

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC

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Report of the President

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With all that challenges us of late—nearby and around the world—some may be wringing their hands over the future of music. I am not one of them. We have yet to find any human culture that is without music and with now eight billion people sharing this planet, music is likely interwoven into the lives of every one of them. For many people, music comes before and sometimes remains well after word-based languages. Music is our nearly constant companion, offering comfort and encouragement in our lowest and highest moments in life. Music—filling in the blanks where words alone are insufficient.

As it turns out, it appears that to be human is to be musical. And to be musical is to be fully human.

If you want to get to know a culture or an individual, you might start with their music, maybe along with their food, as both appear to be elemental in every human story. One of the most direct paths to the soul and spirit of another person is through music. In his quest to explore aspects of world culture, Alan Lomax put it this way: “As a people live, so do they sing!”¹

Music allows us to hold hands with others and to know them in new ways. Music gives voice to people from centuries past, as well as to those living today in disparate parts of the world or maybe just across the fences of our own backyards.

The future of music, you ask? I believe that it will continue to be the ubiquitous, everpresent force, the gift, tool, mystery, friend, healing agent, superpower, and miracle that it has been for us and for people everywhere throughout history. We sometimes seem to think that we have some form of exclusive ownership of music, that we need to worry over it, that it depends on us for it to be sustained, when, in fact, music appears to be inextinguishable.

But music doesn’t make itself. Music is created.

Our jobs are to remove barriers to music-making, to study music, to invite others to further develop their music skills and understanding, to celebrate music, to harness it, to admire it, and to champion the making of music. Lots of it. Music-making for all people in all places.

¹ John Gruen, “As a People Live, So Do They Sing,” *The New York Times*, March 26, 1978.

And to your specific task, you bring your deep resolve and commitment to serving others in all matters musical. You are the facilitator, the encourager. You lead in framing questions, initiating dynamic new programs, in fostering “what-if” thinking, and in securing much-needed resources. You do your very best with students in the short time that they are with you and then you send them out to musical lives of great consequence. You serve as a musical host. You are advocates for music and our obligation to nurture it in every person.

For you, music has substantially altered your life. I invite you to reflect. Remember one of those many times, when you were overwhelmed with the power and profound richness of a musical experience? Remember that time you walked into a rehearsal and could hardly believe the beauty of what you heard? Recall that dynamic premiere of a new work, the presentation of a student-led project in a place where people weren’t expecting it, the joy of handing a musical instrument to a young child for the first time? Do you remember those many “lightbulb” experiences that you witnessed for students in maybe a rehearsal or lesson, in music therapy or theory class, or in the animation lab or entrepreneurialism seminar?

This is such a great time to be alive as we wrestle anew with critical and fundamental questions: Whom are we called to serve? Whom have we invited? Who may have been left out? As we consider the founding of each of our institutions, asking, who came before us? What was their music? In posing these and other critical questions, I believe we have begun to awaken in new ways to those around us—student voices, everyone in our communities, and new partners in this work—nearby and around the world—listening carefully and with increased intensity.

I am so grateful for the challenging and encouraging words that we heard yesterday from our speakers. Ben Cameron set the stage as he urged us to consider and seize new opportunities; listen more intently to one another; increase our investments in vibrant community engagement; clarify our sense of our institutional and personal values; seize music’s ability to serve as a catalyst for change; and mobilize our earnest desires in matters of inclusion, compassion, empathy, and hope.

To best inform these matters and broader conversations, we must be sure to continue to engage with all who are involved as leaders in music in higher education, both within NASM and beyond. We are also well-advised to continue to engage with those involved in affiliate organizations to which many of you belong, including the College Music Society, National Association for Music Education, Association Européenne des Conservatoires (AEC), and the International Council of Fine Arts Deans, to name just a few.

From the White House, we heard this encouragement just about two months ago in an executive order, proclaiming that the arts, humanities, and museum and library services are essential to the well-being, health, vitality, and democracy of our Nation and are the soul of America, as they reflect our multicultural and democratic experience.²

² “Executive Order on Promoting the Arts, the Humanities, and Museum and Library Services,” September 30, 2022.

And what about the membership of NASM? What about you? Consider our united potential and the richness provided in gathering the institutions that are represented today in this room. While ours are a broad range of purposes, types, sizes, and locations, the story of your school and its early beginnings, its present offerings, and its enduring values and commitments bring such rich aspects to the tapestry that is yours, but is also ours collectively.

As much as we are such a diverse collection of music programs, we are here gathered around our united commitment to the highest standards of creativity, vibrancy, diversity, fairness, and to the honoring and flourishing of each person—musically and well beyond. We lend to one another our experience and insight, all the while witnessing—in this organization—the exponential power of our combined wisdom, engagement, and shared questions. As we join in our commitment to music and musicians in higher education, while wrestling with the many opportunities before us, we do so together.

How does NASM best operate? If this is to work well, I believe that it is really quite simple, and a large portion is up to each one of us. In fact, you are well on your way in having completed step one—you must simply show up. Welcome. Once here, then you must speak up, engage with others, offer questions, be unafraid to respectfully challenge, consider the best of others, seek the quiet or muted voice, listen with care—especially to voices and perspectives that may differ from your own. But do speak up; this organization thrives when its members are fully engaged. Every one of your voices and experiences and questions are critical to our collective flourishing, as they are added to the rich heritage of this association and to countless other voices—past and present. It is quite possible that your comment, insight or new idea will ultimately find its way to generational impact, possibly quite profound consequence, in the vast number of individuals we together serve, now and in the future.

What is it that we aim to accomplish, as members of NASM? Our mutual objectives are relatively straight-forward. In fact, our constitution addresses this with stark simplicity, as it states our commitment to advance the cause of music, to establish threshold standards in music, and to provide a national forum for our work. Toward these ends, NASM intends to develop national unity and strength in music, to bolster professional leadership, to foster creativity and the development of new ideas, to support new and emerging pedagogies, and to foster the flourishing of every music student.

As we are about our work, we must fan the sparks of creativity and imagination, we must ask hard questions, and we must nurture exploration and experimentation. Like never before, we are all eager for new ideas. Our world invites and demands our very best in wrestling with the challenges of our day. But good news: we couldn't do otherwise—we are creatives, makers, dreamers. Present questions and conditions just spur our imaginations all the more to new possibilities.

Along the way, let me assure you that NASM hopes to listen with great care. Listening. Isn't that what got many of us into trouble with music in the first place? We count listening as among the most critical aspects of our involvement with music. It is also the framework that fuels much of

the work of NASM. In best understanding our institutions, NASM begins by asking, “What are your core purposes?” This question informs consideration of each new curricular proposal, the need for improved music facilities, and in launching initiatives. Listening also informs ten-year reviews and the work of NASM visitors and its commissions. Resting on the fundamental purposes of your school, NASM then offers you peer review, a set of threshold standards, and a reflective mirror that allows an institution to see and hear itself as it engages in self-study.

In all of this, please know that you are anything but alone; you have the hundreds of colleagues who surround you at this annual meeting—each of them a rich resource of information and friendship. You may also rely on consultative resources, normative data, ten-year on-site visits, and, of course, you are engaged here in St. Louis and in future annual meetings.

And what about that big party I mentioned earlier? We have begun planning the centennial celebration of NASM that is scheduled for just two years from now. How could one hundred years go by so quickly and 2024 be upon us? Could our association founders have had any idea in 1924 what would ultimately transpire, due to their interest in addressing “...the need for standardization of entrance and graduation requirements, the betterment for conditions of music study, and cooperation with and the support of recognized educational associations?”³

It is not too soon to mark your calendars for the 100th NASM anniversary, which will take place in Chicago, Illinois, November 15–19, 2024. I am very much looking forward to the opportunity to celebrate with you all that has been accomplished in this remarkable organization while acknowledging the sizeable impact of tens of thousands of people who are tied to NASM member institutions over these nearly one hundred years.

And in closing, a more personal word to each of you: Surely, in all that you have faced and endured, you have every right to admit fatigue and occasional discouragement. With many facing diminishing resources, vexing questions, conflicts and troubled conditions, our unrelenting email inboxes, and more, it is understandable that we might have a few low moments. But let me offer you this encouragement and challenge: We must continue to fight together for music: music opportunity for every person—the professional, the avocational, the gifted, even the reluctant, the music of those long forgotten or ignored, the music of those marginalized or overlooked, for those without voice, and those not yet born.

Music—what a grand vehicle in giving honor to people, to their stories, to their deepest values, and to their highest aspirations. In providing these musical opportunities and conditions, you will offer the resources, the space, the invitation, and the vision that will result in profound transformational opportunity for countless people now and for many you may never meet.

Thank you for lending your experience, wisdom, and perspective to this noble cause. Your contributions and the investments of your institutions are vitally important, as they inform our work and the challenges before us, as we together endeavor to best serve music and the

³ Sheila Barrows, “Historical Perspectives: The National Association of Schools of Music, 1924-1999,” (1999), 3.

people of your institution, and as we strive to achieve the critical aims of NASM and our profession. NASM needs you—each one of you—and your active voice. These are such very important opportunities that lie before us, and I am deeply honored to partner with you in this work—this high calling to music and its makers.

Thank you. Thank you very much.