

Remarks: AEC Annual Meeting
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It is a great pleasure to meet with you again, and to bring greetings from the National Association of Schools of Music in the United States.

Last year, in Palermo, I shared some thoughts about the future of our music profession, and about the generational change that is occurring among music faculties throughout the world. Together, we discussed the future and what might happen in it. Today, as the AEC embarks on important projects of upholding tradition, promoting diversity, and encouraging innovation, my thoughts turn to the *present*, and to the conditions for progress.

As we hire the new faculty members who will carry on traditions and create new traditions, we tend naturally to think of the future – of possibilities, of plans, and of smooth transitions. But we should really be concentrating on the *present*. It is *now* that we are seeing how these new faculty members will interact with our existing faculties. This is basic, elementary business – how human beings work together, how to be in a group, how to engage with other groups. *Now* is when we must create not only a manageable *modus operandi*, but indeed a *modus vivendi*. This requires care on our part. We must give attention to how we work together – as individuals, as departments, as music schools and conservatories and Musikhochschulen, and, indeed, as associations of schools and conservatories. Just as our faculty members must learn to work together, so must *we*, as institutions and as associations. *We* must learn how to make progress together.

So let me state something that we all know: genuine progress is possible only when *everybody* has a sense of involvement, of ownership in the final product. This means that they have been given an opportunity to express their views, to participate in the process. Some individuals or institutions may choose not to participate, but at least they have been *invited* to, and they have heard the discussions and points of view. Progress is participatory – quality enhancement is a team effort. It cannot be imposed. It must be shared. Progress requires *consensus*.

In today's world, achieving consensus can be difficult. In countries throughout the world, and especially in the United States, it seems, politicians appear to have lost the ability to talk with and among themselves, to work toward mutually agreed-upon goals, or even to decide what those goals are. Last week I heard an interesting theory about why this is so. It came from a prominent American politician from the political center. He pointed out that there is something new in modern society. Only in recent years has it become possible to customize one's life, through social media like Facebook and other means, so that you can associate only with people who agree with you. You can arrange your life so that you don't have to work with, or even talk to, people with whom you disagree. And so people cling only to their own views. And when these views are not challenged by others, they can become distilled to a pure state, without having to compromise with others. But we know that real life does not afford the luxury of dealing only with those who agree with us. We have to forge progress with and among our colleagues. We have to find areas of agreement and pursue them. If we are to make progress of *any kind*, we must seek and achieve consensus. And that is the essential key: *consensus*, and *compromise*. We do so because we know that true progress comes only when our focus remains on work that protects, enhances, and advances the art of music.

Where is consensus needed? Here NASM and the AEC are fortunate, for the areas that require consensus are precisely those areas that form the very reason for our existence. These areas are at our center. They are our DNA, our molecules, our chemistry.

Above all, both AEC and NASM must continue to share an abiding understanding that our work, both individually and together, must support all music in all forms – composing, performing, teaching, study. Such a shared understanding will guide us all as we address the cause of music – a cause in which we believe, *and* a cause which we must uphold and protect for the benefit of the entire field. Both of those conditions are essential – belief in a cause, *and* mutual benefit.

We must also seek consensus as we work to perfect our *standards* and our *procedures*. The abiding strength in standards is agreement among those who are creating the standards, and among those who will abide by them.

And consensus must exist among the *participants*. An organization is strong only if its vision is shared, and if the path forward is embraced. Both of these conditions require clear communication, and patience to conduct open, thorough, and ongoing discussions. Patience is essential, it is imperative. But that patience is rewarded by the strength of the foundation it creates. Without the *shared* vision and path forward, without that *consensus*, at best, real progress is not possible; at worst, we divide and weaken our endeavors and our profession.

Finally, consensus must exist in a dedication to *quality*, and to rigorously high standards that are *fairly applied*. A consensus requiring *quality* and *fairness* is essential to progress, not only in maintaining a system of peer review, but especially in creating such a system. That can be difficult. It is always easier to relax one's standards than it is to raise them; to improvise as we go along rather than to build in advance a lasting framework. There is no downside – no disadvantage – to raising standards. This is a principle that has been essential to all human progress throughout history.

As the AEC addresses its present challenges and contemplates the path forward that will create its future, I invite us all – colleagues in AEC and NASM alike – to embrace the principle of consensus, of working together, patiently and with determination, to achieve consensus in our mutual quest to advance our profession through dedication to the highest levels of achievement. Thus will we best serve our art, and thus will we best serve our students.

Thank you for this opportunity to share thoughts and ideas. You have the best wishes of NASM as you move forward.