

## Belonging

By Cynthia Vaughn, Associate Editor for Independent Voices

A few years ago I made an impulse purchase at an office supply sale and ended up buying a small light-up sign with a variety of plastic letters. I wanted to put it in the front window of my studio, but I wasn't sure what to say. The message came to me in a flash and I quickly slid the letters into place: #YOU BELONG HERE. It was a small show of support and welcome for every student as they arrived for their lessons, and it was an encouragement to me every day to see that little sign, especially when I didn't feel like teaching that day. "You belong here." "You make a difference." "This is where you are supposed to be."



I've been thinking a lot about belonging. In the beginning of the DE&I movement, "belonging" was the missing piece. DEIB. Belonging may actually be the scaffolding that holds up Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Anti-Racism. [Psychologists](#) rank our need for belonging as high as our need for love. [Cornell University](#) researchers concluded that an increased sense of belonging leads to collaboration, problem solving, and better decision making: "It's only when people feel a sense of belonging that they can share ideas, confidently speak up, and fully contribute. A sense of belonging is what unlocks the power and value of diversity."

Since the George Floyd murder and protests in 2020, NATS has stepped up its awareness and action by looking inward (with outside help) to examine our history and begin to find ways that we can be a more inclusive, diverse, equitable, and anti-racist (IDEA) organization. The result was many meetings and leadership seminars with consultants, trained facilitators, and NATS member focus groups. One important outcome from that work

is the new IDEA Training Modules for all NATS members: best practices guides for our studios, our communities, and our organization.

In February of this year, NATS arranged for the national officers and regional governors to attend the Sphinx Conference in Detroit, Michigan. For 25 years Sphinx has championed and advocated for diversity and equity in classical music. The three-day conference had an amazing lineup of speakers, including Rhiannon Giddens, who had been a keynote presenter at our 2020 virtual NATS Conference. A few weeks before we traveled to the conference, it was switched to a virtual-only conference due to the spike in the Omicron variant of COVID. I regret that we couldn't have been in the physical rooms together. Watching anonymously from a screen wasn't as impactful as being there in person, however, it gave me space to sit with my discomfort and white privilege. Sit and listen. Topics included "Making Room; Doing Right," "Learning to Disrupt the White Racial Frame and Industry Rooted in It," "Shame or Reframe: Balancing Activism vs Collaborative Approaches to DEI." Some takeaways included:

- "There are some who are not prepared or willing to go with us on the future journey, and we need to be willing to move forward without them."
- "If people aren't a little uncomfortable, we may not be having the right conversations."
- "The idea that 'Change is slow' comes from privilege! Change needs to happen more quickly!"
- "Celebrate the small changes along the way and continue building culture."
- "Resources follow relevance."
- "NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US."



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I have pondered "Who are we inviting to the table?" (Or allowing to make their own table?) In addition to anti-racism advocacy, are there other ways that NATS can create a sense of belonging for our students, members, and prospective members? Are we inclusive to all body types, sizes, and abilities? Are we a safe place for LGBTQ+ and non-binary students and teachers? Are we welcoming to neurodivergent students and teachers, and students on the autism spectrum? Do we con-

sider ideas from members of all ages and experience? Are we helping teachers to reach underserved populations, perhaps with group classes or grants?

We have a sense of belonging when we are:

1. Seen for our unique contributions
2. Connected to our coworkers
3. Supported in our daily work and career development
4. Proud of our organization's values and purpose.

Source: [Coqual: The Power of Belonging](#)

Of note, there are some areas that NATS has made great strides in recent years: inclusivity of many styles of music, welcoming independent teachers, and offering mentoring opportunities. The conference presentations this summer are more diverse and inclusive than any other past conference. (And I've been to them all since 1984!) While it may have been more equitable and accessible to hold the 2020 NATS Conference online, there is simply no substitute for the energy, excitement, and exchange of ideas that happens when we are in the room together — in person.

I make it a point at each conference to reach out and meet new people, as well as catch up with lifelong friends. If you see someone who looks new (or overwhelmed at being in a room with a thousand voice teachers!) smile and say hello. If you are the new person, give us a chance to get to know you. It is my

sincere hope that you will feel seen and included — that you feel a sense of belonging to NATS.

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This issue's Independent Voices articles feature Heidi Moss Erickson's "Making Play a Part of Practice" and Stacey Mastrian's overview and application of "Complementary Modalities in the Voice Studio." We share the logos and stories behind several creative independent studio names, including Leischen Moore's Rare Bird Voice Studio and Kate Rosen's Fat Joy Voice. Finally, voice and whole body wellness expert Sarah Whitten fights fat discrimination and advocates for inclusion and belonging in the voice studio and on stage: "Every Body is Welcome Here."

Cynthia Vaughn

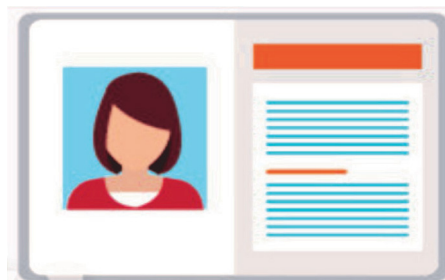
*Cynthia Vaughn, associate editor for Independent Voices, is the newly appointed NATS Intermountain Region Governor. She was a master teacher for the 2020 NATS Intern Program (postponed to 2021 due to COVID.) She teaches voice at Magnolia Music Studio in Richland Washington and was formerly on the voice faculty of Colorado State University. Vaughn and the late Meribeth Dayme, PhD co-authored three editions of *The Singing Book*, a leading college voice class textbook/anthology. Vaughn and Matthew Hoch compiled and co-edited *The Essentials of CoreSinging: A Joyful Approach to Singing and Voice Pedagogy* by Meribeth Dayme, which will be released June 2022.*



## Call for Submissions

Articles on relevant topics are being accepted for inclusion in the independent teacher section of future issues of *Inter Nos*. Approximately 1,000 to 4,000 words. Submissions should be sent by email to [CynthiaVaughn@mac.com](mailto:CynthiaVaughn@mac.com).

## Have you moved, changed your contact information, or your email?



**Members:** The fall membership renewal period is a good time to update your information on NATS.org. Keeping your contact information up-to-date ensures that you won't miss any of our member benefits or upcoming events.

To make updates, log on to your Member Home Page (your email address for NATS correspondence is your Login). Then, click the "My Profile" link on the right.

You also can call the NATS National Office at 904-992-9101 for assistance.