One NATS, Many Entry Points

AN INTEGRATED ECOSYSTEM

Alexis Davis-Hazell



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In this column, NATS President Alexis Davis-Hazell examines how NATS operates as an integrated membership ecosystem in which chapter, region, and national activities collectively strengthen professional value. The fifty-ninth national conference program (San Antonio, July 4–7, 2026) demonstrates how programmatic innovation, competitions, research, and governance build on preparatory work at local and regional levels. Auditions, conferences, and workshops serve as foundational entry points that build community, skills, and leadership capacity. Supported by established governance cycles, the recent executive director succession, and coordinated communication through publications, our multitiered structure reinforces participation and advances the association's mission.

NATS continues to serve as the world's largest professional association for singing voice professionals, advancing excellence in singing through teaching, performance, scholarship, and research. Our public-facing platforms, including conferences, competitions and auditions, publications, and professional development, constitute the primary channels that facilitate our network, and provide benefit to us as a member community.

I submit that these channels need not be isolated. Successful national-level assembly relies on region and chapter activity to cultivate repertoire expertise, adjudication and presentation skills, leadership capacity, and robust professional networks; in turn, national-level competitions, scholarly programs, and governance checkpoints can crystallize local and regional procedures and project them across the association.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE: THE FLAGSHIP HUB OF MEMBER VALUE

The next biennial conference in San Antonio, July 4–7, 2026, will have the recognizable program structure of auditions, awards, workshops, research, and governance that has long characterized NATS's national gatherings.[1] However, the hard work of the conference planning committee, adjudicators, and NATS staff has resulted in innovative programing through the curated call for presentations and poster papers around the theme "Our Mosaic of Music." More than 150 presenters were accepted, including the largest ever number of first-time presenters at our national conference.[2] We will emphasize shared and diverse musical traditions in this semiquincentennial year with a career-tracked session schedule as well as significantly increased performance opportunities. A notable addition to the program portfolio is the Barbara Hill

Journal of Singing, May/June 2026
Volume 82, No. 5, pp. 521–524
https://doi.org/10.53830/sing.00216
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National Association of Teachers of Singing

Moore Emerging Teaching Artist Award (launched in 2025), with live finals embedded in the 2026 conference to maximize its educational reach and visibility.[3] NATS's competition portfolio and the National Student Auditions (NSA) are structurally aligned to coincide with the national conference, which can strengthen attendance and engagement among students, teachers, and families who have progressed through the preliminary and quarterfinal rounds of this program.[4]

CHAPTERS: THE FOUNDATION OF ENGAGEMENT

Chapters are the association's earliest and most consistent entry point for many members and students. At this level, teachers and singers encounter auditions, workshops, and networking opportunities that build confidence, establish professional norms, and foster durable local relationships. It is important for us to maintain welcoming and well-run environments for our colleagues at this level, providing the kind of professional support they need in their geographic areas. Our public regional and chapter events calendar on the NATS website shows the frequency of these touchpoints on the surface.[5] But there are often many more events happening than are submitted to the calendar. And member participation does not need to stop there. Chapters function not only as proving grounds for student auditioners but also as leadership incubators, where members chair auditions, organize workshops, and learn administrative practices that later scale to regional and national roles.

REGIONS: THE SCAFFOLDING BETWEEN LOCAL AND NATIONAL

Whether virtual or in-person, regional events translate chapter synergy into larger-scale auditions, conferences, and professional development that prepare participants for national participation. Our regional governors do excellent work communicating with members, and with one another, contemplating how regional programming can blend hybrid and in-person modalities, extend category coverage, and clarify qualifications for NSA advancement.[6] Regions also support access through targeted travel awards and mentoring, reducing barriers for independent teachers and those outside major hubs. This work exemplifies distributed vitality and a comprehensive support base that develops student pipelines and teacher community prior to the national conference.

The recent establishment of a distinct Canadian region strengthens NATS' North American footprint by providing localized leadership, communication, and professional development calibrated to Canada's voice-teaching landscape.[7] Its calendar now features dedicated activities, most notably the Canadian Region Virtual Auditions, which ensure equitable access across provinces and a clear path to the NSA online preliminaries and the live semifinal and final rounds held at the biennial conference.[8] By aligning audition mechanics and timelines with national regulations, all fifteen of NATS's regions broaden participation while reinforcing the association's integrated, chapter-to-region-to-national ecosystem. This scaffolded progression is the core mechanism by which regional activity boosts national attendance and engagement rather than diluting it.

GOVERNANCE AND OPERATIONS: INFRASTRUCTURE THAT ENABLES THE SYSTEM

NATS pairs its programmatic ecosystem with predictable governance cadence and succession plans at the national level, which serves as a template to emulate wherever possible. The 2026–2028 officer slate will be installed at this summer's national conference, synchronizing leadership handoffs with the biennial business meeting and reinforcing public accountability.[9] The careful work of the nominating committee and 2025 nomination cycle documents a transparent pipeline, including a multicandidate slate that signals leadership depth and engagement. Operationally, the NATS board of directors approved the sale of the Jacksonville condominium suite and transition to a fully remote executive office in early spring 2025. With a new mailing address and the main phone line retained, NATS is able to benefit from working flexibility, reduced overhead, and access to broader talent pools as benefits of the remote modality. This pivot allowed for a remotely based executive director with modest travel expectations, compatible with a virtual operating environment. Executive leadership renewal is now aligned with a modern operating model. Following Allen Henderson's retirement, NATS appointed Melissa Greenblatt, former interim and managing director of

the National Dance Educators Organization (NDEO), as executive director in January 2026.[10] This governance and operating posture provides the infrastructure that sustains the multilevel ecosystem. Predictable officer transitions coincide with national convenings, and cloud-based staffing enables the continuity and capacity of NATS services to execute large-scale events like the upcoming San Antonio national conference.[11]

PUBLICATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS: THE CONNECTIVE TISSUE

Several of NATS's periodicals help the ecosystem remain legible to members. *Inter Nos* archives provide updates on operations, leadership transitions, program innovations, and editorial capacity; the "Issues" page gives members access to current and prior editions, including the Fall 2025 issue.[12] The "What's New" newsfeed documents editorial appointments and related developments that support throughput and quality in the scholarly pipeline.[13] In early 2025, following the announcement of Lynn Helding's departure, I appointed and charged the *Journal of Singing* editor in chief search committee, leading the selection process on behalf of the board of directors. The committee's recommendation to the NATS board of directors culminated in the appointment of Matthew Hoch as editor in chief in late April, with duties commencing May 1 and full responsibility beginning with production of the September/October 2025 issue (vol. 82, no. 1).[14] This orderly process ensured continuity for contributors, reviewers, readers, and sponsors, while advancing the journal's strategic direction. As the *Journal of Singing* serves as NATS's core scholarly channel, Hoch's staffing announcements over 2025 showed editorial team enhancements that maintain rigorous discourse while the association refines operations and program portfolios.[15] Together, *Inter Nos*, *Journal of Singing*, and the newsfeed are vehicles that reinforce transparency and coordination across the association's program, governance, and operations cycles.

CONCLUSION: A UNIFIED, MULTILEVEL MEMBERSHIP SYSTEM

NATS's chapter, region, and national activities must form a single, integrated system designed to reinforce member learning, connection, and professional identity. Chapters initiate engagement and cultivate belonging; regional participation prepares members and students for national platforms; and the national conference codifies this cumulative work into visible achievement, scholarly exchange, and governance continuity. With officer installation scheduled for July 2026 and the NATS staff working within a remotely enabled operating model, the association enters its next biennium with a coherent structure that can translate local vitality into national impact if we agree to work together.

As I reflect on my tenure, I am profoundly grateful for the privilege of serving as president of the National Association of Teachers of Singing. This role has allowed me to witness the remarkable talent and dedication of our members, and to build upon the strong foundations laid by my predecessors. I am equally confident in and deeply encouraged by rising leadership. Randall Umstead will assume the office of president, and Nicholas Perna will step into the role of president-elect, continuing the intentional cadence of succession that defines NATS governance. We can be assured that NATS will continue to flourish in the years to come, benefiting from their vision, integrity, and commitment to our mission.

NOTES

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Alexis Davis-Hazell is a singing actor of opera, concert, and musical theater repertoire. Her performance highlights include operatic and symphonic works with regional organizations in the U.S. and Mexico, over 130 performances of *Porgy and Bess* at international venues, and contributing to the Grammy Award-winning album *Grechaninov: Passion Week* with the Phoenix Bach Choir and Kansas City Chorale. Davis-Hazell has over twenty years of teaching experience in adjunct-college, tenure-track-university, and private studio-owner roles, and a variety of higher education administration experience. An interdisciplinary collaborator and session presenter at conferences and arts research alliances, her research interests include African American folk and art music, Russian art song literature, and lyric diction pedagogy. She served in chapter leadership roles immediately upon joining NATS in 2010. She was an Emerging Leader Award recipient in 2014 and has accepted appointments in the Cal-Western and Southeastern regions as well as national committee appointments. Prior to a focus on NATS's strategic goals as president-elect (2022–2024), Davis-Hazell was instrumental in the development of a comprehensive membership retention and recruitment guide for district leaders. Davis-Hazell is associate professor of voice and assistant director of undergraduate studies at the University of Alabama School of Music. https://orcid.org/0009-0001-9558-1092

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