduation rate, a ranking, a test score, a starting salary, and so forth. We are told that big data is going to give us more sophisticated single-metric answers to improve educational engineering. Better factories are on the way. In music-centered assessment, there are multiple answers, complex answers, and plenty of mysteries. Assessment serves cultivation and the pursuit of other mysteries where answers produce more questions in infinite series.

Frameworks

NASM's position on assessment is consistent with a big idea called "frameworks." In this meeting, our sessions with this title consider several content and procedural frameworks that the association has developed to work with curricula and curriculum development.

The framework idea generated many founding principles of the American experiment. Based on consent of the governed, it fosters keeping laws, rules, and regulations focused on large-scale threshold necessities. The framework concept is consistent with policies supporting conditions for creativity. It is consistent with placing decision-making responsibility primarily at local and individual levels. It works extremely well in situations where cultivation is the reality, the goal, and the operational objective.

The framework concept is an engine of diversity. It deals with assessment in a larger context. It is also consistent with the way the arts work, where certain fundamentals are the basis for creations

of infinite variety. Think common practice harmony or sonata form. It is also the basis for great teaching and scholarship. It recognizes multiple good solutions and encompasses the realities of multiple dynamic environments. It nurtures conditions that support experimentation, innovation, and change. The framework approach is an approach based on concepts of ordered liberty. It respects the fact that expert knowledge and capability are distributed throughout a society. The framework approach has been a central idea in all four arts accrediting organizations.

As we know, there is a contrasting approach. This approach replaces the concept of ordered liberty under frameworks with the concept of ever-escalating regulation: the big idea is that the more detailed rules we have, the better things will be.

In policy, when the regulatory approach advances, the framework approach is eclipsed, and down the line, local control and creativity are diminished.

Let us place on our imaginary table a fifth ideas set containing distributed expertise – many people know what’s best for their own work and situation – and centralized expertise – a few know best for all work, situations, and people. Distributed expertise is central to the framework idea; centralized expertise is central to the regulatory idea.

Change

To a great extent, every NASM meeting and every session is about change. During these meetings, there will be several opportunities to continue the Association’s multiyear discussion of local creativity and change with regard to the undergraduate curriculum. We will also be working with issues of student health, copyright and intellectual property, and multidisciplinary curricula – all important areas of change.

As we all know, the work of music is infused with change. Through the creative work of artists, scholars, and teachers and other music professionals, newness and change produce interest and excitement. Individual passion for exploration and creation produces a continuity of exploration and creation. This continuity inspires, energizes, and animates the spirit of the field.

In our society today, we hear “Change or die” repeated endlessly, as though all change is good. But clearly all change is not good. “Change and die” is just as real, but we don’t hear much about that possibility in advance. We also hear that everything is changing, a statement that is almost never true. Too often, we hear that those who question change, either generically or specifically, are deeply flawed. These either/or approaches are too simplistic and petulant. The work of music demands a more sophisticated approach.

Let us return to our imaginary table and place upon it a sixth set of ideas: change as destroyer and change as contributor. The first view sees change as replacing what is. It tends to devalue past achievements. The second view sees change as adding to, influencing, and entering into a dialogue with what is and what has been. It encompasses change in larger continuities. It recognizes the presence of transcendent conditions, achievements, values, and mechanisms.

Conclusion

Let us return now to our imaginary table and look at all six sets of contrasting big ideas we have placed there.

The first set was control and freedom, followed by manufacturing and cultivation, then puzzles and mysteries, then single-answer problems and multiple-answer problems, then centralized expertise and distributed expertise, and finally change as destroyer and change as contributor.

As I continue, please remember that these are not contrasts between good and bad ideas, but rather different ideas in relationship and, at times, in collision.

Our administrative challenge is twofold: First, to understand the priorities and interactions among these contrasting big ideas in the specific contexts and decision-making situations we face, and second, to use those understandings to compose specific plans, actions, and responses according to the nature of the task at hand, remembering that whether large or small, the most basic task for each of us is to make and preserve the best possible conditions for the work of music. All this is easy to say, but hard to do.

As I have said twice, I know that many of you are troubled about what you see happening. Perhaps here is why.

The general educational context in which most of us are working seems more dominated at present by an ideational environment that seeks control, sees education as a factory, regards every problem as a puzzle, poses and addresses only single-answer problems, seems fixated on centralized expertise, and pursues change as a destroyer of all that is past.

The nature of music and the nature of the work of music produce and thrive in an ideational environment dominated by freedom, cultivation, mysteries, multiple-answer problems, distributed expertise, and change as contributor.

A conflict at the most fundamental conceptual level is obvious. Policies and operational patterns shaped primarily by ideas in the first list are pressuring us musicians to be less than we are, to narrow what we are and do, to narrow the concept of our field and its purpose, to narrow the range of our spirits. These pressures produce that gnawing and scraping feeling that something is fundamentally wrong. It is, because all around us we can see myopic pursuit of the ideas in the first list that begins with control attacking the credibility and operational realizations of ideas in the second list that begins with freedom. This is not only troubling and inconvenient to us; it is dangerous to our society.

Transcendence for the work of music is our responsibility, our challenge, and our joy. So what do we do? What about our transcendence responsibility in such conditions? How do we keep from being harmed by the wolf of power and will while it is devouring itself? What is the one conceptual tool to work on transcendence I promised to describe a few minutes ago?

When we analyze the ideas on our imaginary table – alone, in relationship, or in conflict – we discover something important. The ideas dominating the work of music – freedom, cultivation, mysteries, multiple-answer problems, distributed expertise, and change as contributor – are bigger, broader, and more inclusive than the dominating ideas presently shaping so much of our environment – control, manufacturing, puzzles, single-answer problems, centralized expertise, and change as a destroyer of all that is past.

In other words, our dominating ideas can and do contain the current set of dominating ideas as a part of a larger whole. The reverse is hardly true. For example, control agendas seek to remove freedom. Freedom agendas seek to find a workable relationship with control.

When we understand this distinction, we have the basis for enfolding the many incompatible ideas and conditions we face into larger constructs compatible with music and the work of music, and also compatible with the larger realities of life and the pursuit of civilization. This enfolding is worth doing even if conditions only allow us to do it in our minds.

Our field itself is full of wonderful examples of how this enfolding works, and how practical it is.

In music, control serves freedom rather than reducing it. Freedom encompasses control and ennobles it. The technical and mechanistic enable and serve creativity. Puzzles and their solutions are parts of larger mysteries. Questions with single answers are elements in questions with multiple answers. Authority contributes to distributed expertise, and change adds value.

Laid out in this way, we can see that the work of music not only describes what we do, it also gives us principles and lessons about ways to think and what to do.

It tells us to maintain a strategic vision and a conceptual approach to serving our field that takes situations dominated by ideas of control, manufacturing, puzzles, single-answer problems, centralized expertise, and change as destroyer; and manages them all toward the ideas and glorious results of cultivation, mysteries, multiple-answer problems, reliance on distributed expertise, and change as continuity.

Such a strategic conceptual vision for the work of music builds conditions for transcendence. In fact, it is what musicians have done for centuries as the nature of their field led their hearts. It is what you are doing. I have only presented one of many structures to describe a natural inclination.

Following this inclination and becoming more conscious of what encompasses what can help us lead our minds and hearts in ways that keep our colleagues, our students, and ourselves on a broad fertile field where cultivation is both priority and necessity, a fertile field that supports creativity in music, a fertile field that continues to expand, that yields surprise and wonder, that links us to mystery and to infinity and to eternity.

A field where as we plow, sow, reap, rejoice, and give thanks we can, in Kierkegaard's words, not only know the truth, but be the truth. A field where we can join Faulkner. We can know the work of music and be the truth of music – "a life's work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit, not for glory and least of all for profit, but to create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before."