

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC
Annual Meeting 2009

Oral Report of the Executive Director

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Yesterday, President Sher gave us many reasons to celebrate an anniversary in the midst of an extremely unsettling time. Over the past eight and a half decades, music in American higher education has been a powerful nurturing force for the musical culture of the United States. The way has not always been easy. A great ally has been a concept embodied in the founding documents of our nation. We recognize that the primary developmental force is individual and local, that the aggregate of individual and local efforts produces the national result. Therefore, as much as possible, powers are distributed, and centralization is minimalized. For music in higher education, you, your colleagues, and your predecessors are the builders. NASM provides a common base and support system for local action. Working under this concept since 1924, we have generated a record of progress for the art of music. Sustainability is us.

Let us look at one reason for this achievement. Over the years, NASM and its members have kept many sets of promises to each other and to the field we serve. For example, we promise each other to recognize and cultivate productive relationships among various needs. The wisdom underlying this promise is derived in large part from a deep knowledge about the nature of music, including the natures of music creation, performance, scholarship, teaching, therapy, management, and in turn their relationships to each other in various kinds of musical efforts and settings.

Let us look at a few more relationships that mutually, we promise to cultivate. And, let us start with Einstein's famous statement: "Everything should be as simple as possible, but no simpler." The Association and its members have dealt with the simplicity/complexity relationship in many ways. One of the most constant and obvious is the relationship between simple membership-approved standards held in common that can be read in minutes, and complex institution-developed curricular programs that are unique, and take several years for students to complete. This example points to another goal the Association and its members share—cultivating a productive relationship between what is national and what is local, what we can best decide and do together and what can only be decided and done at each institution. This goal is consistent with the American concept of distributed powers and responsibilities that we considered a few moments ago.

Clearly, NASM and its members are mutually pledged to be centered on music, but the Association and members alike pursue the centrality of music in relationship to the other arts and with the worlds of education, science, the humanities, business, promotion, and public policy. Collectively, through our statements and actions, we encourage disciplinary connections on campus through both undergraduate and graduate degree structures, and through more experimental means such as our current work on multidisciplinary

multimedia. Nationally, NASM establishes relationships with other organizations, and works with them to develop and maintain the best possible climate for local action.

Another area of mutual promise is fostering a healthy relationship between competition and mutual reciprocity. It is easy to recognize the multiple ways that all NASM member institutions are linked together. Just think about the constant circulation of students and faculties among the programs represented here, the audience development and amateur participation that result from the work of your schools and departments. There is no question about it. To develop the healthiest possible music culture at advanced levels, each institution needs to support the wellbeing of other institutions while at the same time engaging in healthy competition on many levels. As you can see from reading the minutes of the organizational meeting, this relationship between reciprocity and competition has been a concern since the days of the founders. Our accreditation work is a perfect example of competitors helping each other for the good of the whole.

As NASM and its member institutions go forward, it is our job to recognize and manage these and other critical relationships in a changing environment. It is important to keep our promises to each other and to the field. It is our job to do so as simply as possible, but not simpler. We do not have the luxury of stasis. We dare not endanger ourselves by pretending or believing that things are simple when they are not, or that all problems have a single, simple answer.

Let us use this short discussion about relationships as the basis for reviewing one critical issue that is evolving rapidly. The issue is federal tax and regulatory policies that affect non-profit organizations. All here know the extent to which we are engaged in and connected to the non-profit world. As participants, we understand the importance of the funding and services that sector provides. Reductions in funding or in the ability to serve would hurt us and our institutions in many ways.

Here are four ideas that have traction in the current policy arena. If turned into law and regulation, each of them would be dangerous to the flow of non-profit arts and higher education funding; together they would be devastating. They would breach promises we have made to each other as a nation.

Idea number one: the federal tax exemption for charitable contributions should be reduced to provide revenue for federal programs such as health care.

Idea number two: non-profit organizations should be subject to more federal control and oversight of their operations. Regulations, reporting requirements, and penalties should be increased significantly.

Idea number three: donors and philanthropic organizations should not have as much freedom as they now have to choose how their monies are allocated or how their personnel are chosen. Instead, government should determine allocation and personnel policies in the interest of social justice.

Idea number four: the arts and cultural activities do not meet the test of significant social need and thus the tax system should not provide for as large a deduction or any deduction for giving to arts organizations.

I am not making this up. Thirty-one Senators have written a letter to their colleagues asking that all join to oppose any attempt to place a provision in the health care bill that would reduce the charitable deduction for giving to non-profit organizations. Their letter specifically mentions the arts along with other areas of concern. For over four years, coalitions in Washington have been working day and night to preserve healthy conditions for the non-profit sector, in part by working to counter these four ideas. There are constant skirmishes. Last year, many of you joined with others to thwart an attack on the rights of higher education institutions to control spending from their endowments. Please know that some on the right and some on the left support one or more of the problematic ideas I have mentioned. Obviously, as the Senate example shows, there is also opposition.

What do we need to do?

First, remember that ultimately, the question is not who is right, but what a particular set of ideas or a specific policy will actually do. Remember that a good public policy is one that you are comfortable with if politicians you do not support administer it.

Second, be aware that this danger exists, that it is based in ideas, and that the consequences of bad decisions would be serious and far-reaching to every music-related entity in your life.

Third, remember that NASM is monitoring this situation, and working with others in ways appropriate to its non-profit status. As always, we will keep you informed, and we will call upon you as the need arises.

Fourth, work with those on your campus most closely associated with fund-raising and development. As appropriate, make sure they are aware of this danger.

Fifth, connect three dots: our work individually and together, the future of the non-profit sector, and advocacy.

In just a few moments, we will have the honor of hearing Henry Fogel. The powerful case he is about to make regarding advocacy needs to be considered in light of the non-profit policy challenges we have just been discussing, as well as in terms of music as an art form of priceless value.

I close by calling your attention to a wonderful essay by Italian postmodernist Italo Calvino. The title is "Why Read the Classics?" In this season of Thanksgiving, celebration, and need for effective analysis and advocacy, I hope you will treat yourself to the exquisite beauty of this seven-page work. Calvino gives fourteen reasons. I want to quote two. Please make the translation from literature to music or to other works, ideas, and principles of lasting value.

Number 13—A classic is a work which relegates the noise of the present to a background hum, which at the same time the classics cannot exist without.

Number 14—A classic is a work which persists as background noise even when a present that is totally incompatible with it holds sway.¹

As we proceed individually and together in a time where deeply-held values and developing situations often seem totally incompatible, let us remember that great values and great work will not only persist, but ultimately, will prevail. We are stewards of great values, great work, and great aspirations in the field of music. We are the stewards of many important relationships in and for music. In the words of Robert Frost, indeed, “we have promises to keep, and miles to go before we sleep.”²

Thank you and best wishes to you all.

¹ Italo Calvino, *Why Read the Classics?* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999)

² Robert Frost, “Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening,” in *New Hampshire* (Durham: Friends of the Library, University of New Hampshire, 1976)