

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

“Quiet Powers”

Karen P. Moynahan

I have come to be intrigued and moved by quiet powers—powers that incrementally over time leave indelible and everlasting imprints. These quiet powers come in many forms: meandering waters that carve a deep canyon’s footprint, gentle winds that shape the face of a weathered mountain, and patient parents who instill in their children attributes such as honesty, integrity, and kindness, to name just a few.

There is no doubt that such powers are not always quiet. They can act with sound and fury; they can demand our immediate attention. However, they rarely unleash their full force all at once. Instead, they expend their energies, moment by moment, on the tasks at hand—the carving, the shaping, the instilling. They seem to know their purpose and remain committed to it regardless of distractions. They are indefatigable.

The aggregate positive effects of these powers are rarely observable in any given active moment when they are working. As we know, results take time. True and enduring achievement can be hidden unless one takes the opportunity to step back and look at the long view, to look at the changes that have taken place over extended periods of time, or to wonder what the landscape or situation might look like if these powers had been absent or were extinguished.

One of the most powerful examples of such positive effect in our own field is practice—the hours of daily practice necessary for an individual to become a musical artist.

Earlier this year, spurred by my intrigue and the thought that NASM will celebrate its 100th anniversary in eight short years, I began a journey—one of research, reading, and contemplation. Although the end of this journey is nowhere in sight, and for that matter may have no end, I have come to some enduring realizations along the way. Allow me please to share with you with today three of these realizations.

First, and of particular note, is the realization that NASM’s work is a quiet power.

NASM began in 1924, driven in part by the need to ensure that college credit earned would be recognized as academic legal tender should students wish to transfer between or among institutions. Guided by wise and passionate leaders who administered music programs and institutions throughout the United States, NASM engaged this critical issue comprehensively. Its members and leaders quickly realized that dialogue, study, fairness, and excellence, were essential if such efforts were to be successful and have a long-term impact on the field of music and the education and training of students. Through such efforts, NASM envisioned, defined, and articulated its principles early on, and to this day, has remained ever true to them. Held at its core are its purposes, which are memorialized in its Constitution. Adherence to its enduring purposes has led NASM year after year to deepen its knowledge, expertise, and sophistication for the benefit of its members, potential members, and the field.

NASM’s accomplishments are a result of the work of its members—those here today and those who participated throughout NASM’s nine-decade history. Regardless of the form of participation, the history

of NASM, known to be centered in values and focused on content, has always produced a certain self-awareness in these individuals, particularly in those who have been elected to serve in leadership roles. As service-oriented self-awareness is apt to do, it has always instilled in our leaders a deep sense of commitment and humility, which assists them to seek the greater good for the benefit of the membership and music as a field with a mission-focused vision, broad understanding, and compassionate empathy. Historically, it has also led to the realization that the vital work of NASM is but one of the many bright stars in the constellation working on behalf of the field of music, and how critically important it is for these stars to not only share common goals, but to light the way together, each fulfilling its critical role.

Many today define NASM's work in a single word—accreditation—a word that to some simply indicates a lengthy process. In truth, NASM fulfills its purposes in many ways, primary among them is accreditation. NASM is accreditation, and so much more. NASM offers a rich program of professional development for music executives; it studies and analyzes policy; and it conducts institutional research. All four functions are interrelated; each serves the others. Accreditation in all its functions, including standards setting, is the anchor.

This leads me to my second realization. Accreditation is a quiet power.

Assumed by some to exist solely as a clerical procedure that satisfies a requirement for external review, accreditation can be perceived as a tax on time and energy, both precious commodities in a music executive's day. If one sees only a busywork exercise or a bureaucratic labyrinth, the long-term benefits may be hard to ascertain or realize. Such points of view may serve to obscure accreditation's quiet power and its substantial potential.

The true value of accreditation rests not in procedure for procedure's sake, but rather, in the dialogues that take place on many levels, and the awareness and understanding that result from such dialogues. Nationally, standards setting is centered in dialogue and consultation. We are engaged in such dialogues at this meeting. On campus, the first and most critical dialogue is the one that unfolds between and among constituencies as the music unit or institution studies itself and considers what is, what was, what can be, what should be, and what must be. The second is the dialogue conducted between the institution and individuals who hold deep and vast expertise in music, who have studied the institution, and who offer feedback, thoughts, and ideas with profound respect for the institution and its mission. These conversations and their inherent value are recorded and memorialized nationally in the published standards of the Association, and locally in thousands of self-studies and tens of thousands of Commission Action Reports.

A self-study document is far more than a three-hole-punched stack of papers that provides information and answers to questions. Instead, a comprehensively prepared self-study document is the result of the culmination of years of careful and critical considerations, and the articulation of honest and realistic conclusions reached by an institution confident in its pursuits, and focused in its desire to educate its students to its greatest capacity and their greatest potential.

A Commission Action Report is not a checklist of tasks to be accomplished. Instead, a Commission Action Report is the supportive analysis offered to an institution, the contents of which are intended to assist the institution as it considers its current and future plans. The collective effect of these Commission Action Reports represents nearly a century of tireless advocacy for music institutions and on behalf of music in higher education, each seeped in the language of standards that the field itself has confirmed worthy of attention, adherence, and aspiration. It is impossible to know what the field of music in higher education would be without the NASM contribution and the advocacy provided by its accreditation process to those in higher education who do not know music or what it needs, but who want fine programs and are willing to invest in them.

But what we know tells us that these national and local dialogues we have been discussing, vital to the advancement of the field, continued at high levels for over 92 years, are among the most effective quiet powers in American higher education, even though their total impact cannot be measured. You and your predecessors have generated this accreditation power. You are continuing to do it today.

This then leads me to my third realization. Music administrators are a quiet power; you, individually and collectively, are a quiet power.

For nearly a century, NASM has had the extraordinary good fortune to have a membership, composed of generations of individuals that believe in its purposes and support its aims and objectives; a membership that sets its sights not solely on local pursuits and successes, but on matters that will advance the discipline of music, the field of higher education, and the education and training of music students in broad terms. The dedication of NASM's membership is boundless. Examples are your willingness to travel to and participate in the Association's Annual Meetings; to give of your time and expertise to serve as visiting evaluators, elected officials, and volunteers; to engage in self-study; to set and be reviewed against national standards; to uphold, remain true to, protect, and defend NASM's enduring principles of service and fair process; and pursue excellence continually.

Burnet C. Tuthill, Secretary of NASM from 1924 to 1959, offers, "The history of the National Association of Schools of Music is really the story of a group of dedicated men [and women]. That is what has made this history so exciting. It is in a way difficult to believe that in applied music, matters of ethics in the business of teaching music, could arouse such enthusiasm for goals to be reached and command such devotion from a group of sterling characters. They set themselves the goal of raising the teaching of music at the college or professional level to place it on a par with the academic disciplines and to bring standards to the music schools of America..." Tuthill continues and describes the membership as "...the men [and women] who laid the foundations for the future of the National Association of Schools of Music."¹

Your quiet power emanates from several conditions. First and foremost is a strongly held understanding of the nature of power—knowledge that it can be used to build, harm, or even destroy, and the wisdom to exercise your power with care, learning from the examples of meandering waters, gentle winds, and patient parents we discussed earlier. In attribution to Abraham Lincoln, it has been suggested, "Most people can bear adversity. But if you wish to know what a man really is, give him power."² A second condition is your continuous dedication and work over time. A third is a deep, abiding, and pure love of music. For many of us, we know the moment that music reached into us, touched our hearts, and spoke to our souls in such a way that it took hold of our very being. It is these and other conditions that assist us to distinguish between the two kinds of power described by Mahatma Gandhi, "One is obtained by the fear of punishment and the other by acts of love. Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the one derived from fear of punishment."³

Armed with this knowledge then, and an unselfish love of and for the discipline and its people, we must proceed, for as suggested by Tuthill, "the building is far from complete but the foundations can carry whatever load is imposed upon them."¹

¹ Burnet C. Tuthill, "NASM – The First Forty Years, A Personal History of the National Association of Schools of Music" (1963).

² Robert G. Ingersoll, Motley and Monarch, *The North American Review*, Volume 141 (New York: 1885).

³ Mahatma Gandhi.

Last year at this time we spoke of the importance of asking “what if” questions—questions that promote thinking and dialogue that enables and demands consideration of possibilities, opportunities, realities, and risks. Questions that lead to answers that assist us to maneuver on the chessboard addressing the challenges we face day in and day out. Questions that lay the groundwork for decisions we will make that will not only allow us to protect what exists today, but to safeguard that which we hope our future will hold. Today, one year later, this need has not diminished.

As a country, we face a future that includes changes in party representation. Such changes are sure to have an effect on policy and its implementation. We are witnessing the release of an unprecedented number of laws and regulations, which, if enacted, will have the ultimate effect of compromising the freedoms and autonomy historically coveted by institutions of higher learning. Also, we are all observing an exceptional overreach on the part of federal authority, a reach far beyond the boundaries established by law.

As a field, we face the specific challenges brought to bear by Department of Education initiatives including final regulations pertaining to gainful employment, borrower defense to repayment, and teacher preparation; draft regulations pertaining to state authorization; and guidance pertaining to the interpretation of aspects of Title IX; as well as the overtime ruling released by the Department of Labor; the Department of Justice’s call for comment on the accessibility of web information; the National Labor Relations Board’s decision pertaining to the rights of students to organize; and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau’s actions to step beyond its reach of authority and to review institutional and accreditation practices.

As a discipline, we continue to face critical issues such as the continuing necessity to defend the importance of advanced study and work in our field; the need to maintain and find new sources of revenue and support; and the challenge to recruit, admit, and retain students—to name only a few. There may be comfort in suggesting that all is not lost, but there is no wisdom in turning a blind eye to possible implications and outcomes; avoiding consideration of the impact such governmental initiatives and those that will follow will have on higher education; failing to contemplate “what if” scenarios; assuming we have the ability to continue without effect; and thus not planning accordingly.

Despite what we have faced and faced down, and what we face today in all aspects of our context, we are aware of our history and our successes, and possess the fortitude to press on. It remains our responsibility to pick up where our predecessors left off; to continue to strengthen our foundation; to discover, to create, to innovate without burden of limits; to navigate successfully the rough seas that surely are ahead; and when our time has come to pass the torch, to welcome those who will continue our collective work, and relinquish to them the task. Quiet power requires continuous action.

I hope you might take a moment today and throughout this Annual Meeting to greet and speak with those seated to your right and to your left. These are your colleagues; individuals who not only share your hopes, dreams, and passions for our discipline, but who face many of the same issues you face today. These individuals can be an invaluable source of assistance. You may be able to succeed singularly without them, but with them, you will soar collectively to heights possibly unimaginable. As suggested in Proverbs, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”⁴

⁴ Proverbs 27:17, *New International Version*

Yesterday, Jake Heggie, a gentleman himself of quiet power, spoke to us about the fire of possibility. Echoing Jake's message and in closing, allow me to share with you a quote from Cormac McCarthy's 2006 Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Road*. The exchange is one between father and son, as the father imparts upon his son the importance of everlasting hope and human resilience.

You have to carry the fire.

I don't know how to.

Yes, you do.

Is the fire real? The fire?

Yes it is.

Where is it? I don't know where it is.

Yes you do. It's inside you. It always was there. I can see it.⁵

It is my hope that you keep the fire burning, and to assist you to do so, that you share a message of everlasting hope with your colleagues on your campus, and particularly with your faculties.

Thank you for your extraordinary work and for the integral part you play in our unfolding history. May you take with you from this meeting the memories of new and renewed friendships, a wealth of ideas and information, and the light from the fire of possibilities, which will assist you to continue to fine tune and put to effective use your quiet powers.

Please accept our best wishes for a happy, healthy, and peaceful holiday season.

We look forward to seeing and being with you next year in Arizona.

Thank you.

⁵ Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Vintage International, 2006).