

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC**

Annual Meeting 2019

**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 attend the NASM Congress. It is an honor and pleasure, on behalf of the Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen, to greet the NASM and this distinguished Assembly. This is my fourth Congress and it is inspiring to come back and meet American colleagues again, to listen to interesting presentations and vivid discussions, and to have the opportunity to share thoughts with you.

On our side of the Atlantic, ever since the Bologna declaration in 1999, we have had an ongoing process with a view to realizing a pan-European integration of higher education with a common degree structure and emphasis on quality assurance, recognition, and international mobility. The process has had a substantial impact on higher education within the European Higher Education Area, which now encompasses 48 countries.

This year, the Presidency of the Bologna Process has been assumed by the Italian Government. From the perspective of higher music educators, we think it must be embarrassing for the Italians to realize that Italian laws still do not open for full recognition of their own Italian conservatories as higher educational institutions.

And, as we all know, the history of our conservatories goes back precisely to Italy, not only to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, but even earlier, to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, to the orphanages linked to hospitals, where the children were given education in music at an early age.

Two weeks ago, the Annual AEC Congress took place at the Conservatorio Statale di Musica Giuseppe Verdi in Torino. For us, this was an encounter with a vital institution and its venerable culture for music education, – a reminder to our non-Italian member institutions of the value of continuity in music education and training, from early childhood to the concert podium, a tradition that is still found in many of the nearly 80 Italian music conservatories.

As institutional leaders in America and in Europe, we all are concerned about the quality and quantity of applicants to our institutions. In Europe we are worried because there are too few opportunities for highly motivated children to immerse themselves in music, and for those who want to develop their talents even further, there are too few paths

leading towards studies at our institutions. These kinds of subject-specific needs in music education have not yet been properly addressed in the Bologna process.

However, we realize that an even more fundamental threat is intensifying because music-and arts education in European primary and secondary schools has become gradually weaker over the years, and in some countries, have disappeared altogether. This threat is made even more severe by the increasing number of music teachers who do not have the necessary competencies in the subject they teach.

In 2017, the AEC decided to include a third element in our Vision, stated as follows: *“AEC understands and supports music and arts education, together with cultural participation, as central contributors to quality in human life, and inclusive societies founded on democratic values.”*

-----

There are many similarities in the work that NASM does and what the AEC does, but there are also some differences. One distinct difference is that NASM for many years has had a strong emphasis on quality enhancement through development of common standards and accreditation, while the AEC has a shorter history in this respect, and has chosen instead to establish our accreditation agency, MusiQuE, as a separate body, maintaining AEC as a membership-based organization for advocacy and a common think tank for quality enhancement and developmental work.

AEC is not a political organization, but we realize that we have to be as political as we have to be in our continual effort to support academic and artistic freedom and strengthen the citizens’ right to music and arts education and to participation in cultural life.

The good news is that we are seeing some rays of light in recent political developments in the European Union, such as when the European Commission, for the first time in its history, in November 2017, referred to culture and cultural education as the 'key to the future - both for the individual as well as for the Union as a whole'. Triggered by this clear political commitment, and also by other corresponding statements, the concept of art and music as identity-builders is experiencing a revival, although a somewhat unexpected revival.

The arts do not exist in isolation. They are part of society. For art and culture to become the glue that holds societies together, we must place greater emphasis on issues such as providing everyone with access to music and music education. It is time to re-think and re-imagine how we can enhance the social relevance of our institutions and strengthen our candidates’ competence. What are, in fact, the criteria for our success, and theirs, and who determines these criteria?

At the AEC Congress in Torino, we had the great pleasure of listening to important contributions from NASM President Dan Dressen and Executive Director Karen Moynahan. AEC’s Chief Executive, Stefan Gies, and I are looking forward to continuing our European-American dialogue here at the NASM Congress in Chicago.

I wish you all a stimulating, inspiring and valuable NASM Congress! Thank you.