

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC
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Oral Report of the Executive Director

Samuel Hope

It is always an honor to address colleagues whose minds are engaged and racing continuously. However, let us all stop for a moment, take a deep breath, and create a clear space.

In that space, let us stand quietly before the magnificence of our art, the magnificence of music itself.

We are in a realm where the word “awesome” is truly appropriate—a universe of intellect, thought, and incredible, transcendent achievement over centuries.

Now, let us hold that magnificence in our minds as we add another dimension.

There is a wonderful story about a cleric who came to a rural village and found that his family was to live in a neglected rectory. While his wife started work on the interior, he turned to the grounds. After about two years, the house was welcoming, and the lawn and plantings a subject of local pride. One day a fellow clergyman from a distant province came by. He took one look and said, “Pastor, you and the Lord certainly have a beautiful garden here.” The pastor responded, “Yes, but you should have seen it when the Lord had it by Himself.”

The lesson of this story is one that musicians understand in the heart of their being. This lesson adds the second dimension: There is what we are given, and there is what we do with what we are given. Persons born with even the greatest musical gifts cannot bring them to fruition if they do not work constantly to develop and perfect their capabilities. Even the most beautiful garden will turn to weeds and briars if daily work ceases.

We all know gifts and work produce the ever-evolving magnificence of our art. Nothing can change this. Nothing ever has. We can be secure in our faith that nothing ever will.

This unbreakable connection is always there to nurture us, especially when we go through difficult times. Each of us has been given great gifts. Some are just mysteriously present in our own uniqueness as a human being. Some have been given to us through the efforts of previous generations, while others are current. Some are visible or traceable, while others are fully present but so remote from our immediate knowledge that we cannot know where our thanks should go.

Yes, the gifts are there in abundance. But so is the work: the daily intellectual, physical, organizational work of learning and doing music. We all experience the continuous struggle. After years in the field, we know that our standards for ourselves grow higher the more capable we become. Our cultivation is ceaseless. We are always manifesting our faith that gifts and work produce the magnificence that turns our art into meaning. Our students are doing the same.

Now of course, cultivation, records of achievement, and enormous potential are not unique to music. Cultivation of the various disciplines and professions and their relationships produces the fruits of civilization. Traditionally, higher education has been centered on cultivation—on

continuous work with what has been given in terms of people and achievement, even up to the last second. At least to those with the most operational say about it, higher education in the United States was anchored in civilization-building, which meant continuing to nurture all areas of human endeavor. When civilization is the underlying purpose, it is clear why music and the other arts and humanities have an unquestionable place.

But what happens when civilization-building is no longer the primary underlying purpose? When other agendas become the anchor? When a kind of shortsighted pragmatism starts to govern decision-making? Hear G. K. Chesterton: “Pragmatism is a matter of human needs; and one of the first human needs is to be more than a pragmatist.”

Today, we are facing many problems and unknowns. Three primary agendas proposed as the only viable basis for pragmatic solutions have all but eclipsed the civilization purpose in most public and legislative discourse about higher education. In a strategic sense, this eclipse is the biggest policy challenge of all, not just for us, but also for the nation.

What are these three primary agendas: the economic agenda—only money matters; the statist agenda—only government power matters; and the technocratic agenda—only technological advance and technical method matter. Of course, each of these primary agendas uses the other two in its justification arguments.

Clearly, the economy, governance, and technical advancements are critically important. But each is part of something larger. History shows us over and over again that when any or all of these agendas are no longer anchored in civilization and range free as myopic forces, terrible things begin to happen. The three agendas become tyrannical machines—instruments of destruction. People and societies lose their reason, their perspective, their money, their freedom, their time, their opportunities, and their potential. And, in the past century, life was lost on an unimaginable scale when certain combinations of these forces became uncoupled from civilization and civilizing principles.

There is no question that we are in an economic crisis. The aggregate annual operating budget of NASM member institutions is about \$2 billion per year, or about the amount of money that the federal government borrows every 10 hours and 40 minutes. We could spend days considering the difficulties of the present hour. But we don't have days, and besides, doing so would divert our attention from first things.

So instead, let us think about something we already know: in times good and bad, the work of music continues. The relationship between gift and work is cultivated even when civilization is temporarily eclipsed. Musicians' aggregate faith in the gift/work relationship transcends all temporary pragmatisms, all institutionalized myopia, and all economic disasters.

So what does all this mean for students and faculty members, for administrators, for schools of music, and for NASM? What should we do?

Each of us here, and each of our colleagues who cannot be here, will go to work after the holiday in local environments that are unquestionably difficult and where difficulties and unknowns may grow. The effects of vexing conditions none of us created may resonate in unaccustomed ways.

It seems to me that the most important things are to continue affirming our own civilization-building agenda and to help others sustain their faith—no matter how much the civilization purpose is abandoned elsewhere. We affirm first by continuing to cultivate the gift/work

relationship in music and by supporting those in other disciplines who are doing the same. Let our pragmatism be connected to this foundation, and we will join Chesterton in being more than a pragmatist. We dare not doze when reason sleeps.

Here are some other things we might remember and affirm as we make our decisions. I paraphrase Mark Smith, top advisor to the brokerage house of Raymond Jones.

- It's not about running systems; it's about reaching goals. For us, those goals are in terms of artistry, education, scholarship, teaching, and so forth.
- Managing risk is more important than short-term success at the expense of long-term or permanent losses.
- Institutions, accreditors, and individuals associated with them cannot control the many large, external forces that create the conditions in which we work and make decisions. But each can control the principles, goals, and values that shape their decisions.
- Under a strong framework of principles, goals, and values, monitor everything constantly and revise as necessary. Keep moving toward fulfillment of fundamental content-based purposes.

The approach I am suggesting is not conservationist, but rather the basis for change that builds on and from the natures of things, rather than denying those natures and attempting to subordinate them to theory, system, planning, or just pure will. Remember the old French phrase: "Banish the natural, and it comes galloping back."

Today we have reminded ourselves of large concepts that enable us to put the recent work of NASM in a perspective that goes beyond a series of worthwhile projects. Our recent efforts regarding the undergraduate curriculum, teacher preparation, multidisciplinary multimedia, health and safety, advocacy, and accreditation reflect and affirm our engagement with our gifts of all kinds: our work to nurture and protect those gifts, our goals to carry on the civilizing purpose of music, and our constant effort to make the wisest decisions possible in the times that we are given. One of our greatest gifts is to have the honor of stewardship for a field that so directly and powerfully affirms, strengthens, and explains the human spirit to itself. In difficult times, our work is more important than ever. Best wishes to each of you as you continue that work this year.