

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC  
Annual Meeting 2010**

**Greetings from the  
European Association of Conservatoires (AEC)**

**Martin Prchal  
AEC Chief Executive**

Dear President Gibson, dear NASM Executive Committee, dear NASM members, dear colleagues and friends:

Thank you so much for giving me the privilege and honour to address the NASM membership and bring greetings from your colleagues in the European Association of Conservatoires – AEC. Let me start with extending my sincere gratitude to NASM Past Presidents David Tomatz and Dan Sher, and to Sam Hope and Karen Moynahan for their excellent contributions to our conferences and activities over the past few years. And this year, we were very happy to welcome your new president, Mr. Don Gibson, at our annual conference at the Frederic Chopin University of Music in Warsaw, and let me thank Don for giving such a wonderful speech there.

Ladies and gentlemen, this will be my last visit to the NASM Annual Meeting in my role as Chief Executive of the AEC, as in January I will be taking up a new post at the Royal Conservatoire of Music in the Netherlands. If I would have carried on for just a few months more, I would have celebrated my 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the AEC, so allow me to make a few observations on what has been achieved and what needs to be done.

In Europe, we have seen an unprecedented reform of the national higher education systems during the past few years. Among others, we have seen the introduction of a unified 3-cycle system, of quality assurance and accreditation, of modular structures and credit points, of classifications and rankings. These are all things that may sound familiar to you, but I can assure you that in many European countries these reforms have been nothing less than a higher education revolution.

The AEC has navigated these developments with the greatest care, but also with a proactive approach. We understood that if we were actively involved, we would be able to influence the reforms and demand for an understanding of the specificities of our sector. That's why we developed our own European-level frameworks for qualifications and for quality assurance and accreditation, which are now widely acknowledged as some of the most advanced systems at the European level. In 2010 alone, the AEC was involved in 19 institutional and programme reviews in 7 European countries, and although this may sound like a piece of cake to the NASM Office, I can assure you this was a major achievement for us.

But possibly the biggest achievement of all was that we managed to give the higher music sector a visible place in the European higher education arena. I remember very well when I started to attend meetings bringing together the main European higher education organisations. When I introduced myself, people smiled friendly and said "how wonderful – my son plays saxophone too". I was told we were too small and insignificant, that we should merge with the other arts, the humanities, or whatever.

They were wrong.

Because in the end we did not only manage to become a respected player in the European higher education arena, we also created powerful examples for others of how things could be done.

Now, why am I telling you all this? I am telling you this, because I dare to say that our current advanced position would have been impossible without the support of NASM. I will never forget the presentation on the NASM accreditation system given by Sam Hope, David Tomatz and Jim Undercofler at the 2003 AEC Annual Congress in Germany. Looking back, I believe this presentation was a turning point in the history of our association, as the presenters, being representatives of highly respected music institutions, were able to explain very clearly how such a review system could work without violating the values that are so essential to music training. From a psychological point of view, the effect of this presentation cannot be underestimated. It showed the higher music education sector in Europe, which was being threatened to be overrun by big political reform processes, what could be achieved when it would take matters into its own hands. In doing so, the American schools of music gave a significant gift to their colleagues in Europe: an understanding of ownership, control and self-determination. It is for this gift that I would like to thank you collectively from the bottom of my heart.

Ladies and gentlemen, I also dare to say that as a sector we have been very successful. We, both NASM and AEC, have shown the ability as a community of experts to develop a common voice and a common direction. We have developed an efficient context for policy development and cooperation, and, with the review systems, of reflection, showing we are not afraid to look critically at ourselves. So let us ask ourselves why we have been so successful. Of course because we worked hard, but I feel that the main reason why we have been so successful is because we approach all the things we do as musicians. We take the issues and internalise these based on our own expertise in music, which makes what we do relevant and therefore powerful. Of course we need to work together with other disciplines in larger contexts. Of course we must listen to advice of others. But let us continue to develop our own expertise based on our experience as musicians. It is only then that music can thrive and resist the often dubious opinions of quality assurance experts or educational specialists who think they understand our field but do not really.

Finally, allow me to express some words of personal gratitude to your wonderful executive director Sam Hope. His willingness and patience to share his knowledge and experience has been a permanent source of inspiration. In my work I have travelled all over the world, but I have never met a person with such a vision, integrity, wisdom and understanding of what we as a sector stand for. I will be forever grateful for his guidance and friendship.

So, dear friends, let me congratulate you with all that has been achieved and allow me to finish by expressing my sincere wish that the relationship between AEC and NASM will remain strong, so that both organisations together can continue to be of service to that incredible phenomenon so central to our humanity: music.

Thank you very much.