

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF DANCE

Annual Meeting 2015

Oral Report of the Executive Director

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Good morning. Welcome to the 35th Annual Meeting of the National Association of Schools of Dance. It is good to see and be with you; it is good that you are here. Thank you for your participation. It matters and it makes a difference.

It remains an enlightening and welcome challenge, a profound and rewarding pleasure, and a humbling experience to have the opportunity to work with the many dedicated individuals who represent institutions that offer higher education programs in dance—individuals who hold expansive expertise and devote this expertise, and their lives, to the education and training of students interested in studying dance. Thank you for the countless hours of time you spend advancing the field. It matters and it makes a difference.

It's been a good year, a busy year. The number of accredited institutional members continues to rise slowly. In 2014, 80 institutions held NASD institutional accreditation, a growth of 5.2% over last year. We welcome one new member in 2015. The number of potential member applicants remains small but steady, even as new schools gain accreditation. When one recalls that the total number of accredited institutional members was just under 50 in the early 1980's, this growth realized over these many years is formidable.

In the fall of 2014, NASD accredited institutional members enrolled nearly 6,000 (5,922) undergraduate and graduate students majoring in dance (5,586 undergraduate and 336 graduate), a 4.2% increase over the previous year.

What does this tell us? In short, though trials, tribulations, and taxing events remain ever-present bedfellows, in spite of it all, dance and the interest in dance study remains; it prevails. This is not the result of an overnight success; it is not sensational. Instead, it is the result of a conscientious decision to develop a discipline, and associated practices; to construct a foundation built with bricks laid by course in running bond, which has been slowly, steadily, and incrementally expanded with careful attention devoted to ensuring its permanence. With regard to our foundation, it would be true to say that the placement of each brick has been calculated, recalculated, adjusted, and set with conviction of passion, spirit, and mind.

As we seek to preserve our past, we need not travel far to find our stories. They rest here in our foundation. As we prepare to embrace our future, we need not look far to find our lessons, they too rest here in our foundation. The desire to preserve our past confirms its value; the eagerness to embrace our future confirms the importance we place in that which lies ahead.

This year marks NASD's 35th year of operation. On such a momentous occasion, it is not only appropriate to take stock in accomplishments, it is also important to revisit our stories, remember our

lessons, and recommit our sights on tomorrow, for we are the masons responsible for adding the next course of bricks in our foundation.

The work accomplished throughout our history, and certainly within these last 35 years, has benefited from many endearing characteristics. We know and practice these well. Among them are included the pursuit of knowledge, application of wisdom, exercising of patience, belief in the importance of purpose, deep respect for point of view, honor in service to the field, empathy for others, and personal humility—all seasoned with a good sprinkling of humor. It is safe to say that motivation, perseverance, and hard work too have held leading and long-standing roles. The importance of each of these characteristics is inestimable. They matter and they make a difference.

To know why actions and events matter, and how they can and will make a difference offers us a valuable, and not to be discounted, perspective. It offers a glimpse of our relevance. To know the relevance of something is to know why it matters or how it is important. To be relevant is to be connected with the matter at hand. Knowledge of this relevance then becomes critically important if goals are to be set that pave the way for the addition of yet another brick in a course in the existing foundation, rather than the setting of the first brick in what will be a competing structure. The absence of attention to the importance of the relevance of an activity, unless luck prevails, will certainly render the activity irrelevant, and within time, defunct.

We have the ability to hold and maintain our focus on the bigger picture—dance study and dance education. The work accomplished to date has been guided by the desire to be connected to the pursuit of excellence in the field and for the field as a whole. Although we have realized local successes, the value and contribution of which cannot be underestimated, we, at the same time, deeply understand the inherent value such successes contribute to the entire enterprise. We are also cognizant that our accomplishments and those of our institutions and students contribute to the stability and success of the enterprise, and in turn, this success returns to us in various shapes and forms, to assist, and in some ways, protect us and our work.

But this doesn't minimize the daily slog. Our work is hard; better said, the challenges we face each day make our work hard. Consider if you will, the amount of information that is created today. Consider the ease of access to this information. Consider the information you must address, the information you should address, and the information you would like to read and study just for the purpose of trying to stay connected. We live in a world where it is impossible to remain current on all topics, much less those related to our own field.

On the home front we face the prospect of dwindling funds, which has a direct impact on our programs, and the resources necessary to support them. We must become proficient in squeezing the value out of every dollar, maximizing the use of resources, and defending the necessity of our existence.

We experience first hand the speed of change particularly as technologies change in the blink of an eye, and particularly if our programs have been designed to operate solely or predominantly through use of current technologies. There is little time to settle into that which is new found, particularly if it is announced with a swiftness that heralds its arrival, as well as its equally swift departure.

We welcome new students each year who are more savvy and sophisticated than the previous cohort, armed with inherent skills and abilities that we work to acquire and develop.

Despite questions about the nature, disposition, and effectiveness of the academy, we see first hand increasing enrollments, and anticipate enrollment and therefore institutional growth as our current world population of 7.2 billion is projected to reach 9.6 billion by the year 2050.

Beyond the gates of our institutions we see pressures brought to bear by the availability of \$150 billion dollars of federal money earmarked for education, an amount equal to 4% of the entire federal budget, and creative pursuits designed to lay claim to a piece of this pie. Concerns emanate from federal discussions outlining plans and intentions regarding issues such as testing, teacher review, and teacher preparation at the elementary and secondary levels, and cost, employment, data collection, state authorization, and gainful employment at the higher education level. These issues receive even further emphasis as candidates jockey for position as the 2016 election draws near. We do our best to ensure that the principles addressing institutional freedoms and autonomy remain at the center of these conversations. We do our best to hold at bay regulations that have the ability to bury us in red tape and reporting requirements.

Nationally, we worry about the rising cost of goods and services, and the increasing national debt, which rises approximately \$2 billion dollars a day. It is now in excess of \$18 trillion dollars, which amounts to approximately \$56,000 per citizen. Our worries are further exacerbated by what appears to be a difficulty, on the part of federal officials, to work the problems to good and effective end—together with sophisticated cordiality.

Bleak, you might say. Possibly. It depends upon your point of view. As students of history, we know that there have been, are, and will be times that offer, if not these, then other pressing challenges. Despite the fact that we may not have the ability to directly affect the overall outcome (although this hope should never be relinquished and this pursuit should never cease), we have an ability to affect our own outcome.

Today's dance administrator must wear many hats and balance many balls, all while keeping a watchful eye on the ever changing lay of the land. Today's dance administrator must, after careful consideration, make well-calculated decisions, which make certain that any course set and pursued remains ever faithful to mission and purpose. Today's dance administrator must ensure that the outside is allowed to impact the inside only to the extent that the inside is strengthened by this relationship. Today's dance administrator must ensure that a proportional and appropriate balance is achieved, a balance which by its nature will define relevance.

We are surrounded by countless examples of events and initiatives that have maintained their relevance for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. As examples, there are great works of art, design, dance, music, and theatre. It may prove helpful to consider those you deem of great import, to contemplate their impact upon individuals and society throughout the ages, and to ascertain why they became and remain relevant today. Consideration of such issues helps us to frame the relevance of our own initiatives.

We spoke earlier of the importance of knowing why actions and events matter, and what role these actions and events play in determining the relevance of an initiative. It would be safe to say that the level of attention devoted to ascertaining and ensuring the relevance of an initiative may be instrumental in determining its fate. The challenge at hand is to ensure that the initiative stays relevant for a lifetime and beyond.

But how do we maintain the focus needed to prevail, if even to continue. How do we stay the course when distractions abound. Why do we stay engaged when it would be easy to turn away from the challenges. The answer seems quite clear. We have developed a commendable resiliency—a resiliency that stems from our desire to make a difference in the lives of our students, a resiliency that stems from a deep and abiding belief in our principles, and a resiliency that stems from an unflinching and unwavering love for our art form. As well, we possess a capacity to dream, to achieve, and to care—a capacity that knows no limits or bounds. This capacity is clearly evident in your accomplishments.

William Faulkner, offering thoughts at the Nobel Banquet in Stockholm in 1950, speaks to this capacity. He begins:

*I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past.*¹

Faulkner speaks of the poet and the writer. But it could be imagined that these words speak of the artist as well, the power held by the artist, and the duty of the artist to use the art form for greater good.

Tonight we will gather down the hill to enjoy the flavor of our local and charming surroundings. We will enjoy the fellowship of dear friends and good colleagues. We will recall and celebrate our many successes. I am reminded of a scene from a film released in 1983 about the Mercury Seven. During a celebratory event, as Claude Debussy's *Clair de Lune* gracefully and elegantly frames the moment, the seven astronauts seek and catch the eyes of the others. These glances, shared but brief, are knowing. They indicate and confirm an understanding of achievement, an understanding of the cost of the labors and sacrifices given in pursuit of achievement, and an understanding that today's achievement is simply a well-positioned and affixed brick in yet another course of bricks in the ever-expanding foundation.

I hope you will take a moment this evening to contemplate the magnitude of the extraordinary accomplishments that have taken place in dance during these last 35 years. In doing so, I hope you will find great pride in these accomplishments for they have been realized by the hands and handiwork of each of you—singularly and collectively. Your work has ensured the relevance of your field. At this meeting we merely turn a page and end a chapter; the story ahead is left to write and to choreograph. Tonight, we pause for just a moment, to exchange those knowing glances, to celebrate our many accomplishments, and to anticipate with excitement the next 35 years and the many possibilities that lie ahead.

I extend to each of you best wishes for a success and productive year.

Thank you.

¹ William Faulkner's speech at the Nobel Banquet at the City Hall in Stockholm, December 10, 1950