

Gratitude, Acknowledgement of Indigenous Lands, and the Elections

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The first virtual CMS national conference, which convened over two weekends in October 2020, was deemed a success! I wish to share with you my President's Report from the Annual Meeting of the Membership, followed by additional remarks.

"It is an honor to serve as President of the College Music Society. Our membership contributes much to music in higher education. Part of what makes our Society unique and indeed what attracted me as a member so many years ago, is our profile as an umbrella organization for all of the music disciplines. I have remained in the Society because of the connections I have forged with colleagues. To those who have joined CMS most recently, my hope is that you will find a professional home with us.

I would like to begin with a number of acknowledgements. First and foremost, I wish to acknowledge the national staff of CMS, led by our Executive Director, Dr. William Pelto. It is a privilege to work with Bill Pelto on a weekly basis. Members of the CMS staff include Peter Park, Director of Professional Activities; Beth Mast, Director of Information Delivery; Julie Johnson, Information Services Specialist; Shannon Devlin, Membership, David Schafer, Director of Information Technology, and Candi Davis, Bookkeeper. Staff of the national office carry out work on behalf of the membership throughout the year, but I wanted to acknowledge especially their continued excellence and commitment to carrying out CMS's mission, through the Society's budget reductions of this year. The national staff demonstrated nimbleness both in working remotely and in identifying a way forward to our virtual format this year and we are grateful for their leadership. We acknowledge, also, CMS interns, Alex Alberti and Wendi Griffiths, both of whom are working with the national office this year. The Society would not be able to function without the expertise of all these individuals.

I acknowledge our donors, for contributions large and small. Every gift makes a difference and helps to sustain our mission. Our "Platinum" level contributors or corporate sponsors whose contributions have been substantial, include Aurelia 6, Dancing Dots, Artusi: Interactive Music Theory, Noteflight, Pi Kappa Lambda, the Yamaha Corporation, represented by Dan Rodowicz, and the NAMM Foundation represented by Executive Director, Mary Luehrsen. All of these entities and their representatives have our deep gratitude for their support. Many of you are aware that the NAMM (National Association of Music Merchants) Foundation provided the lead gift for the aerosol study conducted by the University of Colorado-Boulder research team. We shared the reports with our membership, many of whom incorporated them into their decision-making about the Fall return to campus. Again we want to thank Mary Luehrsen for her work to sustain our partnership with NAMM and GenNext throughout the year. I would like to thank also, Dr. James C. Scott, president of the CMS Fund, who made it possible for CMS to contribute to the aerosol study.

The 2020 Program Committee was amazing, going above and beyond in their planning this year and I would like to acknowledge their enormous work. The decision was made rather early, to go virtual, and for their willingness to venture forth into realms unknown, we are indebted. The committee was deftly led by Pamela Pike, chair, and committee members included: Tracy Cowden, Kimberly Goddard Loeffert, Alejandro Cremaschi, William Price, as well as members of the Composition, Performance, and Scholarship, Research, and Pedagogy sub-committees.

My report for this year focuses on three areas: a) The first is CMS's efforts to meet the needs of its diverse membership. I do not assume credit for these accomplishments, but it is my honor to report the news. Activities in this category include supporting ongoing discussions around regional chapter restructuring. These discussions have been facilitated by Brian Chin, Vice President. In other news, the national staff has led the redesign of the Music Vacancy List, an innovation I am sure you will appreciate as it is coming soon. In an effort to prompt additional interest in the national conference, we sent a letter advising deans, department chairs, and directors of the importance of supporting professional development especially in the year of the pandemic.

The second area of activity is our collaborative engagement of the Society's common topic. Equity and opportunity in music is a long-term proposition and going forward, CMS is poised to infuse everything we do and all of our operations with these values. With the support of the Board of Directors, we passed a resolution on the diversification of CMS committees so that it becomes commonplace no longer, for committees to be all-white; we introduced for the Board's consideration, a resolution proposing a Board of Directors position for jazz/improvised music, a position which will also acknowledge the African American foundations of jazz and popular music in the U.S.

In March, the Society began offering webinars on teaching resources during the pandemic. The idea was a suggestion of Michael Stepniak, Dean of Shenandoah Conservatory. The initial impetus was to address the new teaching context wrought by covid 19, including the establishment of a repository of teaching resources for faculty, spanning all fields. We quickly, however, included reference to equity and opportunity for all in each webinar program. If you did not have the opportunity to attend those in real time, I encourage you to visit the website to catch up. In that regard, I would like to acknowledge the webinar moderators and co-organizers who have brought us this programming since March: Mark Rabideau, Bill Pelto, Tayloe Harding, Teri Dobbs, and Kim Wangler. And so there were five webinars emanating from the president's office, so to speak, with six additional webinars sponsored by the Musician's Health Collaborative, under the direction of committee co-chairs, Gail Berenson and Linda Cockney.

The dissemination of Scholarship and research was well served by our editors of the various publications, including our book series. Many of you attended the webinar, held most recently, on CMS support of scholarship, pedagogy, and publications. My thanks to Lisa Urkevich, Editor-in-Chief of *Symposium*, Todd Sullivan, chair of the board of editors for books and monographs. CMS is grateful also, to Constance Ditzel, Senior Editor with Routledge, which is the Society's publishing partner. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge Mark Rabideau's founding of the Emerging Fields series. Each book in the series helps us to consider anew, the multivalent context for engagements by the 21st century musician.

Next, I wish to acknowledge all of our members who will perform, share findings through poster sessions, or present at this conference. Those who carry out the work of the Society on a daily basis include our regional chapter presidents, chapter officers, and chairs of CMS Standing Committees. Every week when Bill Pelto and I meet and I have to confess that I am behind 'in my homework' for the Society, he reminds me that other than the national staff, we are all volunteers. I want to give a shout out now to the volunteers with whom I have worked during the past year: the CMS Board of Directors: Gene Trantham, Sabrina Clarke, Brenda Romero, Teryl Dobbs, Aida Huseynova, Kim Wangler, Patricia Burt, Ayden Adler, Emery Stephens, and Tyler Readinger; the executive committee is comprised of Mark Rabideau, Brian Chin, Charles Young, and Michelle Kiec. While most of our colleagues continue in service, I wish to express our special thanks to Michelle Kiec, Sabrina Clarke, and Aida Huseynova, who will complete their terms of service at the end of December.

In January, we welcome President-Elect Mark Rabideau to this office and I have said before that I am sure that never before has a president-elect worked so hard and for so little money! But, thank you, Mark for your collegiality and steadfastness of purpose on behalf of the Society. Lastly, I know as well as several of you in attendance, that the work of the Executive Director anchors the Society in a way that the changing musical chairs of the presidency does not. I thank my predecessors for identifying Bill Pelto as our executive director. It has been a remarkable learning opportunity to work alongside Bill Pelto in service to the CMS. As I transition to my role as past-president, I will think of the conversations I have had with many, and of the ways each of you have rallied to effect consequential change for CMS and for music in higher education."

Earlier in the Annual Meeting of the Membership, as has become customary, I offered an Acknowledgement of Indigenous Lands. Over the years, I have become increasingly ambivalent about these institutional performances of allyship. Often, they do little to address the intractability of systemic racism and its colonizing effects on Native communities. I shared my unsettled reaction with the Board of Directors who supported my proposal for an action step that would lend greater efficacy to CMS'

strides toward becoming an anti-racist music society. Plus, the fact that we were engaged in a virtual, cross-geographic meeting, raised for me the matter of the specificity of the land acknowledgement, and how we might proceed. This year then, our acknowledgement consisted of two components. First, I acknowledged that the site of our annual conference, originally scheduled for Miami, is coterminous with the traditional territories of Seminole and Tequesta peoples. After the conference, however, I researched suggestions for Land Acknowledgements in the digital sphere. A program hosted by *Unsettling Dramaturgy*, a group of Indigenous dramaturgs and disability rights activists, addressed the matter of land acknowledgements in a special program last spring. In their livestream event produced in March 2020, each presenter acknowledged the Indigenous lands associated with their respective geographic locations.¹ For those who might disassociate the virtual environment with present day sovereignty concerns, one of the panelists, DeLesslin “Roo” George-Warren, from Catawba Indian Nation in South Carolina, offered the following:

I mean, what is the biggest buzzword of the internet age the last seven years, but the Cloud, right? This idea that it's somewhere up there and that it doesn't have effects on the lands and the waters. In preparing for this, I was doing some research on pipelines that go through oceans that carry the literal fibers of the internet. And like if you look at the so called United States and Canada, there's specific places where those pipelines touchdown on land and from there presumably proliferate. So in one way it's different because we aren't all gathering in a single land, but in another way, we're all gathering on lands across the world because the way that this distributed internet system works is that while we, none of us might be in so-called China, there may be servers that are carrying data from our conversation through that landscape. And then back to the places that we are inhabiting. So it's not just some thoughts that I've been having. Thinking about how is the land still a diplomat in our conversations, even if it's not a singular landscape that we're gathering upon to have these conversations.²

I find George-Warren's reflections compelling and will continue to ponder them in the months ahead.

In advance of the virtual Annual Meeting in October, Board of Directors representative for Ethnomusicology, Brenda Romero, brought to the Board's attention, Brent Michael Davids' *Requiem for America*, a work in 18 movements and one that is originally scored for chorus, Native American flute and percussion, film, and choreography. I decided that the playing of the 14th movement would function as the Society's Land Acknowledgement with the goal of heightening awareness of Indigenous composers, the significance of song as tribal history, and the potential for cross-cultural collaborations between settler communities such as universities and schools of music, and Indigenous musicians.

Davids is a Wisconsin [composer](#) and member of Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Tribe, one of 11 tribes in the state of Wisconsin, where I am based. Whereas many CMS members will observe November 26 as Thanksgiving, others will recognize the date as the 51st [National Day of Mourning](#).³

Regardless, I hope that you will derive meaning from the intercultural performance that included the UW-Whitewater Chamber Singers, conducted by Dr. Robert Gehrenbeck, with collaborating artists, Awaehsaeh Meskihkiw Singers, an intertribal drum circle including members from the Menominee, Mohican, and other Wisconsin tribes; Harold Kalchanago, Lead Singer: [Sanctus: Singing for Power](#)

In private communication, Robert Gehrenbeck provides context for the performance:

The 11/13/2016 performance was an intense experience for everyone who attended because it fell less than two weeks after Trump was elected president. As you can see, the text for the movement we performed begins, “To the President of the United States,” making the telegram sent by Ponca chief Standing Bear to President Hayes in 1877 seem startlingly contemporary.⁴

My decision to play Davids' piece in the context of the Annual Membership meeting was an enticing but risky move - not that the composition or experience wasn't favorably received, but, following themes First Nations scholar Dylan Robinson addresses in his book, *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies* (2020), I ask: What is the work or agenda that the performance,

now mediated through a digital platform, carries out and for, or with whom?⁵ In seeking a range of potential answers to these questions, I turned to one of Robinson's earlier essays that addresses intercultural classical music and notions of reconciliation.⁶

I was not the only one who was moved by the video-recording of *Sanctus: Singing to Power*. My affective response caused me to well with emotion at the phrase (directed to the U.S. President) "Please answer, for we are in trouble," which appears near the end of the 14th movement, before the concluding and plaintive Native American flute solo, played by the composer. Robinson's work prompts us to consider that "intercultural music performances have begun to act as sites where audiences experience "reconciliation" as affective response.⁷ But perhaps we should also ask: Is that enough? Does the playing of an intercultural work such as *Sanctus*, constitute an action step for an organization such as The College Music Society? I would argue that one step must be followed by another, and by another, with similarly clear intention.

Robinson, who holds the Canada Research Chair for Indigenous Arts at Queens University, located on the traditional lands of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples, encourages us to consider how "decolonial practices of listening emerge from increasing awareness of our listening positionality." For several months now, my "listening positionality" has been inflected by my worry over the U.S. election cycle which concludes shortly, with its uncertain outcome. As we learn from Beverly Diamond, renowned scholar of the music of indigenous cultures, the concept of "sovereignty" doesn't translate easily into indigenous languages, but in *Sanctus: Singing for Power*, the appeal for justice in the context of the threat to sovereignty, seemed to have been felt by those who contacted me afterward, on a visceral level.

At the same time, we should guard against what Robinson describes as "the substitution of symbolic experience for dialogic action," yet I would offer, that in part, that is what the presentational arts do. I would agree however, that watching a performance via youtube is not the same as our students participating in the live collaboration with the *Medicine Bear Singers*, which is not the same as our redressing manifestations of historical injustice in Native communities and in the law.⁹

And so, pursuing the theme of sovereignty and the redress of injustices in the past as well as those of the present, we offer the following:

The College Music Society holds free and fair elections. Every member of the Society has one vote. All CMS voting is verified by the Board of Directors Secretary and at least two staff persons at the national office. It is a privilege to hold an office within the College Music Society, and officers strive to comport themselves accordingly. There will be a peaceful transition of responsibility between the presidential terms of Eileen M. Hayes and President-Elect Mark Rabideau on December 31, 2020.

May the gods of voting and of music be with you and yours, this election season and always.

Endnotes

1. <https://howlround.com/happenings/praxis-sessions-virtual-collaboration-land-acknowledgements>, accessed on October 28, 2020.
2. <http://www.delesslin.com/#ABOUT>, accessed on October 27, 2020.
3. [National Day of Mourning](#), youtube accessed on October 27, 2020. "Why These Native Americans Observe A National Day Of Mourning Each Thanksgiving." Posted by HuffPost.com.
4. E-mail correspondence from Robert Gehrenbeck on October 4, 2020.
5. I wish to thank Beverly Diamond, the renowned scholar of Indigenous music cultures and Professor Emeritus, Memorial University at Newfoundland, for her permission to cite her Charles Seeger Lecture, Society for Ethnomusicology, October 24 2020.

6. Robinson, Dylan. 2012. "Intercultural Art Music and the Sensory Veracity of Reconciliation: Brent Michael Davids' Powwow Symphony on the Dakota Music Tour." *MusicCultures* 39, Vol. 3, No 1, pages 111-128.
7. Ibid, p. 118.
8. Robinson, Dylan. 2020. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*, University of Minnesota Press.
9. My thanks to Professor Robert Gehrenbeck, Director of Choral Activities at UW-Whitewater for advising me of this event. At the time that Dr. Romero forwarded the youtube excerpt of the performance, I was unaware that the concert had been performed by the music department of the College at which I currently serve as dean.