



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF SINGING

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"Between Us"

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ASSOCIATION NOTES

Ethics, Diversity, #MeToo, #MentorHer, and the Conscience of Our Profession

I wanna lie

I wanna think things are better than they are

I wanna think we've gotten further, and
that far

Is just an inch away

I wanna lie

—from *A Horse With Wings* by Ricky Ian Gordon

I recently had the pleasure of hosting Ricky for a master class at Georgia Southern University and as a judge for the week long American Traditions Competition (americantraditionscompetition.com) in Savannah for which I serve as a board member. Ricky loves NATS and NATS loves Ricky. Every time I am with him, I come away moved and enriched by our conversation, his work with young singers, his love of the spoken and written word and the inspiration it provides him in his work as a composer. In the current climate in our world I was particularly moved recently by the above verse from one of his songs. While we all might wish for the sentiment expressed in his lyric, let's be honest. We have work to do in our profession and it is our responsibility to bring about the necessary change to support all our colleagues, embrace and promote diversity, promote and expect the highest levels of ethical behavior, and model that behavior for the coming generations.

Diversity

It is our responsibility to promote and encourage diversity in all forms among our membership and programming. Approximately 18 months ago I had the pleasure of discussing

initiatives to promote diversity in our programming for the national conference with a few of our members who agreed to promote and encourage proposal submissions from minority members of our association. As you view our conference program you will notice the results of a little encouragement behind the scenes and a lot of excellence among our member colleagues who submitted proposals for a rich variety, and the most diverse program ever. With only 8.2% of our membership self-identifying as non-Caucasian, we know we must continue to promote NATS membership among diverse populations. Our students of diverse backgrounds need diverse role models in the profession so we must encourage more mentorship within our membership and also actively seek to identify today's students who show an affinity for teaching and encourage them to seek out the education and preparation to succeed as a teaching artist.



Allen Henderson
NATS Executive Director

Ethics

NATS has a [Code of Ethics](#) which each member confirms their commitment to yearly when they renew their membership. As we approach our 75th anniversary as an association we must renew our commitment to ethics and raise the consciousness of one another to the importance and absolute necessity of ethical behavior between each of us and our students, colleagues, and association. President Linda Snyder recently asked our Ethics Committee to review our current

Code of Ethics and suggest revisions. The committee has deliberated and discussed ways to strengthen, clarify, and modernize our Code of Ethics to address the modern teaching environment. Additionally, they have sought the advice of our legal counsel James Nolan in order to make sure the revised Code is enforceable and legally sound. Once approved by the Board of Directors, the new Code of Ethics will allow us to embark on a renewed effort to educate our membership and provide clearer direction regarding ethics matters.

#MeToo

When the #MeToo movement began to more publicly empower victims of sexual harassment to share their stories I immediately began to think of the impact this movement could have on the performing arts. Once we began hearing about investigations at the Metropolitan Opera, major symphony orchestras, opera companies and theaters, and even a few leading conservatories and summer programs, it quickly became publicly clear that new systems and stronger systems must be created to ensure change happens. A question asked by many who lead organizations in the arts today is: How do we foster professional and artistic spaces in which people feel supported, respected, empowered, and most of all, safe? The solutions are not simple and due to the various teaching constructs in which voice professionals work there is not a one size fits all approach to dismantling past systems that have allowed harassment and discrimination to exist. For those who teach at institutions, many times those systems have failed victims. Our best solution as colleagues is to be committed to the mantra "if you see or hear something, say something." We must speak up and speak out for (or unfortunately in some cases against) one another. For those who teach in an independent setting, there are other considerations which must be made in order to ensure a safe environment in which to teach. For those who operate multi-teacher studios, additional questions must be considered in order to protect all parties in the unique setting in which voice instruction is offered. In my search for some resources that may assist I discovered an excellent resource list at the [Theatre Communications Group](#) website which may be of interest as it brings together a variety of resources for those interested in advocacy efforts as well as those seeking support. As we discuss these issues among our Board of Directors we are committed to open dialogue and providing the best resources possible to our membership and our profession.

#MentorHer

Mentorship is critical for ALL in our profession and NATS provides several formal mentoring initiatives including the acclaimed NATS Intern Program. We are committed to

providing even more opportunities for mentoring and you will hear more about this in various sessions at our national conference including a presentation by our colleagues from the American Academy of Teachers of Singing. Along with vocal, pedagogical and academic purposes for mentoring, is a need for mentoring through current social issues. One response to the #MeToo movement launched by Sheryl Sandberg and LeanIn.org is #MentorHer, an effort to encourage men to mentor women. A recent survey indicated a possible backlash that could be harmful to women. Almost half of male managers who responded to the survey indicated that they now are uncomfortable participating in common work activities with women including working alone and mentoring. In order to counteract this trend resources are being created to help make workplaces stronger and safer. More information on this is available at leanin.org/mentorher.

#NATSVegas

Every two years we have the opportunity to gather nationally. I am always excited when I hear the depth of conversation our colleagues engage in when we are in this setting. Some conversation is practical, some philosophical, and some leads to collaboration and groundbreaking research. I also always see a lot of informal mentoring happening in the nooks and crannies of our conference setting. There is a lot happening in Las Vegas this summer that you will not want to miss and probably a few unannounced surprises along the way. I hope you will join us.

Ricky's lyric takes a hopeful turn as he expresses hope for the future and commits to making a difference:

A horse with wings
I wanna think of things like that and other things
I want two brothers, one who
laughs and one who sings
I hope the future brings
A horse with wings

I wanna know
The things they told me way back when were really so
I wanna make a little mark before I go;
Not barely just get by
I wanna fly

Let's commit to making our NATS world (and the entire world) a better place for all. As always I welcome your feedback and comments at allen@nats.org.