

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC**  
**Annual Meeting 2017**

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

**Eirik Birkeland**  
President, AEC

President, Executive Director, 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.

Since the Bologna declaration of 1999, the AEC has been deeply engaged in the work for shared standards and quality development within The European Higher Education Area. Today this area includes 48 countries, which step by step have been developing common tools based on mutual key values. These include freedom of expression, autonomy for institutions, independent student unions, academic freedom and free movement of students and staff.

For the AEC and higher music education in Europe, it has been stimulating to take a position at the forefront of this movement for international quality development. The reasons are simple enough, since music is, and always has been an international language, and because our focus on quality in teaching and learning continuously has formed a solid foundation in our work. For us, some of the related activities, such as the European Erasmus Programme for student and teacher exchange, has not represented a complete new way of working, but has rather been a welcomed way of systematizing and strengthening internationalization. When the 16-year-old Edvard Grieg, after a long journey from remote Bergen, arrived in Leipzig in 1859, he met a whole group of young Norwegians already studying there at the conservatory.

In this work for quality enhancement within higher music education, the AEC has also adapted the general European approach of respecting and promoting diversity as a variety of practices within different countries and institutions. However, as we all could expect, over the years, the increased international collaboration has put this ambition under pressure. Our sharing of knowledge and experiences, and our search for best practice is gradually transforming the European landscape of higher music education into a less heterogeneous one. The positive result is of course a strengthened quality development and the gradual disappearance of weak practices. A price to pay might be that some highly valuable variants or alternative approaches of good practice in artistic work, in learning and teaching methods, as well as how we organize our activities will be wiped out.

Maybe it is time for the AEC and higher music education in Europe to have a more thorough discussion about how we can keep an open room for a stimulating variety within the standards. Maybe these concerns from our European context also might have some relevance in America?

Are there ways of identifying and supporting approaches and qualities that not necessarily fit immediately? Are there ways of dealing with this in our strategic and operational work?

Last week we had our AEC Congress in Zagreb where we had the pleasure of listening to a stimulating greeting speech from your President Sue Haug. The main theme for the conference was *Leadership in the Arts, the Arts of Leadership*. The conference dealt with many different aspects related to this theme, such as change management, structures, cultures, influence, ownership, competencies, and collaboration. Quality assurance and the fundamental relationship between the learning student and the master teacher were also central topics of discussion.

A speech, highly appreciated by the conference participants, was given by Jamal Rossi, Eastman School of Music and Robert Cuttieta, Thornton School of Music. The speech was called *Music Leadership - Education for Future Generation, and in it* they presented the philosophies and curricular approaches utilized by these two prominent schools as models for others, as more institutions invest in leadership education.

Their important contribution was a reminder of the potential for further development of exchange of knowledge and experiences, and for increased collaboration between our two Associations as well as between our member institutions.

Dear colleagues, for me it is a great opportunity to come to the NASM Congress here in Scottsdale. I look forward to attending presentations and discussions and to have the opportunity to share thoughts, at least with some of you. I wish you all a fruitful and stimulating Congress!