NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC

99th Annual Meeting

November 17 – 21, 2023

Keynote Address
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"Forgiveness, Not Permission"

Good morning, everyone. What an incredible honor it is to have been asked to address you today. This request comes with a level of trust and respect that I do not take for granted. I imagine there are some in the audience who heard me speak just a few weeks ago at the CMS Conference in Miami. Forgive me if I repeat a few points, as I believe they're still as important today as they were just a few weeks ago. For those of you with whom I've had the pleasure of standing before previously, you know that it's important to me to acknowledge that I am 100% a product of public-school music education. I salute those of you in the audience who have ever answered the call to teach music at the grade school level. I stand here as a testament to your tireless work and dedication. In this moment, and if you'll indulge me, I would like to take a moment to recognize my high school band director, Mr. Lloyd H. Ross, who passed away just 11 days ago.

Mr. Ross read my first attempts at composition with both the Newark High School wind and jazz ensembles. I had written a David Holsinger knock-off called "Accolades" (it was the 90s, mind you) that I still have to this day. He recognized and nurtured my leadership potential, placing me on podiums on both the football field and on the concert stage. He never kicked me out of the band room, where I found safety and refuge from hostile high school hallways, though he was well within his right to put me out. He laid the bricks along my path, and paved the way to my life's passion, calling, meaning, and purpose. I know every one of us in this room had a Lloyd Ross, and even were and still are a Lloyd Ross. You all are actively paving the path to students' life's passion, calling, meaning, and purpose – either via one-on-one interaction and instruction, or in a more macro fashion, shaping their curricular paths and institutional culture in ways that optimize their potential for success. Know that however your work manifests, it matters.

I'd like to take a moment to tell you all a bit about someone else - my friend, Wendel Patrick. I met Wendel during my time on faculty at The Peabody Institute in Baltimore. Born Kevin Gift, Wendel majored in music and political science at Emory University, and continued on to earn his M.M. in Piano Performance at Northwestern University. He is an accomplished and celebrated professor, composer, producer, beatmaker, pianist, sonic architect, photographer, and videographer. He is equally at home on stage behind turntables as he is on stage performing a Mozart concerto. Wendel is the co-founder of the Baltimore Boom Bap Society, which performs monthly improvised hip hop shows with hand-picked musicians and emcees. The group's collaborative performance with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra of Stravinsky's "L'Histoire du Soldat" was named "Best Mesmerizing Performance of 2016" by Baltimore Magazine. His photography has been exhibited in several galleries, including the Baltimore Museum of Art and the Ralph Arnold Gallery in Chicago. Wendel was a member of the faculty at Loyola University from 2003 to 2013, teaching piano, introduction to music theory, music history, and electronic music production. In 2019, he was the Loyola Department of Fine and Performing Arts Guest Artist-in-Residence. In 2022, he was named Renaissance Man of the Year at the Baltimore Crown Awards. Wendel currently serves as an Associate Professor in the Department of Music Engineering and Technology at The Peabody Institute where he teaches "Hip Hop Music Production: History and Practice," the first course of its kind to be taught at a major traditional music conservatory anywhere in the country. He is currently a visiting non-resident Fellow at Harvard University's Hutchins Center for African and African American Research.

For me, Wendel represents the now. He is the moment, and the future of what is possible for students who matriculate at our institutions. When reading his bio, I am overcome by two emotions: awe and curiosity. While I believe the former to be self-explanatory, the latter would benefit from some extrapolation. The curiosity comes when I attempt to reconcile all the facets that contribute to his artist citizenship: concert pianist, beatboxing, production, turntables, composer, professor, photographer, videographer. When I lay out all these talents before me, I'm left pondering a bit of an uncomfortable question: did Wendel come across his talents and skill sets because of his academic music training, or in spite of it?

I believe a Wendel Patrick to be more of an exception than he should be. His skill sets and the multifaceted career he has been able to build for himself are current, contemporary, exemplary, relevant, and representative of a musical understanding that bridges and combines musical and cultural languages that exist both within and outside of the walls of music academia. How can we ensure that our institutional culture and curriculums help to cultivate this level of artistic and cultural fluency? I will be exploring that question deeper into our time together.

So often, many of us faculty operate as if what we are here to impart upon our students is the most important piece of their educational experience, when in actuality everyone's expertise and contributions are necessary in creating and nurturing artists and musical citizens such as Wendel. The piano professor is just as important as the theory professor, is just as important as the composition professor, is just as important as the history professor, is just as important as the jazz professor, is just as important as the piano tuners, who are just as important as our facilities managers, who are just as important as our registrar coordinator (and on and on…) in creating polyglot artists. We must think bigger about the possibilities of the multitudes of points at which we can intersect, and we must create a culture of collaboration that finds and fosters these points of intersection! This requires us to all be on the same page, and to accept and stand in the fact that our jobs are not about us.

Two weeks ago, we were fortunate enough at UT to welcome two-time Academy Award-nominated, 14-time GRAMMY Award-nominated (15 as of 9 days ago), 5-time GRAMMY Award-winning trumpeter, composer, educator, activist, and artist citizen Terence Blanchard to our campus. Every moment our students and community were blessed to share with him included gems and pearls of wisdom. One such pearl is particularly relevant in the context of our discussion today; Terence mentioned that artists are never done.

Yes, "artists are never done" is what I call a Hallmark card statement. It is a reduction of the sum of the experiences of many that end up becoming condensed to a concise sentence of seemingly- generic wisdom, if that wisdom is received without experiencing the life journey that ultimately leads one to that same truth. However, there is something both liberating and affirming in hearing one of the greats arrive at a conclusion upon which we ourselves have also arrived, in the same way it's oddly reassuring to hear someone at the top of their field admit that they still suffer from imposter syndrome when faced with a new project.

"Artists are never done." I find this statement to be fairly non-controversial. The musical and sociocultural landscape continues to bloom, to stretch, to redefine itself. I think about the truth of the tireless pursuit of art and artistic growth every single day in the context of myself as an artist and artist citizen, and in the context of my students, also as artists and artist citizens. Where I believe we run into a bit of an issue is that to be "never done" implies always striving - working our way to new discoveries - which also implies a good degree of failure, which in turn implies a release from fear. Someone once told me if you can't point to a pile of bad art, then you're not doing the work. If we agree that artists should continue to grow and learn as music evolves, are we creating a safe space for our music community to continue to grow and learn? Are we even cognizant of the roadblocks and pitfalls that are in place in our institutions, which prevent healthy failure due to fearlessly trying a new way of teaching a class, creating a new, unconventional ensemble, performing repertoire that's learned in

a nontraditional manner, exploring new musical languages, or omitting a few "staples of the canon" in order to make space for newer, still relevant-yet-overlooked works, or newer, alive composers or genres?

To address these questions, we must plainly state some truths from our chest. We ask ourselves, "what drives the fear from faculty of not wanting to change anything and what drives the fear of not wanting to give anything up?" Well, I believe the answer is that the fear is not in change; the fear is in loss. The fear is in what must be given up. The fear is in losing the aspects of music study that held meaning to the faculty member along the path of their own music educational experience. To remove certain works and certain composers from the curriculum feels like robbing their students of crucial information that will make them competitive in the market - the "market" pertaining to both postgraduate admissions candidate pools and professional work. The fear is also in loss of one's status as the expert and authority in their chosen field. What I find most fascinating about this fear is that it manifests by completely missing the point of what it is we are here to do in music academia: that point being that it's not about us. It's not about our greatness and it's not about our prowess and it's not about our status and it's not about our authority. Real harm has been done to our students, to our institutions, and to our field by those who have chosen to center themselves rather than center their students. They've erected roadblocks, they've caused pain, they've sown mistrust, and they've dropped anchor on progress all in the name of self-preservation. Ultimately, teaching is about rendering ourselves completely useless – taking our students as far as we can, offering them as much as we can, leaving them inspired to continue their individual work, and our collective work.

The fear is in the belief that the "quality" of programs will suffer if we implement too many changes. It's high time we have an honest conversation about through whose cultural lens we rate and judge ideas of "quality." Who is not accounted for in those fears is a musician like a Wendel Patrick, who represents the musical market and landscape as it exists now, and as it is trending in the future. Those fears are rooted in a musical landscape that has existed, from which we have shifted. This current musical landscape makes space for musicians whose interests and talents fit between set genres and cement them, creating new sounds and identities - new ways to reimagine musical lineage and creative ways to contribute to their longevity. And, if there persists an overwhelming fear of the "quality" (there's that word again…) of programs suffering due to change, it is time to reassess what are our institutional goals and metrics for success. If your metrics for success mirror or rhyme with the metrics that existed 30 years ago, 20 years ago, 10 years ago, not only is your field of vision concerning the current musical landscape and music career possibilities detrimentally narrowed, but also, you've already missed the boat on what kinds of conversations and opportunities are being created and explored in this new reality. Do our current metrics allow the space for growth and evolution? Do they create space for us to take the necessary fearless leaps towards new ideas? Or do they keep us locked in the safety and familiarity of routine?

Another Terence Blanchard gem: "the best way to honor the past is to add to it." This sentiment is particularly important in the context of our conversations around fear and self-imposed stagnation. What Terence is reminding us of is that change does not mean replacement. Making changes to our institutional ways of operation and to our institutional offerings does not mean a complete dissolution of the past. It means being brave enough and creative enough to reimagine what a symphony orchestra or wind ensemble or choir can be moving forward. How they can sound moving forward. What they look like moving forward. How they perform music moving forward. How they are in conversation with the community beyond the walls of our institutions moving forward. How we decenter these musical traditions and make space for our students to interact with and build upon these traditions moving forward. I say every time about my piece "Come Sunday" which brings the music of the Black church to the wind ensemble stage that nothing is novel about those notes and rhythms and harmonies that I wrote. What *is* novel is the space and the stages and the venues those notes, rhythms, and harmonies occupy. Black music has almost entirely been forgotten on concert stages, and oddly overrepresented in the "spirituals" genre of choral works. There is at the same time an underrepresentation of Black music and an overrepresentation of Black pain on concert stages. After writing my own Black trauma piece, I felt it necessary to write music that was rooted in Black joy, Black triumph, and Black celebration. And

that is rethinking the concert stage. And *that* is reimaging concert ensembles for today and tomorrow. There are some styles from which I pull - and my students are finding the same issue - where notation reveals itself to be painfully finite. Notation has historically been presented in music academia as being made of steel, but as space is being made to tell more and different stories, it is being revealed that notation is actually made from drywall - as sturdy as it is penetrable.

One of my graduate composition students at UT, Minoo Dixon, has composed a work entitled "The Songs of Shim Cheong" which will be performed at the Midwest Clinic in Chicago. This piece is rooted in traditional Korean music - in his own words as a reclamation of what Korean music is and a sort of pushback against "Arirang" as the full representation of traditional Korean music. He himself is Korean, and yet still needed to do quite a bit of research on traditional Korean music, as Korea has been colonized several times by Japan, a large portion of their traditional music having been erased. It's a multi-movement work based on a Korean folk tale, and each movement is inspired by a different type of traditional music. I've worked with him on this piece, and we've had to get quite creative regarding our notation to accurately signal to the musicians what types of sounds and tunings are required in order to "pronounce the music correctly." There are also moments that require a tone and a type of intonation that would not constitute a "good sound" as we understand it in our current music academic spaces (where the idea of a "good sound" is used to speak to playing very specific styles from very specific musical traditions of music on very specific stages), yet it is *integral* to the accurate performance of this work. *That* is rethinking the concert stage. And *that* is reimagining concert ensembles for today and tomorrow.

Dr. Chuck Dotas, my undergraduate mentor and dear friend to this day, is the Director of Jazz Studies at James Madison University, and has been in that role for over two decades. Before he was at JMU, he taught in a similar role at McGill University in Montreal. Chuck taught the wind ensemble a piece by ear. How did he do it? First, he picked a piece that he felt would be possible to learn by ear. In this case it was Matt Darriau's arrangement of a Senegalese folk song – the last track of the *Orange Then Blue* album of the same name. The first step was to give the musicians the recording ahead of time to listen to and to make a part of themselves. Besides the flute trio which begins the arrangement, since the piece is built in rhythmic hockets, he taught each section their hocket with his trumpet. For the flute trio (which he decided to arrange also for oboe and bassoon), he made individual cassette tapes for each of those sections and gave it to them ahead of time so they had time to learn it. They rehearsed, built an orchestration, and performed it at the concert.

This wasn't the first time Chuck had taught a wind ensemble a piece by ear, and every time he would have students thank him for opening up their musicianship, and for teaching them a skill set that they will be able to apply to their music making and music communication moving forward. *That* is rethinking the concert stage. And *that* is reimagining concert ensembles for today and tomorrow.

Now, there's no denying that from the educator's standpoint, that's a good bit of work. But that is *the work*. *That* is rethinking the concert stage. And *that* is reimagining concert ensembles for today and tomorrow. At the end of the day, our large ensemble offerings are classes. We should be measuring our success in these ensembles not only by the standing ovations and the curtain calls after the final note, but also by the skills our students develop in creating communal music. And here's what I think we miss in these large ensemble settings: communal music is community music. Many communities. Not just the community that's been cultivated on the stages of our concert halls inside our academic music spaces.

What can we do as leaders of these institutions to inspire our faculty to think creatively and currently about how to use their specialties to connect our students to the world outside of our music schools? It's time to stop talking only to one another, and time to be in conversation with the rest of the musical world - the world in which our students will enter and hopefully be the leaders and drivers of creative conversation.

Teaching second-semester theory at Peabody, which focuses on chromatic 4-part realizations – if I was teaching first-inversion secondary triads resolving up stepwise in the bass to diatonic chords (very specific, I know), I'll use the intro of "How Beautiful are the Feet" from Handel's "Messiah" alongside the intro to the title track of Toni Braxton's 2010 album "Pulse," which uses the same device. Teaching jazz harmony at UT, we look at the "Ode to Joy" from Beethoven's 9th, in comparison to the reharmonization created by Mervyn Warren of "Take 6" that was performed by Lauryn Hill in the climactic scene from the 1993 runaway hit "Sister Act 2" starring Whoopi Goldberg as a nun, as a current, relatable, and memorable example of how to take jazz harmony and use it to reharmonize. Beethoven and Lauryn Hill and "Take 6" in the same lecture on the same piece. Nothing was given up for that lecture to happen. What did Terence say? "The best way to honor the past is to build on it."

You want to quell your faculty's fears about having to "give something up"? You tell them what Terence said: "The best way to honor the past is to build on it." He didn't say to dissolve it. He didn't say to eradicate it. He didn't say to forget it. He said to *build* on it. Empower your faculty to think creatively about ways to *build upon* the lessons and the musical experiences that hold value for them. Wendel Patrick shows us that there is and there must exist space for old and new. The dexterity of his fingers as he brings to life a Mozart concerto coexisting with the same proficiency as when he plays an 808 drum machine is the point! Building upon the past is the future. Adding to what has already been done is the way forward.

Another difficult truth with which to wrestle: much of what we do in academia is habit. "Why are things this way? Because that's the way they've been." That's called generational trauma. The most detrimental aspect of habit is that it is comfortable. It is easy. It is familiar. It is predictable. And it is the antithesis of growth. How do we motivate our community to get comfortable with the discomfort that comes with change…with trying new things? Though this is a large task, I encourage you to give it a try: get to know your faculty's interests, passions, and skill sets beyond the title that appears on their office door or desk nameplate. And then I invite you to create a space where your faculty can pitch a "passion project" course that has been in their heart for some time. I was fortunate enough to have been given that space at UT, and from that was born my graduate seminar, "The Post-Genre Era."

Am I an expert in genre? Not even close. However, I am an artist citizen who both exists and operates in a reality where my own music is at times difficult to neatly classify. I am also on faculty with someone who *is* an expert in genre…and you better believe that I reached out! I recognized that cleanly placing music into genre categories has become increasingly difficult as our world becomes smaller due to technological advances, and I knew that our students had the same questions I did regarding the implications this will have on our artistry. In a way, I selfishly created the course so that I could also learn more about what it means to create art in a "post-genre landscape." I explained to my students on the first day that I am in no way an authority on this topic, but that I will put in front of them people who are…and that's exactly what I did. This being a pandemic course that was piloted in the spring semester of 2021 and Zoom being our primary mode of "connection," putting specialists in front of my students was an easier task. In that way, you can argue this course was bred by necessity. I also let my students know that, since I am no expert in this topic, we will discover our answers together.

An aside: I think there is power in the fearlessness that comes with being able to say "I don't know. Let's learn this together." There is reward in the vulnerability that comes in your students watching you fumble and recover. There are lessons to be gleaned for both you and them, and there is a grace that comes in our willingness to be imperfectly human in full view…if your academic culture provides space for that.

What resulted from this curiosity around genre was a rich, illuminating, and transformational class rooted in open discussion, words of wisdom from topic experts, and healthy grappling with challenging articles. My course was bookended by a deceptively simple question: "What kind of music do you do?" It was a question no one was able to answer on the first day of class, myself included. Their assignment on the final day of class, however, was to re-introduce themselves to the group by stating their name, and having spent a semester 1) defining

frameworks through which we could discuss genre, 2) understanding the sociocultural, political, and economic implications of genre, 3) its implications for music academia and academic music study, and 4) in relating post-genre ideas to our own artistic pursuits, saying from their chest exactly what kind of music they do.

The course feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with more than one student mentioning that it was the best and most meaningful course they had ever taken. I'm grateful to UT for providing me an opportunity to possibly fail loudly. Fortunately, I was able to build my parachute on the way down. I challenge you all, if you haven't already, to get a sense of your faculty's passion projects, and to also provide them the opportunity, the safety, and the insulation to fail loudly – to build their parachutes on the way down.

Well, we must address another factor that inhibits cultivating a fearless faculty: metrics. Data measurements. Though your faculty may *want* to relate to their students, and though they may *want* to curate their students' individual experiences, and though they may *want* to employ nontraditional materials and techniques into their curriculums, our metrics may not create space for that level of nuance. It's one size fits most. By this metric, you were successful. By this metric, you were unsuccessful. Are there ways to insulate your faculty who ask forgiveness, not permission, from potential institutional wrist slaps for implementing innovative ideas into their curriculum and teaching styles that either can't be quantified or for whom the metrics aren't suited to accurately measure the scope of their efforts?

How do we create a culture that supports the freedom to fail? It's day one of the fall semester. Your school of music community convenes in your auditorium or your concert hall at your "welcome back" reception. You prepare to give an address. You know what I've always wanted to hear from the dean or the director at one of those events? That it's okay to fail if the reason for your failure is that you tried, loudly. Encourage your community to fail, and to fail because they tried loudly. "Trying loudly" means that our community members took full advantage of the fertile environment that is our institutions….attempting new styles, new musical languages, new ways of communicating through art, new ways of seeing and shaping musical and cultural conversations, new ways to organize and deliver their lectures, new ways of harnessing the power of the concert hall, new ways of exploring what it means to prepare for a life as a working artist citizen, new ways of preparing our students to be artist-citizens of tomorrow…and, if we believe in the changes that must take place in our institutions in the coming weeks, months, and years, we must be in agreement that they can only ever be achieved if we all try loudly. By welcoming this type of failure, we're inviting a level of humanity into our institutions while greenlighting bold thought and innovative ideas. And there *will* be failure *precisely because* we tried loudly. And we will learn from those failures and use them to grow, as there is no greater teacher than failure. "If you can't point to a pile of bad art, then you're not doing the work."

You've heard me say the word "community" quite a bit. I do so deliberately, because the freedom to fail from reaching should not only be extended to the students.

The fear that is felt by our new students coming into our communities for the first time and facing competition amongst their peers and questions regarding their own preparedness, validity, and longevity is real. The fear that is felt by our well-matriculated students who are facing questions of career path and viability in an increasingly unforgiving socioeconomic landscape…that fear is real. The fear that is felt by our faculty members who retreat to safety and familiarity because it's what has worked in the past and has kept them within the bounds of the imposed metrics that guarantee their career longevity….that fear is real. The fear you all face as administrators - where "the buck stops" - the front-facing representatives of the institution; the pressure you face from a community of faculty, staff, and students whom you oversee, the pressure you face from provosts and boards and bureaucracies, the pressure you face from surrounding communities….that fear is real.

The common denominator here is fear. A culture of fear keeps us from evolving, from leaning in and letting go, and from taking the bold action we all need to transform. This brings me back to what I shared regarding day

one of the semester, when your music community convenes in a shared space to hear your words, which will set the tone for the year ahead. *That* is your opportunity. *That* is the chance to say to everyone that we will try new things *together*. And we will fail *together*. And we will succeed *together*. And we will grow *together*. And we will support one another, and we will figure this out *together*. And then you create space to be in active and ongoing conversation with your community members as you all collectively craft a bold vision for the direction of your institution.

Some of the richest, most impactful, and most impressive music we have in our society comes out of Black churches. It is a poorly kept secret. The keys player is doing the thing, laying it down with all the runs and hip substitutions and reharmonizations. The drummer is setting the entire congregation alight with their driving grooves and deep pocket. And the singers! Three- and four- part harmonies materialize out of a shared spirit and ring across the sanctuary. And then there's the tambourine - played by literally everyone. It's some of the most impressive syncopated, polyrhythmic, soul-stirring percussion playing you can imagine. And somehow just about everyone seems to own one. Most of these musicians (and when I use that term, I'm including the congregation) haven't had a formal music lesson a day in their lives, but make no mistake, they've received an entire education in music-making.

There are several "nonformal" outlets, such as churches or folk music gatherings, or other culturally-specific social and ceremonial settings, where high-level music making takes place, and there is something profoundly important about the ways music information is transmitted in these settings. I think about this often in the context of our institutions, and I often wonder about the roadblocks people encounter who have come to music via these avenues if they decide to matriculate at our schools of music. Do our entrance requirements make space for musicians who have not followed a path of formal music learning to the doors of our institutions and should they be accepted? Are our curriculum, lesson, and ensemble offerings designed to accommodate these different methods of music making, especially if the students in question do not come from a tradition of reading music?

De-emphasizing the importance of notated music in our institutions would be quite the paradigm shift, and yet a great number of the world's most successful musicians don't read music. Yes, there are many skills that a musician who has come to and developed their art nonformally can gain from a formal, institutionalized music education. There are also many skills that our institutional community can learn from musicians who have come to and developed their art nonformally.

If you were to ask the performers in your institutions - be they students or faculty - to perform solo for two minutes with no music (not counting the jazz majors or professors), and you provided the stipulation that they were not allowed to play something that already exists, that they previously memorized, or that they previously worked up, you may or may not be surprised that most of them would have no idea what to play. What's fascinating about that to me is that we would all call ourselves musical beings with music being both inside of us, and at the core of who we are. What we don't wrestle with enough in our institutions is the question of *whose* music is inside of us, and if we are giving our students skills that will allow them to communicate with other musicians who have not followed the formal music-learning model. Are we cultivating individual artists with flexible musical skill sets that will allow them to be adaptable in their musical careers, or are we creating soldiers who exist in specific ensembles playing specific music in specific venues – only able to demonstrate proficiency through the ideas of others and unable to express their own musical thoughts?

Do we teach our music students how to develop their musical being? Are our curriculums set up to teach how to do that? Do our institutions prioritize that? Or are music students being taught to only be vessels and mediums and interpreters of others' musical ideas? Are we making space for nonformally-trained musicians? What roadblocks have we erected that make their matriculation into our institutions decidedly difficult, if not altogether impossible?

There is much to be learned and much information to be shared between musicians who have studied formally and those who learned nonformally. How can we create an environment that catalyzes an exchange of ideas, techniques, and musical languages between formally and nonformally-trained musicians?

A "simple" question for everyone: who do you want at your institutions? Please don't answer that out loud, but also be honest with yourselves. Because how you answer that question will be the legacy of your institution. It will define how you approach recruitment, curriculum, degree offerings, ensemble offerings, mean socioeconomic status of your student body, delegation of resources, postgraduate career viability, community culture, and so much more.

Do only certain ensembles count towards degree credit? In doing so, you're sending a message to your community about whose music truly matters within the walls of your institution, and what music outside of the walls of your institution is erudite enough to warrant a place in your curriculum. You're saying: "it's playing in these types of ensembles that will matter for your long- term success." Or more specifically, "it's playing in these types of ensembles that will matter for your success as a student at this institution, long term success be damned."

Are all your strongest players reserved for your symphony orchestra, or your top wind ensemble exclusively? Those kinds of decisions and hoarding of resources ripple outward and affect the very culture and attitude of your institution. Those musicians who are a part of your most resourced ensembles may deem themselves the best of the best, though there may exist musicians who have come to and make their music in a different way, who are guided by different, broader metrics of success, who can communicate musically in a way that those formally-trained first chairs could never…but, chances are, those types of students are slimly represented in your institutions, if at all, depending on your institutional priorities.

Last week, I was in residence at Illinois State University for the 5th anniversary of my piece, "Come Sunday," which they commissioned and premiered. In preparation, their director, Dr. Tony Marinello, in conjunction with a former member of the wind ensemble, brought in a drummer and keyboardist from the City of Refuge church right there in Bloomington, Illinois. Tony shared with me that these two musicians expressed intimidation when viewing the score of the piece, as they don't come from institutions built on traditional notated music practices. Tony expressed to them clearly and in front of the entire group that they had the best ears in the room. Thus started a beautiful exchange of ideas and cultural knowledge, where the ISU wind symphony would play for them, and the church musicians would help with the interpretation and pronunciation of the phrases of the music. The session culminated in the church musicians performing for the wind ensemble (across the room from one another, mind you, due to where the piano was positioned on stage in relation to the drum set). I asked the students what they learned from this exchange, and several of them mentioned realizing the power in the ability to communicate with another musician in real time while creating music on the spot. The students also took note of how the church musicians communicated chord and section changes, as it was unlike anything we do in our traditionally-rooted institutions. I expressed to the wind ensemble that the slow movement is Bach on the bottom and the Blues melodically on top. It was my concurrent teaching of chromatic 4-part realizations at Peabody while writing this piece that sparked that revelation within me.

What did Terence Blanchard say? "The best way to honor the past is to build on it." He didn't say to dissolve it. He didn't say to eradicate it. He didn't say to forget it. He didn't say to luxuriate in it. He said to *build* on it. Tony turned his programming of "Come Sunday" into a true educational experience for his musicians, giving them the opportunity to learn from musicians who developed their artistry in a different way, and who's artistry is tied to culture and community. *That* is rethinking the concert stage. And *that* is reimagining concert ensembles for today and tomorrow. Nothing was given up, and everything was gained.

Are ensemble successes measured solely by length of standing ovations and number of curtain calls, completely neglecting whether students are developing skills in creating communal music, "community" music - the communities that exist outside of music institutions and not just the ones that the privileged few were lucky enough to have access to?

We were discussing recruitment in our most recent faculty meeting at UT a few weeks ago, and I'd love to take this opportunity to gleefully misquote one of my beloved colleagues, Dr. Bob Duke, Director of the Center for Human Learning, with this beautiful bomb he dropped on all of us: "We can be an institution that coattails greatness, or we can be an institution that cultivates potential." I've not been able to stop thinking about that quote.

Rather than accept the students who are a 96 and polishing them up to a 98, how about we accept some students who are a 72 with promise, get them to an 87, and in the process equip them with the skills, tools, inspiration, and curiosity to take themselves further.

Who do you want at your institutions?

Institutions who don't have a robust traditional classically-rooted large ensemble culture, perhaps due to enrollment numbers or their student body coming to music via nonformal paths, may actually be at an advantage in this conversation, because those institutions have to think beyond the model that has been codified and legitimized over a century of routine and habit.

One of the guest speakers I Zoomed in to speak to my "Post-Genre Era" graduate seminar was a former student of mine at Berklee College of Music named Adam Calus. I had Adam as a student in my "Intro to Music Education" course a little over a decade ago. Adam graduated to teach in the Boston Public School system, where he built music programs from nothing, accepting donations and fundraising to find drum sets, keyboards, guitars, and digital audio workstations for his students. As his student ethnic demographic was mostly Latino, he would, for example, come up with creative ways of simplifying a montuno to teach his students so that they would feel a personal connection to and ownership of the music. The students would rotate instruments, learning by ear (notation came later), and always making music in a communal way. Near the end of the school year, he would find venues around town for them to perform and shared with my seminar a video of his students performing on a Boston Harbor Cruise boat, both playing for and dancing with other cruise members. The students held a major stake in their own success and they were invested in their own learning. That is music education, holistically and in totality.

When you are unbridled from the expectation of wind ensemble and symphony orchestra as your anchor ensembles, you are free to consider the music that actually exists around you – the music that exists outside of the walls of music academia – the music that is a part of the stories and identities of your students, and you are able to build ensembles and curriculums around cultural understanding and social need. And make no mistake, not having a traditional classically-rooted large ensemble anchor does *not* speak to the musicianship (or lack thereof) of the musicians in your institutional community. If your institution is a 4-year program, what pathways and partnerships exist for ease of matriculation for your students from 2-year institutions, and once they arrive, what support systems are in place to see that they graduate having had a rich, meaningful, useful, and affirming experience?

Who do you want at your institutions? Realize that you answer that question without saying a word. You answer that question with your course offerings. You answer that question with your audition requirements. You answer that question with the styles of music with which you engage. You answer that question with how many different methods of learning and sharing music you offer. You answer that question with how you delegate

your financial resources. Who do you want at your institutions? A more direct way to ask that question is: who are you as an institution? Who do you want to be as an institution? How do you define success as an institution?

These questions are massive. Easy to pose, difficult to implement. Admittedly, some more difficult than others. If only there were a body somewhere – a body who oversaw curricular requirements at the nation's music institutions, and if only that body were somehow in the same room at the same time. What would be even better is if there was some kind of conference that this body could attend for a few days, where they were presented with innovative ideas and methods for how to move our institutions forward. Sounds like a pipe dream, I know. But, if such a serendipitous conversion should ever happen, what an incredible opportunity that would be…to be in conversation with one another, to discuss what has worked and what hasn't. To share instances of creating the freedom to fail, to build the parachute on the way down. To be brave enough to make the kind of bold decisions that require asking for forgiveness and not permission. "This is the way it's always been done" is the quickest way to an early grave. Institutional death. Artistic death. Creative death. Everyone in this room is still an artist, and it is by keeping our fingers on the pulse of the changes that are manifesting in the greater musical landscape that we will be able to steer our institutions towards the center of these shifts, so that we can both participate in and guide artistic conversations and their great implications for societal change. So that we can prepare our students to profess, compose, produce, research, improvise, beatmake, turntable, beat box, Tuvan throat sing, and whatever meaningful career exists at the nexus point of all those skills. The future lives in the in-between – in the building upon the past, not in the wallowing and luxuriating in it. The power to make the kind of change we all want exists right here, in this room. Be bold, be fearless, take the leap, and build the parachute on the way down.