

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF DANCE

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Oral Report of the Executive Director

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I have come to be intrigued and moved by quiet powers – powers that incrementally over time leave indelible and everlasting imprints. These quiet powers come in many forms: meandering waters that carve a deep canyon’s footprint, gentle winds that shape the face of a weathered mountain, and patient parents who instill in their children attributes such as honesty, integrity, and kindness, to name just a few.

There is no doubt that such powers are not always quiet. They can act with sound and fury; they can demand our immediate attention. However, they rarely unleash their full force all at once. Instead, they expend their energies, moment by moment, on the tasks at hand – the carving, the shaping, the instilling. They seem to know their purpose and remain committed to it regardless of distractions. They are indefatigable.

The aggregate positive effects of these powers are rarely observable in any given active moment when they are working. As we know, results take time. True and enduring achievement can be hidden unless one takes the opportunity to step back and look at the long view, to look at the changes that have taken place over extended periods of time, or to wonder what the landscape or situation might look like if these powers had been absent or were extinguished.

One of the most powerful examples of such positive effect in our own field is the devotion of time individuals commit to mastering their craft, to becoming artists.

As I considered these two phenomena - quiet powers and unbridled devotion of time – brought them in close juxtaposition with each other, and placed them in the context of NASD, several enduring realizations became evident. Allow me please to share with you today three of these realizations.

First, and of particular note, is the realization that NASD’s work is a quiet power.

NASD was established in 1981 to improve education practices and to maintain high professional standards in dance education. Guided by wise and passionate leaders who administer dance programs and institutions throughout the United States, NASD has sought to engage critical issues proactively and comprehensively. Its members and leaders are keenly aware that dialogue, study, fairness, and excellence, are essential if such efforts are to be successful and have a long-term impact on the field of dance and the education and training of students. Through such efforts and from its inception, NASD envisioned, defined, and articulated its principles, and to this day, has remained ever true to them. Held at its core are its purposes, which are memorialized in its Constitution. Adherence to its enduring purposes has led NASD year after year to deepen its knowledge, expertise, and sophistication for the benefit of its members, potential members, and the field.

NASD's accomplishments are a result of the work of its members – those here today and those who participated throughout NASD's nearly four-decade history. Regardless of the form of participation, the history of NASD, known to be centered in values and focused on content, has always produced a certain self-awareness in these individuals, particularly in those who have been elected to serve in leadership roles. As service-oriented self-awareness is apt to do, it has always instilled in our leaders a deep sense of commitment and humility, which assists them to seek the greater good for the benefit of the membership and dance as a field, with a mission-focused vision, broad understanding, and compassionate empathy. Historically, it has also led to the realization that the vital work of NASD is but one of the many bright stars in the constellation working on behalf of the field of dance, and how critically important it is for these stars to not only share common goals, but to light the way together, each fulfilling its critical role.

Many today define NASD's work in a single word – accreditation – a word that to some simply indicates a lengthy process. In truth, NASD fulfills its purposes in many ways, primary among them is accreditation. NASD is accreditation, and so much more. NASD offers a rich program of professional development for dance executives such as that offered during its Annual Meetings; it studies and analyzes policy such as legislation and regulation pertaining to the flow of federal funds to support elementary and secondary, and higher education; and it conducts institutional research such as the HEADS project, a collection, compilation, and publication of data pertaining to dance programs in the United States. All four functions are interrelated; each serves the others. Accreditation in all its functions, including standards setting, is the anchor.

This leads me to my second realization. Accreditation is a quiet power.

Assumed by some to exist solely as a clerical procedure that satisfies a requirement for external review, accreditation can be perceived as a tax on time and energy, both precious commodities in a dance executive's day. If one sees only a busywork exercise or a bureaucratic labyrinth, the long-term benefits may be hard to ascertain or realize. Such points of view may serve to obscure accreditation's quiet power and its substantial potential.

The true value of accreditation rests not in procedure for procedure's sake, but rather, in the dialogues that take place on many levels, and the awareness and understanding that result from such dialogues. Nationally, standards setting is centered in dialogue and consultation. We are engaged in such dialogues at this meeting. On campus, the first and most critical dialogue is the one that unfolds between and among constituencies as the dance unit or institution studies itself and considers what is, what was, what can be, what should be, and what must be. The second is the dialogue conducted between the institution and individuals who hold deep and vast expertise in dance, who have studied the institution, and who offer feedback, thoughts, and ideas with profound respect for the institution and its mission. These conversations and their inherent value are recorded and memorialized nationally in the published standards of the Association, and locally in over a thousand self-studies and Commission Action Reports.

A self-study document is far more than a three-hole-punched stack of papers that provides information and answers to questions. Instead, a comprehensively prepared self-study document is the result of the culmination of years of careful and critical considerations, and the articulation of honest and realistic conclusions reached by an institution confident in its pursuits, and focused in its desire to educate its students to its greatest capacity and their greatest potential.

A Commission Action Report is not a checklist of tasks to be accomplished. Instead, a Commission Action Report is the supportive analysis offered to an institution, the contents of which are intended to assist the institution as it considers its current and future plans. The collective effect of these Commission Action Reports represents nearly four decades of tireless advocacy for dance institutions and on behalf of dance in higher education, each seeped in the language of standards that the field itself has confirmed worthy of attention, adherence, and aspiration. It is impossible to know what the field of dance in higher education would be without the NASD contribution and the advocacy provided by its accreditation process to those in higher education who do not know dance or what it needs, but who want fine programs and are willing to invest in them.

But what we know tells us that these national and local dialogues we have been discussing, vital to the advancement of the field, continued at high levels for now over 35 years, are among the most effective quiet powers in American higher education, even though their total impact cannot be measured. You and your predecessors have generated this accreditation power. You are continuing to do it today.

This then leads me to my third realization. Dance administrators are a quiet power; you, individually and collectively, are a quiet power.

For nearly four decades, NASD has had the extraordinary good fortune to have a membership, composed of generations of individuals that believe in its purposes and support its aims and objectives; a membership that sets its sights not solely on local pursuits and successes, but on matters that will advance the discipline of dance, the field of higher education, and the education and training of dance students in broad terms. The dedication of NASD's membership is boundless. Examples are your willingness to travel to and participate in the Association's Annual Meetings; to give of your time and expertise to serve as visiting evaluators, elected officials, and volunteers; to engage in self-study; to set and be reviewed against national standards; to uphold, remain true to, protect, and defend NASD's enduring principles of service and fair process; and pursue excellence continually.

Your quiet power emanates from several conditions. First and foremost is a strongly held understanding of the nature of power – knowledge that it can be used to build, harm, or even destroy, and the wisdom to exercise your power with care, learning from the examples of meandering waters, gentle winds, and patient parents we discussed earlier. As attributed to Abraham Lincoln, “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.”¹ A second condition is your continuous dedication and work over time, a condition we spoke of earlier. A third is a deep, abiding, and pure love of dance. For many of you, you know the moment when the powers of this discipline reached inside of you, touched your heart, and spoke to your soul in such a way that these powers took hold of your very being. It is these and other conditions that assist individuals to distinguish between the two kinds of power described by Mahatma Gandhi, “One is obtained by the fear of punishment and the other by acts of love. Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the one derived from fear of punishment.”²

Armed with this knowledge then, and an unselfish love of and for the discipline and its people, we must proceed, for as suggested by Burnet C. Tuthill, a colleague active in the development of

¹ Robert G. Ingersoll, Motley and Monarch, *The North American Review*, Volume 141 (New York: 1885).

² Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948).

accreditation in the arts, “The building is far from complete but the foundations can carry whatever load is imposed upon them.”³

Last year at this time we spoke of the importance of asking “what if” questions – questions that promote thinking and dialogue that enables and demands consideration of possibilities, opportunities, realities, and risks. Questions that lead to answers that assist us to maneuver on the chessboard addressing the challenges we face day in and day out. Questions that lay the groundwork for decisions we will make that will not only allow us to protect what exists today, but to safeguard that which we hope our future will hold. Today, one year later, this need has not diminished.

As a country, we face changes in approach and changes in direction. Such changes have had, and will continue to have, an effect on policy and its implementation. We are witnessing an about face, a recasting of existing laws and regulations, all of which will have a direct impact on institutions of higher learning, and the way they conduct their operations and plan for their futures.

As a field, we face uncertainty with regard to the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, which is now four years overdue; federal guidance which interprets aspects of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which is slated for reconsideration and recrafting; the aftermath of the Department of Labor’s overtime ruling, which was struck down by a federal judge in August of 2017; and ongoing propensities of the Department of Justice, the National Labor Relations Board, and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to reach beyond the bounds of their intended authority.

As a discipline, we continue to face critical issues such as the continuing necessity to defend the importance of advanced study and work in our field; the need to maintain and find new sources of revenue and support; and the challenge to recruit, admit, and retain students - to name only a few. There may be comfort in suggesting that all is not lost, but there is no wisdom in turning a blind eye to possible implications and outcomes; avoiding consideration of the impact such governmental initiatives and those that will follow will have on higher education; failing to contemplate “what if” scenarios; assuming we have the ability to continue without effect; and thus not planning accordingly.

Despite what we have faced and faced down, and what we face today in all aspects of our context, we are aware of our history and our successes, and possess the fortitude to press on. It remains our responsibility to pick up where our predecessors left off; to continue to strengthen our foundation; to discover, to create, to innovate without burden of limits; to navigate successfully the rough seas that surely are ahead; and when our time has come to pass the torch, to welcome those who will continue our collective work, and relinquish to them the task. Quiet power requires continuous action.

I hope you might take a moment today and throughout this Annual Meeting to greet and speak with those seated to your right and to your left. These are your colleagues; individuals who not only share your hopes, dreams, and passions for our discipline, but who face many of the same issues you face today. These individuals can be an invaluable source of assistance. You may be able to succeed singularly without them, but with them, you will soar collectively to heights possibly unimaginable. As suggested in Proverbs, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”⁴

³ Burnet C. Tuthill, “NASM – The First Forty Years, A Personal History of the National Association of Schools of Music” (1963).

⁴ Proverbs 27:17, *New International Version*.

In closing, allow me to share with you a quote from Cormac McCarthy's 2006 Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Road*. The exchange is one between father and son, as the father imparts upon his son the importance of everlasting hope and human resilience.

"You have to carry the fire.
I don't know how to.
Yes, you do.
Is the fire real? The fire?
Yes it is.
Where is it? I don't know where it is.
Yes you do. It's inside you. It always was there. I can see it."⁵

It is my hope that you keep the fire burning, and to assist you to do so, that you share a message of everlasting hope with your colleagues on your campus, and particularly with your faculties. You must, for you are the heroes of today, and the hope for our tomorrow.

Thank you for your extraordinary work and for the integral part you play in our unfolding history. May you take with you from this meeting the memories of new and renewed friendships, a wealth of ideas and information, and the light from the fire of possibilities, which will assist you to continue to fine tune and put to effective use your quiet powers.

Please accept our best wishes as you begin another academic year full of promise and possibility.

We look forward to seeing and being with you next year in Cincinnati.

Thank you.

⁵ Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, (New York: Vintage International, 2006).