

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

**Oral Report of the Executive Director**

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All of us know about balances and how important they are to every aspect of musical activity. For us, balance means right or good proportion, not equal weight for all elements. Whatever we do in music, balance is critical. When we are creating and performing music, we think about balances all the time. And, we are always changing and adapting proportional relationships as we go.

But the concept of balance is important far beyond music. For example, the distance and mass of the planet Jupiter have a critical relationship to sustaining life on earth. Scientists tell us that if Jupiter were further away or if Jupiter's mass were less, too many asteroid and comet collisions would occur on earth. Or if Jupiter were closer or if Jupiter had greater mass, the earth's orbit would become unstable. In other words, the distance of Jupiter has to be right, and the mass of Jupiter has to be right and in balance. And, both distance and mass have to be in the right relationship with each other if life on earth is to be sustained.

Our night friend the moon is 25% the size of the earth. We all know the critical role the moon plays in tidal action. Changes in our gravitational interaction with the moon would have serious consequences. The exchange of nutrients and life back and forth between the sea and the land would be affected, among other things. The moon is moving away from the earth 1.5 inches per year. The long-term future is clear. However, this is one administrative problem that we will not have to deal with when we get home.

Even though the entire universe is flying apart at breathtaking speed, this change does not destroy relationships on any time scale that matters to us. The intricacy among balanced relationships in nature is awe-inspiring. One fundamental lesson is clear. From the universe to our own bodies to music, imbalances cause dysfunction. They destabilize and adversely affect the health, sustainability, and productivity of systems.

Now what do these science facts and lessons mean for us? What is the application to our many internal and external concerns? To be brief, the same foundational principles of balance important in the musical, artistic, and physical worlds seem to apply in the world of human interaction. Balances are critically important. Too much or too little, or wrong relationship for purpose, and things go awry.

Let me ask you a question. Do you feel you are living in a time when balanced conditions are present? Do you sense the presence of colliding extremes? Do you feel inundated with claims that one-dimensional solutions will work? Do you wonder if anything is anchored anymore? Just to be clear, I am not talking about political views, or about being for or against change. Good debates on such questions are essential to keep things in balance. I am talking about the view one gets by stepping back and looking conceptually at what is going on, the nature of our discourse, for example. Winston Churchill once said that it takes courage to stand up and speak, but it also takes courage to sit down and listen. What is the balance between speaking and listening in our society today? What about the balance between surface superficiality and deep engagement? What about academic work and assessment? What about public relations and real achievement, or images and substance? What about illusion and reality? What about centralized power and individual freedom?

Each of the two elements in these pairs is important. The question is not whether to have one element or the other, but rather what balance, what proportion?

We are working in conditions created by imbalances and widely promoted yearnings that create imbalances, conditions where there are excesses of zeal to promote one part of a whole as the whole. All this produces a kind of group-think, an unwillingness to face the reality of the whole. Unfortunately, this hubristic approach to problems or decisions is as sensible as pretending that we can move Jupiter or change our distance and gravitational relationship with the moon and nothing will happen.

Over the past year, NASM has been engaged in many efforts. Some of these are about maintaining critically important balances among the roles of institutions of higher education and their accrediting organizations and the federal government.

In another area, your work yesterday made an important contribution to NASM's efforts to encourage local, institution-specific reviews of undergraduate curricular balances and relationships. What do our students in our institution need? How do we, in our institution, meet that need? How do all the parts work alone and together? What is their relationship? What do they produce?

In considering questions like these, I am reminded of the spring 2010 cover of the *American Educator*. Here is the title in large bold type: *The Most Daring Education Reform of All*. Under it, the following text appears: "for over a century, educational fads have hindered efforts to deliver what our youth really need – an education filled with works of lasting beauty, knowledge of the past and present, and skills of personal and professional significance." The article inside is not about back to basics, but back to content, content as subject matter and work to master it.

Over the next 12 months NASM and its member institutions will face many challenges. The teacher education accreditation world is reorganizing and promising to "turn teacher education upside down." The Congress and legislatures, under new pressures on debt and spending, are seeking new sources of revenue and thus new ways to tax. This situation will bring new pressure to the non-profit sector, and thus to most of us. In Washington, higher education is experiencing the policy pressures that President Gibson spoke about yesterday. There are new constellations of interests forming to promote single-perspective assessment, the kind that trusts numbers and nothing else. It helps to remember another Churchill quip that the only statistics you can trust are those you make up yourself.

In the world of accreditation, there are those whose ideas and policies would create an adversarial relationship between accreditors and the institutions or programs they review.

Your organization has pledged to do the opposite. Cooperation and mutual effort are natural to music making and essential to creating balances and relationships. They are important because music in higher education is a system that requires certain balances, certain relationships, and certain reciprocities if the whole effort is to work and evolve productively.

NASM thrives on its principles of service and support. There is no reason to destroy the proper balances here even though pressures to do so may mount. I see no evidence that NASM will embrace educational fads at the expense of high artistry and serious learning. It has not done either of these things in its history. It cannot trade the integrity of its relationship with its member institutions, the power of its values to serve the music profession, and the contributions of its service orientation to improving the education music students receive for other values, no matter how fashionable. This does not mean stasis. It means changing, evolving, and advancing in a

mindset that is focused on current reality, but also a mindset consumed with a search for the wisdom to preserve essential balances and relationships as changes are made. For what doth it profit an organization to gain the whole world and lose its soul? We must not waste time joining movements to move Jupiter just because some group has mounted a successful propaganda campaign to do so and gained many followers. Think what would happen if this project were to succeed. As Thomas Hobbes said, “Hell is the truth seen too late.”

Over the years, NASM and its members have faced many challenges, taken advantage of many opportunities, and grown and prospered all the while. Our field is a glorious one. Powerful. Magnificent. Beautiful. A reflection in sound of the kinds of balances and relationships that exist in the physical world and beyond. Indeed, it is these balances and relationships in music that produce the beauty, the magnificence, the power, and the glory. In the matter of balances and so many others, our field itself gives us important principles to follow. Unlike so much in the physical world, we have no set answers. There is a single answer for the speed of light, but there is no single answer to symphony. We have the honor and challenge of creating balances within the context of each work that we create in each of our music specializations and in the work of curriculum building and teaching in our schools and departments.

As this year continues and the next one comes, and the next let us remember what we and our colleagues hold. We literally hold a massive responsibility for students, the field of music, and our institutions individually and collectively. This is who we are first; this is what we are about first. This responsibility should lead us to a humble respect for the challenge of balances, and a commitment to face that challenge, whatever is ahead, in whatever arena.

I close with two quotations. The first is from Warren Buffet as reported in the 2009 Berkshire Hathaway Annual Report. Berkshire Hathaway is a holding company that includes many major corporations that Buffet has acquired over the years, the last of which was the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad. We are often told that higher education should operate like a business. Here is the management approach followed by one of the most successful businessmen of all time.

*We tend to let our many subsidiaries operate on their own, without our supervising and monitoring them to any degree. That means we are sometimes late in spotting management problems and that both operating and capital decisions are occasionally made with which Charlie and I would have disagreed had we been consulted. Most of our managers, however, use the independence we grant them magnificently, rewarding our confidence by maintaining an owner-oriented attitude that is invaluable and too seldom found in huge organizations. We would rather suffer the visible costs of a few bad decisions than incur the many invisible costs that come from decisions made too slowly – or not at all – because of a stifling bureaucracy.*

Let us all think whether or not it is true that a culture of mistrust and one-way accountability is a culture of death, while a culture of trust and mutual responsibility is a culture of life.

The second quotation is from the late dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham, one of the great creative geniuses in the history of art making. It is about dance but the analysis applies equally well to all the art forms.

*I think that dance at its very best (and as in all arts, that very best is rare) produces an indefinable and unforgettable abyss in the individual spectator. It is only an instant, and*

*immediately following that instant, the mind is busy questioning, deciding; the feelings are busy agitating, confirming, or denying. But there is that instant, and it does renew us.*

Is it not true that renewal in many dimensions is one of the great themes of our work individually and together?

I think it is. A project of renewal is everywhere we turn in our profession whether it be to our artistry, our teaching, our scholarship, or our healing.

So let us not be discouraged by present conditions, but rather be renewed constantly through the beauty of our art, the productivity of our relationships, and the power of our values.