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**Mission:** To advance excellence in singing through teaching, performance, scholarship, and research.

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#### ASSOCIATION NOTES —

## Are we there yet?

By Allen Henderson, NATS Executive Director

s a parent of four children, the question in the title of this column was asked innumerable times during our family travels, which were almost always by car. Our youngest, Clark, was of age (often prompted by older sisters) to ask this question in the heyday of the show "Barney and Friends" so we began answering with "It is (three) Barney's until we get there." Now that our children are all adults

we get this question less, but it still often prompts a similar response, especially if Clark asks it.

At NATS, we are constantly asking ourselves this question in a variety of contexts. Our work tends to move in repetitive cycles around events, the largest of which is the two-year cycle between our grandest event, the NATS national conference. Having just completed the 2022 conference and wrapping up paying the final bills, we start a new cycle moving toward the next conference in Knoxville in 2024. Certainly, the recent two-year cycle



Allen Henderson NATS Executive Director

has been like none other in the history of NATS, and we were delighted to once again return to a live and in-person event. It was an event to remember, and we are grateful to all who made the event a success in so many ways. Right now, we are asking ourselves "Are we there yet?" Have we struck the right balance? What does our attendee feedback say? (You did fill out your conference survey didn't you?) What elements do we want to replicate, and what needs replacing? I always tell those who ask me about program balance that we can't feature every aspect of our industry at every conference, but if you come to three conferences in a row you should hopefully have a peek into just about all facets. The other leading programs that are in two-year cycles are: the Emerging Leaders Program, the Joan Frey Boytim Independent Teacher Fellowships, and the NATS Artist Awards and National Musical Theatre Competition. We ask the same questions of ourselves as each committee evaluates and refines these programs in our cycle of continuous improvement.

Other programs and services are on yearly cycles that primarily begin in late summer. As you receive this, the first chapters are preparing to hold student audition events as we kick off the National Student Auditions year. We just had our annual zoom meeting with all our auditions chairs and everyone is excited to return to primarily live and in-person auditions again. It clearly will take some adjustments to reserve facilities, make travel arrangements again, organize our students to arrive at the audition site, attend our adjudication meeting, and find the location for our adjudication assignments. I hope you will encourage and excite your colleagues and students to get back into the habit of preparing and receiving independent feedback on their performances. It is also time to apply for the NATS Intern Program if you are eligible. Have you or your students taken advantage of the Summer Program Auditions (SPA) program where online submissions can be made to a variety of summer programs for one small fee? Many of our mentoring initiatives have cycles that begin in the fall. Check them out on our website. Know composers who love art song? Share with them information about the Art Song Composition

# <u>Award</u> and the <u>NATS Mentoring Program</u> <u>for Composers</u>.

Our highest-level opportunity to ask ourselves the title question is through our NATS Strategic Plan. During the presidency of Linda Snyder, a strategic planning process was initiated and since its completion and introduction we have been constantly asking ourselves every quarter, "Are we there yet?" in relation to the 100+ action items. Of those, 77 are deemed short to medium term, and we have already completed 46 (59.7%) of them! This fall, various teams are at work meeting more of them, and we will be providing a more detailed update soon. I encourage you to peruse the entire plan, and see where our work intersects with your particular interests. We are currently at the half-way point of our current plan, which concludes at the end of 2024. Our world has certainly changed since we completed the current plan and introduced it in early 2020. It is a testament to our leaders who have remained focused on these tasks during a difficult time for our profession. My sincere thanks to all.

So "Are we there yet?" How many Barneys until we get there? I am not sure. But if we are really doing our job and living out the NATS vision statement of "Transforming Lives Through the Power of Singing," we may never fully get there because we will always be striving to improve our individual and collective impact in our world locally and globally — setting the bar higher and higher in years to come. That's a LOT of Barneys.

As always, I welcome your comments and conversation on this or any other topic at <a href="mailto:allen@nats.org">allen@nats.org</a>.

## **Remembering Deborah Guess**

Longtime member of the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) executive staff, Deborah Guess, passed away on July 13, 2022, in Jacksonville, Florida.

She first joined NATS as office manager in 1997 and was later appointed director of operations in 2006.

Guess was responsible for a variety of tasks, including the planning of the biennial NATS conferences. She also served as managing editor of *Inter Nos* for many of these years.



Family, friends, as well as past and present NATS executive office staffers attended her memorial service on July 25 in Jacksonville Beach, Florida. She will be missed. Read full obituary.

If you would like to offer a tribute or memory of Deborah Guess to share with her family, please send your message to <a href="mailto:info@nats.org">info@nats.org</a>. In lieu of flowers, the family requested that contributions be made to NATS in memory of Deborah Guess. To contribute, please contact the NATS office or use our <a href="mailto:online.orm">online.orm</a>.



NATS members also may know her daughter Mandy Ruddock, who joined NATS as a parttime clerical assistant in 2002, working wherever extra help was needed during the busy season. Most recently, Ruddock worked alongside the executive staff at the NATS 57th national conference in Chicago. Ruddock was stationed at the registration desk and also facilitated countless hotel and catering details.

### **IN MEMORIAM**

March - August 2022

Mrs. Irvin (Pauline) Bushman James Michael Derrick Margaret George-Hahle Sara McFerrin Tannis Fast Vetter Wendy Williams