

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC
Annual Meeting 2016

**Greetings from the Association Européenne des Conservatoires
(AEC)**

Eirik Birkeland
President, AEC

President, colleagues, dear friends.

Thank you very much for the generous invitation to this NASM Congress. It is a great honor and pleasure, on behalf of the Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen AEC, to greet the NASM and this distinguished Assembly.

The NASM and the AEC have had a good collaboration for many years. The parallel history of our two organizations is a striking demonstration of the value of *sharing thoughts and experiences to become wiser*, and the benefit of *joining forces to become stronger*.

Remaining Rooted in Society

In an interview to mark an AEC anniversary some years ago, the Finnish conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen stated: “The greatest challenge for musical life at present is to remain rooted in society.” I will assume that Salonen primarily had classical music in mind. The answer to this challenge, faced by many of us, should be a combined response, not only dealing with how we in a more efficient way can reach new audiences with our music through traditional channels and on well-established stages, but also how we can manage to be present in all fields of society. And not least, how we in a balanced and fruitful way can interact and work inclusively in an increasingly diversified society.

The program title for the AEC Congress in Gothenburg, Sweden last week was *Diversity, Identity and Inclusion*, referring to some crucial social and political challenges of our time; migration streams, the rise of populist movements, terrorist threats, and the growing scepticism about the idea of a united Europe—challenges which all are making an impact on our daily life as individuals, and on our institutions. Our understanding of this is fundamental if we want to build bridges, accept diversities, and possibly act towards their inclusion.

The Small and the Big Wheel

For higher music education institutions, this is linked to another question. To which degree do we limit our institutions’ mandate just to focus on the small wheel, “reproducing our own competencies,” to name it polemically, and to which degree do we emphasize our contribution to the speed and direction of the big wheel, the further development of the arts and cultural life, including our support to the aesthetic subjects in primary schools as well as our engagement in lifelong learning within the professional music sector.

It is fundamental to establish a two-way dialog between our institutions and the professional

market. As institutional leaders, we have good reasons for reminding ourselves of the potential which lies in an efficient use of our R&D resources and of the force and drive for renewal which is embedded in our young students.

The Reflecting Conservatory

How we open our doors for diversity, how we understand ourselves and our identity and how we manage to develop through inclusion, is ultimately dependent on the character and quality of the institutional key processes and how we manage to fill our roles as reflective conservatoires. The AEC Congress' establishment of a new European platform for learning and teaching with emphasis on student centred learning and further development of the master-apprentice model, might be seen as a response to this.

Dear colleagues, I look forward to further dialogue with you, and to the exchange of knowledge and experiences of how we can meet these and other central challenges for higher music education in the best possible way. I also look forward to attending the presentations and discussions during this Congress here in Dallas and wish you all a fruitful and stimulating Congress.

Thank you so much.