

Norman Spivey

Looking Forward/Looking Back



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I'm so glad we had this time together, just to have a laugh or sing a song. Seems we just get started and before you know it, comes the time we have to say "so long." (Joe Hamilton)

HOW FONDLY I REMEMBER THIS REFRAIN from the Carol Burnett show—and it seems particularly fitting as I prepare this final column as president.

It has been a busy two years, during which I've met many members across NATS, made wonderful new friendships, learned humbling lessons, and accomplished important work with the help of our board, committees, and executive office. I've written about much of the work in these columns, and hope they have provided a helpful glimpse into the Association. From programs that are available, to ideas from chapters, to new initiatives, to the organization of our NATS family tree, I've wanted to highlight the issues we are juggling as an association, and include the membership in understanding the structure and strength of NATS.

I'm grateful to the members who have welcomed me so generously. It's been a privilege to serve the Association. It has also been a pleasure to see strong support and mentoring between members at nearly every turn. In fact, when I look back, I'm always most impressed with the great network of service throughout NATS and the beautiful work I've seen going on with students. I'm hopeful that this is something we'll never lose, and something I'll continue to see flourishing far and wide.

I'm thankful to the board, and proud of the work of these dedicated members. Their experience and vision have helped to temper and guide our work, balancing the desire to be progressive with the need to stay true to our roots and mission. We have had difficult conversations, to be sure, but in the end I believe the results of our efforts will bear much fruit. One of the lessons I very much appreciated from past president Kathryn Proctor Duax, is that "there is room for everyone in NATS." We all have something to offer, and with the new membership categories for students and for collaborative pianists, the diversity of styles being nurtured and featured, and the growth of student participation at conferences and beyond, it seems that this is playing out beautifully. I look forward to Linda Snyder's leadership, and wish all the very best for the whole slate of new officers. It will be a pleasure to serve on the board with them these next two years.

I'm appreciative of the strong staff we have in our Association office. The more I've had occasion to interact with them, the more I truly value their skill, efficiency, and good humor. The team in the executive office is made up of thoughtful and caring people who are exceptionally dedicated to the mission

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of NATS. They see the commitment and passion we have about our craft, and it seems to have rubbed off in all the right ways. Allen Henderson is as kind and conscientious as we could hope for in an Executive Director. He has been my right arm so often, and NATS is stronger because of his fidelity, mindfulness, and expertise.

In particular I'm grateful for the ongoing support from my family, students, and colleagues. Their kindnesses and encouragement have helped buoy me in the day-to-day work of this office more than they know.

One of the things that many of us are looking forward to is the national conference this summer in Chicago. Those of you who have been to our conferences before know what a treat they are. For those who might be considering registering, I think you will be glad you did. What I wrote about the conference in the brochure bears repeating here.

I hope you'll join us for the 54th NATS National Conference in Chicago—we're anticipating our biggest and best event yet.

With tours of art and architecture, and pre-conference workshops on and off-site, we will get off to a rousing start before the conference even begins!

In addition to multiple sessions and an artist recital with the incomparable Renée Fleming, the conference boasts sessions with renowned physician Dr. Robert W. Bastian, and master teachers Stephen Smith and Warren Jones.

We'll have national rounds of the NATS Artist Awards, the National Music Theater Competition, and the National Student Auditions—including our first-ever College Expo. There will be an Intern Program reunion, SNATS meetings, Publisher's Showcases, and a full array of exhibits.

Breakout sessions will include something for everyone, with pedagogy, movement, repertoire, performance, voice science, independent studio, vocal health, and CCM, in addition to poster papers, and Late-Night NATS events. Our final evening will feature a gala banquet with a featured cabaret performance, presen-

tation of the NATS Lifetime Achievement Award, and dancing. All attendees also have complimentary access to sessions following the conference on the NATS Live Learning Center.

We'll enjoy all the city of Chicago has to offer from the beautiful Marriott Magnificent Mile—right in the heart of the city. A great team made up of the local committee, the Chicago Chapter of NATS, and our officers and staff, is seeing to every detail. It will be a time to see old friends, to meet new ones, to learn, to be inspired, to celebrate. A mile of magnificent events not to be missed . . .

The brochure details many of the conference offerings, but it may not fully illustrate the experiences beyond the presentations. There is so much to be gained in having new information to bring back to the studio, being inspired and rejuvenated in our work, hearing new repertoire in the competitions and recitals, getting opportunities to ask questions and to follow up informally with presenters, going through stacks of music and books in the exhibits, the networking, the hallway conversations, the deep dish pizza . . .

Many of you know that we join in singing "Auld Lang Syne" at the end of our conferences. At my first NATS conference I thought this seemed impossibly old fashioned. What I now realize is how it embodies so many of the bonds we hold most dear: music, tradition, and camaraderie. It is a song often used to symbolize endings and new beginnings. We'll remember NATS members who have passed since the last conference. We'll also take the opportunity to install our new national officers. It was the tune that rang in the beginning of my term of office, and will be the same refrain we'll use to pass the torch. It's always bittersweet. Old fashioned seems perfect.

I do hope you'll join us for the conference this summer in Chicago, and often at other NATS events. Anytime we're together it's a celebration. It's just like I always say—we are stronger together.