

ADDRESS TO THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC
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Measure Against Measure Responsibility versus Accountability in Education

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It is an honor to be speaking to you today. I am impressed with NASM's policy papers, which inform and illuminate my thoughts and writing. So, thank you for your important work, and thank you for bringing me here.

When I was thirteen or so, I had three favorite records: Elly Ameling singing the Italian cantatas of Bach and Handel; Arthur Rubinstein performing the Moonlight, Appassionata, and Pathétique sonatas, and Mstislav Rostropovich performing the Schumann cello concerto. When listening to the Schumann, I would look forward to a passage in the first movement, just before the recapitulation. It consists of triplets that move through a series of modulations from F-sharp minor back to A minor. Rostropovich starts out gently, tentatively, a little slowly, with some rubato. Then the tone warms and brightens; the sound expands until the original theme flies out of it. I longed to play that passage one day—and to play it similarly. In fact, when I listened to other interpretations, they disappointed me. It seemed to me that Rostropovich had not only interpreted the music but seized something in it. Through imagination combined with discernment, he found his way to an essence, if not the essence, of the piece.

According to the cellist Valentin Berlinsky (of the Borodin Quartet), Rostropovich did not always play in this manner; this was the result of years of focused work. In an interview with Rostropovich's biographer Elizabeth Wilson, Berlinsky commented:

With his questing nature, he was eager to develop certain aspects of his cello technique. This search was most evident in his attitude to sound. During the All-Union competition and in the years immediately following Slava was reproached for a certain lack of refinement and warmth in his tone production. As I remember it, he possessed a very large sound, but its quality was somewhat harsh and rough. Obviously this was something he was aware of, or else he listened to what people said, for over the next years he worked on developing a much more refined and varied sound quality, and his tone became quite unique. Indeed, certain of his performances remain engraved in my memory for the amazing beauty and imagination of his sound. For instance, I will never forget a wonderful performance of the Schumann concerto with Kondrashin at the Domsby Cathedral in Riga. To this day I can still hear Slava's incredible, inspired sound in my head—it came from God.ⁱ

How did Rostropovich come to this “incredible, inspired sound”? How do other musicians do this at various levels? It requires not only knowledge of the piece, not only awareness of its parameters and possibilities, but a solitary relationship with it. One must be willing to approach the music bare, without distraction or defense, find out what's in it, and work until this comes through in the performance.

The listeners, too, must pay attention of a solitary kind. They should be concerned with the music, not how it has been reviewed, not what their neighbors think about it, but its form, its internal details, its beauty, and its life. They must bring their best to it; an audience member who does not sink into listening is analogous to a performer who hasn't delved into the piece (not identical, of course, just analogous). This delving is hidden and private but shows its effects in numerous ways.

We can think of this solitary relationship with the music as responsibility. Today I will be talking about the meaning of responsibility in education and examining how it is often at odds with so-called accountability.

Responsibility is internal self-guidance, a combination of thought and action based on our sense of what is right, good, fair, appropriate, or beautiful. It involves full mind and conscience as well as external performance of duty. Accountability, by contrast, is just the external manifestation of responsibility, and only part of it. That is, accountability (as the term is used today) refers to the fulfillment of those activities that an outsider can enumerate and assess. Responsibility requires a keen sense of measure, of correct proportions; accountability relies on uniform, unilateral measures. Responsibility and accountability need not be at odds; in fact, when we do something responsibly, we often have something recognizable to show for it. Institutions of higher education (as well as K–12 schools) need some form of accountability; they need a common measure for gauging limited aspects of their performance. As long as we take such measures in perspective (that is, in measure), with full knowledge of their limitations, they should not interfere with our work. The problem arises when evaluators, policymakers, and the media treat accountability measures as the whole. Today, in both K–12 and higher education, we contend with a language of standardized assessment and results, which sidesteps the difficult questions: what are we assessing in the first place, and why? What are we trying to do? To answer such questions, we must know our fields and ourselves; we must be willing to stand up for our subject matter and principles. In short, this responsibility requires solitude.

Definitions of Solitude and Accountability

Let us consider what solitude is. People often think of it as physical removal or isolation—they speak of “working in solitude,” for instance. But there is more to it than that, as I explain in my book, *Republic of Noise: The Loss of Solitude in Schools and Culture*. We carry our solitude wherever we go. It is an ongoing aloneness that can be shaped. We may be stuck in a dreary committee meeting, yet a comment might trigger thoughts of a poem, a piece of music, or a line of Shakespeare. (“Thrift, thrift, Horatio.”) When it comes time to discuss a proposal, each of us has the responsibility to raise questions and concerns that we deem important. The vitality of the group depends on the ability of each person to think alone. Yet this is often forgotten.

We live in a society that extols group work and group jargon, especially in schools and workplaces. Doing something on your own is considered inferior to talking it out in a room or online with ten others. Wherever we go, we are made part of a “team.” Where you used to have an English department, you now have an English Language Arts team; where you had faculty meetings, you now have team meetings. Even libraries have been converting reading rooms into cooperative learning centers. Schools and colleges emphasize group work; professors learn early on that “peer instruction” is the way of the future and that students should work together to solve problems. The professors themselves are supposed to attend meeting after meeting,

“team-teach” with other faculty, and more. Meetings, groups, and team-teaching are not problems in themselves; they are occasions for bringing together ideas. Nonetheless, when these come with military marching and trumpeting, when we’re suspect if we’re not talking in a group, we lose room and time for the focused, intense work of the mind. After all, we do some of our most important work alone—whether practicing the piano, writing an article, or puzzling through a problem.

The Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus (of the first and second centuries) spoke of a desirable kind of aloneness, which he contrasted with the misfortune of isolation. He describes this aloneness as follows:

To be able to be self-sufficient, to be able to communicate with oneself; even as Zeus communes with himself, and is at peace with himself, and contemplates the character of his governance, and occupies himself with ideas appropriate to himself, so ought we also to be able to converse with ourselves, not to be in need of others, not to be at a loss for some way to spend our time; we ought to devote ourselves to the study of the divine governance, and of our own relation to all other things; to consider how we used to act toward the things that happen to us, and how we act now; what the things are that still distress us; how these too can be remedied, or how removed; if any of these matters that I have mentioned need to be brought to perfection, to perfect them in accordance with the principle of reason inherent in them.ⁱⁱ

Here Epictetus describes the solitude that forms part of any serious endeavor, the solitude necessary for artistic work, for scholarship, for public and private action, and for self-examination. Such solitude forms the basis for responsibility.

To take responsibility is to do what Epictetus describes: to think and act with integrity, spotting and correcting our errors, excesses, and distortions and setting them right when possible. A child learning an instrument exercises responsibility by practicing every day, listening for intonation and tone, and making corrections as needed. As the student advances, he or she becomes more critical, not less so, and critical of more things. But responsibility is not simply self-criticism. It also involves a certain abandonment, a willingness to give oneself over to the music, the language, the book; to wander within it, to become part of it.

In Leo Tolstoy’s story *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, the protagonist, Ivan Ilyich, leads most of his life in a state of compromise and nonchalance. He gets married because he believes the marriage will look respectable to others and will be rather pleasant. After falling off of a ladder during home decorating, he finds himself unwell, with a pain in his side and a bad taste that won’t go away. His outlook shifts: for the first time, he begins to sense aloneness and to question his life. The questioning is at times agonized, at times self-pitying, but at last he asks, “What if, in very deed, the whole of my life, my conscious life, was not what it ought to be?” Later, he answers the question and presses further: “Yes, it was all what it should not have been ... but it doesn’t matter. It is possible, quite possible, to do the right thing. But what is the right thing?” and then he grows still, “listening intently.”ⁱⁱⁱ That listening is, in a sense, the highest level of responsibility he has attained. He has opened himself to a large error of his life, an error that encompassed his life. We sometimes find ourselves facing large errors—and the impulse is to downplay them, postpone dealing with them, or convince ourselves that they are not errors at all. This happens in music,

relationships, leadership, and many areas of life. To face these errors, we must be willing to set aside distractions and quiet ourselves.

Responsibility has external aspects as well. For instance, a student must take certain courses, complete assignments and projects, maintain daily habits of practice and study, and hold to a way of life that supports such work. Here things get complicated: there are always aberrations and digressions, which hold both promise and danger. Sometimes a student needs to take an unexpected direction. A student of classical music, for instance, might find himself interested in jazz, or vice versa, and might want to follow this interest through. Or a student might wonder at some point whether she might not be better off out in the world, making a living instead of racking up debt. Some students have emotional, intellectual, and spiritual crises, deaths in the family, and any number of challenging experiences—and must find a way to reckon with them. This can disrupt their routine. They might flail for a while, or take a break, or go through a long period of doubt. But it is possible to maintain a sense of responsibility even through turmoil.

The highest kind of responsibility—responsibility to one’s conscience or best thinking, or to a divine being, if one is religious—persists even when other things are uneven and uncertain. The responsible student of music may digress now and then but not for too long. Something will pull him or her back—and then the music will be changed and enriched by the digression. This is a tricky matter, of course, because if one goes too far afield, one may find it difficult to return. The principle of digression, then, must have a counterpart: a principle and practice of constancy. A student must have a sturdy routine of practice and the muscle to return to it. The proper mixture of digression and constancy varies from person to person and from field to field—but it makes for a playful and soulful kind of responsibility, a responsibility that brings together the wild and tame in us for the sake of something outside us—a language, a theorem, or a sonata.

There is yet another aspect to responsibility, and that is a resistance to the utterly literal. Accountability insists on the literal: what you see is what’s there. Responsibility, by contrast, involves a great deal of translation and interpretation. For instance, a novice writer will often take the editor’s suggestions literally and make the exact changes requested, whereas an experienced writer might take the spirit of the suggestions and do what he wishes with the specifics. The same is true for a student of music. The beginner must follow the teacher’s precise instructions on fingering, intonation, and so forth. As the student advances, she starts perceiving the principles behind the instructions and focuses on following those (or not, as the case may be). In education policy, we must be especially imaginative in our translations, since no two institutions and no two students are alike. While recognizing the truth of certain common principles, we must acknowledge that they play out differently from one situation to the next. I call this analogical thinking—borrowing from an ongoing discussion at the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, where I teach in the summers—because it calls on us to perceive those likenesses that cannot be mapped onto each other point by point but instead require some kind of transformation.

So, responsibility exists at many levels, but it involves private searching, questioning, and adjustment. One does not simply attain responsibility and stay still with it. It keeps challenging us, asking things of us, daunting us, surprising us, and, day by day, giving us what we need in order to persevere.

Obstacles to Responsibility: Accountability Measures

What does it take to put such responsibility into practice? Nothing short of an obstinate and rebellious (but also tranquil) spirit. There is much to fight. We have not only setbacks and doubts, not only distractions and noise, but a force or combination of forces known as accountability. Accountability, in its worst form, is the mandated practice of answering to people who don't understand what we are doing. Accountability proponents say: if you can't show us results, on our terms, then you are failing and should suffer consequences. They believe that results can be standardized; that the standardized forms are the truth and the way of the future; and that if we pursue this truth and future aggressively enough, we will create a system where everyone can be measured against everyone else, and inequities analyzed and resolved. This mindset is similar to the phenomenon of "high modernism" that James C. Scott describes in *Seeing Like a State*: "a particularly sweeping vision of how the benefits of technical and scientific progress might be applied—usually through the state—in every field of human activity."^{iv} Such belief and practice can do great damage in education, where fields must necessarily differ in their content, methods, and means of assessment, and where fields branch into subfields with their own differences and subtleties.

In 2005, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings appointed a Commission on the Future of Higher Education. One of its purposes was to investigate the extent to which standardized testing should be expanded into higher education. The commission's chairman, Charles Miller, stated that "what is clearly lacking is a nationwide system for comparative performance purposes, using standard formats." In its final report, published in August 2006, the commission described current problems in higher education—such as low entrance standards and high dropout rates—and recommended, among other things, that "accreditation agencies should make performance outcomes, including completion rates and student learning, the core of their assessment as a priority over inputs or processes."^v

The problems detailed by the commission are by no means fabricated. Many colleges have a low threshold for admission and a high dropout rate. Many students enter college without basic writing skills and proceed without making visible improvement. Given steep tuition costs, it makes sense that students, parents, and the general public would want transparency of a kind. The problem is that this information already exists. We can read course catalogs, online course pages, and student reviews; examine where graduates have gone; and more. Yet accountability proponents insist that this is not enough, that schools need to adopt a common measure of student growth. They insist, moreover, that we must move from a focus on inputs to a focus on outputs or outcomes. Inputs include curriculum, resources, and instruction; outcomes are the visible and measurable results, usually test scores.

The "outcomes" movement in education dates back to the late 1980s. Chester E. Finn Jr. captured the essence of it (enthusiastically) in his 1990 article "The Biggest Reform of All," where he alludes to Thomas Kuhn's concept of a "paradigm shift":^{vi}

Under the *old* conception (dare I say paradigm?), education was thought of as process and system, effort and intention, investment and hope. To improve education meant to try harder, to engage in more activity, to magnify one's plans, to give people more services, and to become more efficient in delivering them.

Under the *new* definition, now struggling to be born, education is the result achieved, the learning that takes root when the process has been effective. *Only* if the process succeeds and learning occurs will we say that *education* happened. Absent evidence of such a result, there is no education—however many attempts have been made, resources deployed, or energies expended.

Finn uses a familiar formula: he juxtaposes the old with the new and disparages the former. One hears in Finn’s words an insistence that *only* the results (measured in a transparent and standardized way) can be trusted as indicators of quality. Courses, cultural events, and other matter hold no value unless we see the payoff. There is no room for subject matter that takes shape slowly in the mind. There is no room for a quartet that stays with a person for a lifetime but was difficult to understand at first. There is no room for slow learning here, or for hope, perception, intuition, or gleaning. There are only results.

This rhetoric of results has put educators on the defensive; whoever suggests that there’s more to education than results, will be dismissed as a defender of the status quo. In other words, if results (crudely defined) are not your main concern, then, according to some, you must be an anti-result, wishy-washy, feel-good type. In fact, the opposite is often true. Those who question the primacy of results are often stringently demanding within their fields. Of course they want to see results—but they understand the many different forms that results can take, the time involved in achieving them, and the less tangible things around and beyond them. The danger of the accountability movement lies in its insistence on the generic, literal, and flat, its dismissal of the subtlety and particularity of subject matter. Despite its calls for higher standards, it tends to drag instruction toward a low middle.

Consider, for instance, a middle-school literature class—a rarity, as most middle schools focus on skills and strategies, not on literature as a subject. The teacher has decided to have students read and discuss the *Odyssey*; *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*; poems by Blake, Tennyson, Milton, Hardy, Yeats, Frost, and Dickinson; stories by Twain, Poe, Irving, Melville, Pushkin, Gogol, and more. Then come the interim standardized tests—which are supposed to provide the “data” for instruction. The “data” tell her that a number of students have difficulty making predictions and inferences. So, she must set aside what she is doing and give them practice in these skills.

Now, these students may not have difficulty with predictions and inferences at all. They may have misunderstood the test question or thought about it in a way that the test-maker didn’t expect. The test passage might have been poorly written; it might not have inspired any good inferences or predictions to begin with. However, in the spirit of “accountability,” the teacher comes under pressure to set aside her better judgment and her compelling curriculum and focus on these skills. If her students do not show “growth” on the tests, her job may be at risk.

If “data-driven instruction” is constricting at the K–12 levels, in higher education it verges on the absurd, given students’ wide variety of goals, programs of study, and trajectories. Mark Wait and Samuel Hope write in their policy brief “Assessment on Our Own Terms”:

The nature of successful evaluation in artistic matters depends on understanding the goal of the creator in great depth, and then being able to evaluate the creator’s success at reaching that goal. Since there is a virtually infinite number of goals, and since decisions about them are made by individuals, effective assessment requires deep

knowledge and sophistication. It is for all these reasons, and for other reasons we have yet to describe, that the arts rely primarily on individual evaluation rather than standardized assessment.^{vii}

Yet those calling for “data-driven” instruction would like to see standardized assessment everywhere—in lower and higher education, and in the arts as well as in other subjects. Pundits and editorialists write about it with glee. Bill Gates has been pushing for the development of standardized accountability metrics in higher education; in April of this year, David Brooks wrote in the *New York Times* that “there has to be some way to reward schools [i.e., colleges and universities] that actually do provide learning and punish schools that don’t. There has to be a better way to get data so schools themselves can figure out how they’re doing in comparison with their peers.” He proposed a solution: value-added assessments, that is, formulas currently used to rank teachers in K–12 schools on the basis of their students’ test score growth.^{viii}

How did we get ourselves into this situation? It is an extension, of course, of the accountability movement that preceded No Child Left Behind and continues up to this day. Its main rationale is that massive numbers of students have been shortchanged by our existing institutions. In order to help ensure equity, the argument goes, we must find a precise, reliable way to identify and address the learning gaps.

These efforts rest on a flawed assumption that education can be treated as a science and a social science—that all instruction should be “data-driven” and “research-based.” Now, there is intelligent education research, but a great deal of it has more to do with social statistics than with education. A researcher poses a research question, sets up an experiment, gathers results, and interprets them—in many cases without considering their bearing on the subject matter itself. For instance, a researcher might determine that students working together in groups do better on tests than students listening to a lecture—but might not consider what would be lost if the lecture were dropped. Instruction in any subject involves complex judgment, which in turn involves the intellect, experience, aesthetic sense, and conscience. To surrender judgment to “data,” without considering subject matter, is to engage in flawed reasoning.

The insistence on a “science” of education carries serious consequences. First of all, it brings confusion into the discussion; when we call something scientific that isn’t scientific, we mix up our terms and working principles. Second, those caught in this pseudoscientific environment feel pressure to sound scientific. Whatever does not call itself a science, whatever is not research-based and data-driven, becomes suspect. Whoever does not talk in terms of data and evidence must be hiding something or clinging to obsolete practices, or so the assumption goes. Thus we may shortchange our own language in order to take part in the conversation. This is a great shame.

After all, any “evidence” we provide, any “data” we collect, any “effectiveness” we demonstrate, has meaning only in relation to our existing educational goals, which depend on our conception of education and of the subject matter. It makes no sense, in other words, to say that this or that approach is “effective” without explaining in what sense it is effective. When educators and policymakers talk about “effective” practices, they usually mean those practices associated with an increase in test scores. And so we have created a merry-go-round of madness. We have come to treat the high test score as the ultimate goal and good of education.

To paraphrase the protagonist of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, we have taken a chicken coop and declared it a palace.

What Is to Be Done? How to Uphold Responsibility

But if this picture is grim, it is not only grim. We live not only by the trends of the times, but by countertrends and layers of other times. For instance, there are still people who read Johann Joseph Fux's *Gradus ad Parnassum*, written in 1725, and delight in his way of teaching counterpoint and polyphony through dialogue, of conveying not only the rules and principles, but also the fine points, the hints all along the way that there is more to counterpoint than a student gleans at a given moment. Though not a bestseller today, this work is still read and admired, and is therefore a part of our time. We can say the same for poems, speeches, drama, stories, mathematical proofs, and other works that form part of the modern consciousness, however subtly.

At its best, education gives us these layers of ages. After reading *Moby-Dick*, we may hear its words, as well as older Biblical words, playing in our minds here in the present. A student of music who works on a particular piece—for instance, a Bach suite—enters layers of ages when grappling with the patterns and the phrasing. Over the years, we become aware of more and more layers; we see beyond the rage of the moment, be it an educational fad or a form of political extremism. It is this perspective on the present that allows us to question slogans, buzzwords, and clichés. We press on toward something that rings with accuracy, and we know it when we hear it. In the *Divine Comedy*, when Dante emerges from the Inferno out into the stars, he tells us that he finds his way not by sight, but by ear—"non per vista, ma per suono e noto." We, too, must find our way by ear.

So, part of our hope lies in the preservation of language—not only verbal language, but musical language, mathematical language, and so forth—and the refusal to let it be flattened. It takes vigilance to defend language; on the other hand, language can hold up against the fiercest assaults. I will quote from a poem by the contemporary Lithuanian poet Tomas Venclova, whose poetry I have translated, and who has seen many an assault on language under the former Soviet regime.^{ix} I will recite the passage in Lithuanian as well as English, so that you can hear the sound of the original. These are the final twelve lines of the poem.

Ten, kur sostinė sukas ratu
Ir išvargina sniego žaidimas,
Kur migla neišduoda daiktų,
Ačiū Dievui, dar esti žodynas.
Viešpatijoj, kur draugo ranka
Niekados nesuskubs į pagalbą,
Tuštuma ar aukščiausia jėga
Siunčia angelą—ritmą ir kalbą.

Neprašau nei trumpos užmaršties,
Nei mirties, nei kaltės atleidimo,
Bet palik pirmą pradžią gaudimą
Virš akmenų ir ledinės nakties.

And now the English:

Where the capital spins in a ring,
And the snow games make us weary,
Where fog won't betray the things,
Thank God for the dictionary.
In the land where the hand of a friend
Never rushes to help one in anguish,
The highest power, or the void
Sends the angel down: rhythm and language.

I don't ask for a minute's oblivion,
Or death, or sins' forgiveness,
But leave the primordial moan
Over icy night and stone.

I am averse to reducing this poem (or any poem) to a "statement" of any kind. I hear in it the "primordial moan over icy night and stone," the ironic, agnostic, yet elemental prayer, and am grateful for the dictionary (which indeed helped me translate the poem in the first place).

But as I say this, I am also aware of the difficulty of keeping the best language alive, even in the absence of state oppression and censorship. Not only does our culture bombard us with jargon and urge us to focus on the blatantly successful and lucrative, but we ourselves struggle to make room for thoughtful speech. We must battle our exhaustion, forgetfulness, and frenzy; we must stand up against chatter and cliché. The preservation of language, including musical language, requires introspection, daily practice, and vigorous rejection of nonsense.

This means taking the deepest and most joyous responsibility for our work—defining it according to our best knowledge and understanding, and refusing to submit to lesser definitions. This also means making room for uncertainty and failure—on the part of students, instructors, and institutions. Unless we fail at our work now and then, we can understand nothing well.

This is difficult to convey to policymakers bent on producing and broadcasting success. In their view, whoever speaks of the importance of failure must be suggesting that it's OK to do poorly, that we need not fret over mediocrity. Something rather different is true. To do our work well, we must imagine and strive for excellence—and fall short of it often.

Consider the student of composition writing her first symphony. The opening draws the listener in; the counterpoint and melodies are compelling—but somehow the piece doesn't quite hold together. The student hasn't figured out the textures and balances of the instruments, so parts sound lopsided, and some of the transitions abrupt. Moreover, the development section of the first movement is a bit cluttered—more going on than benefits the piece. Various other flaws combine to make this a good start but far from what she had hoped.

Now, parents and friends will likely tell her how amazing it is that she wrote a symphony at all—but that's almost like saying it's amazing to churn out 50,000 words during National Novel Writing Month. I am stretching the analogy, but the point still holds up: there is nothing amazing about quantity or scope in itself; for a symphony to be amazing, it must have merit. The student

must come to understand where it comes to life and where it falls short. Then she must continue her work with greater keenness.

But living with failure does not mean wallowing in it or knowing no cheer. To the contrary: those students who strive toward something greater than themselves, those teachers and institutions that help them do so, have the vigor and hope of dedication. When one listens to conservatory students in chamber groups, one recognizes that there are still people willing to devote themselves to something worthy; young people who will set aside their phones, TV shows, and private preoccupations, and practice for hours; young people who dedicate themselves to music that bears years of listening, music that one comes to understand over time. Their teachers persist along with them.

How do we uphold responsibility and combat the excesses of accountability? The first way is to remain grounded and immersed in what we do—and that requires believing in what we do. No one can take our fields away from us, if we carry them in our minds and stay true to them. Even in the worst of circumstances, with budget cuts, layoffs, and elimination of entire departments, we may continue our work in its best form. It would be better, though, to work with the full support of our institutions and without fear of abrupt loss.

Thus immersion in our work is not enough. We must find a way to carry it out to the world—so that the public grasps what a music school does, what a high school does, what a literature course includes. We need people who know how to say, “this is what we do,” explaining it to a wide audience without reducing it. In addition, we need to provide an entry, so that those who are moved by this kind of education, who wish it for themselves or for their children, know what they must do to make it theirs. This is part of the work of school administrators: to act as translators and interpreters for the institution, conveying its offerings and accomplishments to the larger world. They also act as buffers, examining accountability requirements and seeking ways to fulfill them without distracting from or diminishing the essential work of the school. They carry a torch in one hand and a shield in the other; their challenge is to hold on to both and to use them wisely, deftly, and continuously.

Miriam Nightengale, the principal of Columbia Secondary School for Math, Science and Engineering (where I teach philosophy and Russian), grapples daily with the challenge of preserving and strengthening the school’s best work while meeting accountability demands. I asked her how she does this, and her answer was enlightening. In every accountability requirement, she says, there is a speck of a good intention or idea. Unfortunately, the accountability measures often distort this idea. But if one can recognize it and incorporate it into one’s work, then one honors the original spirit of the accountability measure without caving in to its distortions. This takes virtuosity and independence of mind, but it can be done.

Not only can it be done, but you—the people here in this hall—have been doing this year after year. Without your work, our musical culture would not be as rich or advanced. It is inspiring to look around this room and realize your aggregate contributions, as leaders of music schools, to musical culture. These contributions have immense value as a force for good and for civilization. Your work enriches and fortifies not only your institutions, but, by extension, music itself. Your responsibilities require solitude—because, as you balance the needs of your students, faculty, and supporters against the current accountability pressures, you need to maintain independence of mind in order to discern the best course of action.

To conclude, then: accountability and responsibility converge now and diverge then, but responsibility is the greater of the two. It is not only sturdier and more lasting, but vastly more interesting. As we fine-tune our work, as we spend evenings perfecting a paragraph or an extended musical phrase, we come to hear it in new ways, drop the extraneous matter, and listen more closely still. This is like John Donne’s “gold to avery thinnesse beate”; others might not see it when we do, but it refines itself and persists. The grappling with music, literature, and other subject matter; the reckoning with one’s own imperfections, at the desk or in the practice room; the slow, persistent practice, day by day; the concerts, readings, recordings, master classes, and other offerings—no fads, no clanging jargon can end or diminish this work.

I wish you well as you fulfill your responsibilities and uphold the work of your music schools this academic year. Thank you.

ⁱ Elizabeth Wilson, *Rostropovich: The Musical Life of the Great Cellist, Teacher, and Legend* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007), 42.

ⁱⁱ Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.13.1–8, trans. W. A. Oldfather (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1928).

ⁱⁱⁱ Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, trans. Robert Nesbit Bain (New York: Tribeca Books, 2012), 79, 82.

^{iv} James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 90. Scott credits the term “high modernism” to David Harvey (*Ibid.*, 377n3).

^v Karen W. Arenson, “Panel Explores Standard Tests for Colleges,” *New York Times*, February 9, 2006; The Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of Higher Education*, U.S. Department of Education, August 2006, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports/final-report.pdf>.

^{vi} Chester E. Finn, Jr., “The Biggest Reform of All,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 71, no. 8 (1990), 584–592.

^{vii} Mark Wait and Samuel Hope, “Assessment on Our Own Terms,” policy brief (Reston, Va.: National Association of Schools of Music, 2007), 3.

^{viii} Jeffrey R. Young, “A Conversation with Bill Gates About the Future of Higher Education,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 25, 2012; David Brooks, “Testing the Teachers,” *New York Times*, April 19, 2012.

^{ix} Tomas Venclova, “I was welcomed by twilight and cold,” trans. Diana Senechal, in *The Junction: Selected Poems*, trans. Ellen Hinsey, Constantine Rusanov, and Diana Senechal (Highgreen, UK: Bloodaxe Books, 2008), 85.