

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC**

**99<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting**

November 17 – 21, 2023

**Greetings from the Association Européenne des Conservatoires,  
Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen (AEC)**

**Stefan Gies**

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Dear Executive Director, Dear President, Dear Members of NASM:

Good morning!

It's a pleasure for me to bring you the warmest greetings from many, many dedicated friends from across the ocean: from our President, Deborah Kelleher, and from the entire AEC Council. Last but not least, I would like to send greetings on behalf of more than 300 higher music education institutions, from all across Europe and beyond, who are members of our association. And that means a lot, because the AEC represents almost all European institutions that are at all working in this field.

Our sister organizations, the National Association of Schools of Music and the Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen, have devoted themselves to a shared task. Music is our mission and our passion, and our commitment is to ensure, to maintain, and to improve the quality of higher music education at its best.

Eight years ago, I had the honour and privilege of addressing you as one of my first official acts in my new office at the 2015 NASM Annual Meeting in Saint Louis. Since then, we could not only maintain, but also deepen, the close contact between our organizations, which already existed at that time and is characterized by regular mutual visits. Even the COVID crisis has only briefly interrupted this exchange.

My own term of office is now gradually coming to an end, and I am delighted to have the opportunity to thank you here today for many years of good and trusting cooperation. And in thanking Executive Director Karen Moynahan, President Michael Wilder, and Vice-President Tayloe Harding by name, I do so *pars pro toto* addressing NASM as a whole, i.e. you all, the many dedicated people who stand behind NASM.

It was only a week ago that I had the honour of welcoming Michael and Tayloe to the AEC Annual Congress in The Hague, Netherlands, and I am very grateful to them for coming all this way, because it is so incredibly important that we know about each other, that we know what we do, what worries us, what experiences we have in dealing with ever-changing challenges, and what answers we find to the pressing questions of our sector and beyond.

Eight years ago, we could not have imagined that we would soon be living in a world dominated by war again, that our democracies would be jeopardized by democratically-elected politicians, that AI would dominate our everyday lives, that we would have to cope with a tremendous climate crisis, and that people would seem to be losing the ability to listen to each other.

I have studied your Annual Meeting programme with great interest. It's really impressive to see both the programme's breadth and depth, to learn which topics you will be discussing, and to observe that you are

addressing them all with the utmost professionalism. Most of the issues you are addressing, and even many titles of the sessions, remind me of our own conferences. For instance:

- Diversity and Inclusion
- Curriculum planning
- Assessment and quality assurance
- How do we retain faculty and staff
- Effective advocacy

...to name just a few examples.

But it is also interesting to see that there might be a different understanding hidden behind identical terms and headings.

When you talk about advocacy, it seems mostly to be about money and fundraising, whereas in Europe this plays almost no role because art, culture, and education are state tasks and no government, regardless of political orientation, would question this.

When you talk about diversity and inclusiveness, aspects such as colour, race, and religion are at the top of the agenda, whereas in Europe it might rather be things like linguistic diversity and social belonging, because these are identity-forming factors for many Europeans.

In that sense, America and Europe might be different: but such differences are not bad. Quite the contrary: that is what makes - in a positive sense - the diversity of the world. When we realize that something is different, that always means that there exists an opportunity to learn. But this will only succeed if we recognize and acknowledge what is different. This requires respect and it requires humility. One of the most significant outcomes of such a learning process might be to strengthen our own identities, even if it's only by knowing better than before why we like and appreciate those things we are used to.

The bonds between our sister organizations are rooted in shared values and concerns and deepen through a constant exchange of views and joint projects. And, of course, the personal encounters that take place in this context are the glue that holds everything together. I am sure that we will be able to carry this forward into the future together.

I wish you a successful and productive meeting and look forward to accompanying you at the various meetings and networking events. I am sure that I will bring a wealth of experience, insight, and inspiration back to my colleagues at AEC.

Thank you - I wish you all a good time here in Scottsdale.