

Norman Spivey

# What We've Been Up To

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RECENT COLUMNS HAVE HIGHLIGHTED some of the significant updates we've had within the past year, particularly having to do with our student auditions and ethics. There also have been other changes, like modifications to the bylaws and additional initiatives, and I thought it could be useful to talk about those here.

Revising bylaws is seldom a glamorous activity, but our recent updates represent how much we have been blossoming as an association. Making sure that our governing documents keep up with our growth is helpful on many fronts. They help provide a structure and give guidance to officers and members in carrying out the work of the Association, ensure that our activities stay progressive, and, in some cases, give us permission to fulfill our mission. In many ways they are the building blocks of our future.

Updates to titles and duties associated with several executive officers show the growth in programs and reflect our hopes for the future. The Vice President for Artist Awards (NATSAA) is now the Vice President for Auditions. After adding two new programs (the National Student Auditions and the National Music Theater Competition), it became clear that the title no longer reflected the scope of the position, and that one person certainly could not be expected to fulfill all of the activities included under this umbrella. We have developed a model that makes use of a coordinator for each event, and follows through with each coordinator reporting to the vice president. Our current team has been exemplary; Carole Blankenship has been the VP responsible for NATSAA, with Dan Johnson-Wilmot coordinating the NSA, and Don Simonson overseeing the NMTC. They have worked together particularly well, and have demonstrated the success of this model. Even so, the new language in the bylaws allows for flexibility in how responsibility for the programs can be divided: *The Vice President for Auditions shall oversee the National Association of Teachers of Singing Artist Awards, National Student Auditions, and National Music Theater Competition. The Vice President for Auditions will actively schedule, promote, and conduct one of these while overseeing the work of those appointed to supervise the others.*

Our Vice President for Discretionary Funds and Field Activities has been updated to Vice President for Outreach. The title is less cumbersome to be sure, but, moreover, the former description of duties for this position was outdated and no longer applied (*The Vice President for Discretionary Funds and Field Activities shall promote and administer the discretionary funds, shall assist in promoting regional activities and conference programming, and shall*

encourage and assist in promotion of chapter activities). With the advent of our refurbished website, additional electronic communication, and other marketing strategies, this office no longer needed to assist with chapter, regional, or conference activities, and since the staff in the NATS office was able to attend to many of the duties associated with this office, the board entertained discussion on whether or not this position was one to be continued. What our conversation elucidated was that the oversight of SNATS, which also had been entrusted to this office some years before, filled a particularly important need for the Association. We recognized that there is boundless room for growth with student involvement, and that with the right combination of vision and energy, there is almost limitless potential. To this end, the new description reads: *The Vice President for Outreach shall actively encourage, promote, and oversee SNATS and student engagement in the Association, and shall promote and administer the discretionary fund.*

The change for the Vice President for Workshops is not so much an update as an addition, with the ability to facilitate advance planning. As you may know, preparations for our national events begin far ahead of time, with arrangements for national conferences and workshops happening years beforehand. The installation of national officers, however, takes place only six months prior to the annual winter workshop for which this VP is responsible. When I assumed the office of VP for Workshops I was lucky that there was already a workshop in the pipeline, and that has continued to be the practice, but of course it's best not to leave these things to chance. Our current VP, Kathleen Arcchi, made a very clear proposal about this, and it was easy to see that some provision needed to be made. Now, once the candidate for this office has been identified, he or she can be brought into the planning. *The Vice President for Workshops shall schedule, promote, and oversee Association workshops. The Vice President for Workshops will involve successors in planning as early as possible in order to meet long-range planning needs of this function.* Like the adjustment for the Vice President for Workshops, the change to the responsibilities of the President Elect, as liaison to the NATS Foundation, was also an addition and was outlined in a previous column.

In addition to the updates with executive officers, we have a new level of student membership to celebrate. The

discussions about the possibility of student membership in NATS have been going on for some time. How great that NATS is now able to provide a place for students who are training to be teachers of singing or collaborative pianists. This new level of membership is not to be confused with SNATS, so we were careful to clarify the language about this. SNATS hasn't changed, and those chapters can still be formed and operate separately from student membership. Likewise, student membership does not constitute affiliation with a SNATS chapter. Students who find themselves in an area not served by SNATS activities now have additional options, and it is our hope that all students will feel an increased sense of welcome and affiliation. *Student Members are actively training to be teachers of singing or collaborative pianists, or are beginning teachers or collaborative pianists, enrolled full-time in an undergraduate or masters degree program. Student members may only vote or hold office in SNATS Chapters. Student membership is separate from membership in a SNATS Chapter. A Member who holds status as an Associate or Full Member may not convert to Student Member status.*

Aside from our bylaws, we've also made updates to several programs, including the NATS Artist Awards and the National Music Theater Competition. NATSAA began at a time when our Association conferences were on a different rotation, and when aspiring singers were not necessarily engaged in summer training or performing programs. Likewise with the NMTC, the vast majority of singers we might want to participate in this program have summer performance conflicts. To address this quandary, we discussed identifying an alternate time to hold the national semifinals and finals of these competitions to ensure that they thrive, and to make them available to the largest pool of singers. After talking over the merits of a new model versus preserving traditions, the vote favored moving forward with the proposal, essaying the new model for the next competition cycle in 2018. A committee fleshed out details associated with the move, and we have agreed to hold the competitions in New York City in conjunction with a winter workshop. Our events will build on the momentum of other major voice competitions and professional auditions that take place in the winter and early spring. There is every reason to think that this will increase participation and visibility, and by involv-

ing additional industry professions we may be able to strengthen the competitions and set them up for an enhanced profile. Of course, we also wanted to be sure to preserve certain important traditions, so the winning artists from NATSAA and the NMTC will still come to our national conference and be prominently featured. Details are yet to be finalized, but plan on coming to participate in these events at our workshop in January 2018. Stay tuned to know if the national rounds of these competitions might be live-streamed or open to an audience beyond workshop registrants. And, of course, remember that both competitions and other programs will continue to flourish with your generous donations to NATS and the NATS Foundation.

Speaking of donations, we have been very fortunate to receive a number of significant gifts over the past year, and our programs will benefit enormously through this generosity.

- Joan Frey Boytim, a long time member and independent teacher advocate, has funded the Joan Frey Boytim Awards for Independent Teachers, which are designed to help an independent teacher from each region attend his or her first national conference. Prior to this gift, NATS had an award for independent teachers that waived registration fees, but was unable to offer additional financial assistance. These fellowships, renamed in recognition of Joan's generous gift, support recipients much more fully than before, and will make a significant impact.
- Kenneth and Joanne Bozeman have set up the Bill Hayes Fund, to be used for awards in the National Music Theater Competition. Bill is their uncle, and because of his significant career in music theater and television, this investment is a wonderful way to honor his professional accomplishments. You may have noticed this award listed on the "add a contribution to your membership" page when renewing your NATS dues.
- The Hall Johnson Estate has funded an award for the Hall Johnson Spiritual Category, which will be presented at each of the next ten national conferences. The prize will be given to the singer with the best per-

formance of a Hall Johnson spiritual, and has inspired regions and many chapters to include this category in their student auditions.

- Alice Mae Riley, who gave a seed gift to help establish the National Music Theater Competition several years ago, remembered NATS in her estate planning. Because her very generous gift came without being designated for a particular use, the budget committee and board looked at a number of options for the funds. We ultimately agreed that by using the gift to build our endowment, Ms. Riley's legacy would support NATS and our programs on a long-term basis.

Perhaps you have plans to include NATS in your estate planning, or wish to provide significant support for a specific NATS program. If so, I encourage you to contact the executive director of NATS or the president of the NATS Foundation to begin that conversation.

I have long been interested in the ongoing health of our organization, and the projects I have been working on over the past several years tie in directly with that. From a survey with chapter presidents, to efforts to solidify the working relationship between NATS and the NATS Foundation, to board conversations about an enhanced "culture of communication," it seemed I could best help the Association by working to be sure our house was well in order. One of the things I'm also working on this year, with the help of the national office and input from a number of officers, is updating the manuals for our officers and board. Like the updates to the bylaws, these more informal governing documents also need to keep up with our growth and practice. I anticipate that these manuals will not only help current and future officers have an easier time with the learning curve of their duties, but will also be of particular assistance to nominating committees. By outlining the responsibilities of each office more clearly, committees and potential candidates will know which skill sets are the best match for a particular office. Like the bylaws revisions, this behind-the-scenes work may not be the flashiest, but it's part of what we've been up to and will contribute, we hope, to the flourishing of NATS.