

INDEPENDENT VOICES

We are part of a family. In fact you and your studio are a branch on the family tree that grew from rootstock 70 years ago. Even before that, our legacy started as a subgroup of MTNA (Music Teachers National Association) in 1906. That small group later changed its name to NYSTA (New York Singing Teachers Association). The Los Angeles Guild of Teachers of Singing began in 1922, and the Chicago Council of Teachers in 1930. Finally, in 1944, a small group of voice teachers met at the MTNA conference in Cincinnati and formally organized as the National Association of Teachers of Singing.

When our family started, 100 teachers voted it in to existence. Now, we are 70 times that in number! But in some places and at some times, it may not feel like a very big family, or a very peaceful family. In fact, one of the incentives for founding NATS was to set an ethical standard for a respectable profession, leading to the assumption there were some unethical behaviors going on. But NATS is actually a huge family of generous, caring individuals, extending not just to all corners of North America, but to the whole world. Hundreds of teachers over the decades have contributed to who we are and how we do what we do. And although every family has to work through issues, working through those issues is exactly what makes NATS strong. As author Vivian Greene put it, "Life is not waiting for the storm to pass -- but go out and play in the rain!"

There are some individuals within NATS who have been giants. And the rest of us see further by standing on the shoulders of these giants. For independent teachers, particular recognition should go to Jeannette LoVetri, Robert Edwin, and Jo Estill (deceased). These three giants among independent teachers fought for our profession and fought to gain respect for teaching in all styles. (They also fought a bit among themselves.) Jeannette and Robert still have our backs, and Jo Estill's Voice Training is a strong presence in voice the world over.

A particular gift to independent voice teachers are the collection and publication of songs. Some of the many people who stand out in this capacity within NATS are John Glenn Paton, Joan Boytim, and Louise Lerch. Others have gone further by creating books that address the technique of singing and provide collections of songs, such as Van Christy, Clifton Ware, Meribeth Dayme, and Cynthia Vaughn. And many, many NATS members have written books to help us with everything from training, to auditions, to voice sciences.

Leaders in NATS have been the backbone of enhancing value for independent teachers. Past-Presidents Roy Delp and Scott McCoy, among others, devised and implemented every program targeting independent teachers. And Allen Henderson, our Executive Director, is moving our organization forward more quickly than most of us could have dreamed!

But here's the problem – nearly all of the NATS board leadership has identified as being college or university affiliated. An exceedingly small percentage of members of the national board over the years have been independent teachers. It is time for independent teachers to volunteer for these higher level positions. We independent teachers have been takers and it is well past time to become part of the givers – the volunteering leaders who decide what directions NATS should go and give back some of what we have received.



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What would it be like if the NATS National Board was made up almost entirely of ind teachers and they were tasked to decide what teachers in academia need? Pretty messed up. So let's find some balance. Independent teachers, if your local chapter is tipped heavily toward academic teachers, work your way in there and help find a balance.

Also, we could use your help with Inter Nos, Journal of Singing, workshops, SNATS, social media, and new projects. But of even greater consequence, step up for district, regional, and national leadership. We are waiting for you! — N.B.