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Music Industry and Higher Education: A Shared Vision

The 2021 Summer NAMM Show took place in Nashville, Tennessee this past month. Made possible by the NAMM-CMS Fellows Program, twenty-three colleagues from every chapter of our society and across the music disciplines came together during the Show to explore the vast ways in which music drives our economies here and abroad.

The Fellows Program serves as an example of the music industry's and higher education shared vision for fostering a continuing love of music and music-making, both for professional artists (those who are paid) and for those who do so simply for the love of it. What the National Association of Music Merchants and The College Music Society share is a belief that music is the soundtrack of people's lives and that partnering in providing broad access to music and music education is not only good for our art form, but good for our shared futures as providers of artistic experiences.

Among other activities of the program, the Fellows met with professionals at the Nashville Symphony, the Gibson Garage, the Country Music Association, and Grimey's New and Preloved Music with the aim of acquiring insights into the business of music from industry experts. Music Education faculty gained a deeper understanding of contemporary publishing rights and licensing practices, unveiling how the commodification of non-improvised music drives composers' earnings. Historians learned about orchestral musicians' educational work with school-aged children, reinforcing the importance of preparing all music graduates to become fluent in the craft of public musicology. Performance faculty benefited from seeing the inner workings of Music City venue management, unlocking critical information about how faculty and students alike might access and influence the expansion of our audiences.

Ideally, faculty participants will take their newfound knowledge back to their home institutions and embed it into their pedagogy (how they teach) and curriculum (what they teach). But what if we were to embrace these lessons within a broader philosophy that accepted our roles as educators as one that prepares musicians for a life of means, the ability to care for those they love; a life of meaning, the opportunity to do good and important work; and the chance to give back?

This way of thinking would require us to confront the reality that our art is a commodity, and how that commodity can bring joy to others, as well as ourselves. Music educators are paid to provide a service and change kids' lives. Composers are commissioned to deliver a product, while ushering beauty into the world. Scholars are purveyors of valuable knowledge, requiring both the making of meaning and the ability and willingness to share that knowledge in and outside of academic circles through public discourse. And performers' marketplace value, in-part, is measured by their ability to build a following and connect with an audience.

So, what – beyond learning how to book gigs, negotiate contracts, develop marketing strategies and tactics, grasp financial management fundamentals, and develop the poise and persona to engage listeners – might we learn from the lessons taught at Summer NAMM? And how might the embrace of a business lens through which we articulate the value of music in society shape the ways in which we think about music in higher education?

Perhaps it can help us re-imagine the mindsets and skill sets we teach our students, both in how they deliver their art and the ways in which they partner with communities to see, celebrate, and value their work. Or serve as a gentle reminder that art does not thrive in a silo (or a practice room), but rather art seeks connectivity across domains and is fundamentally rooted in a shared human experience. It reminds us that the inseparable relationship among art, artists, and audiences defines the artistic moment and that our role as music educators is to prepare students for a lifetime of artistic moments,

one after the next. And that the world needs creatives who can address the complexities of 21st century life and that music schools can help meet these needs by providing rich, innovative, creativity-based offerings “to kids from 1 to 92.”

As the world becomes more uncertain, what is certain is that the need for music and its power to connect us all has never been more important.

I'd like to give a big shout out CMS's Kim Wangler, chair of the [Council on Music Industry](#) and her team for coordinating such a meaningful program, past CMS president Tayloe Harding for first envisioning this thriving partnership, and to NAMM director of public affairs and government relations and executive director of the NAMM Foundation Mary Luehrsen for believing that a strong relationship between music in higher education and the music industry is a good investment in the future of music everywhere and for everyone.

I, too, on behalf of our society, would like to offer Mary our deepest sympathies for the loss of her husband, Peter Alan Young. Peter was a wildly interesting and successful journalist, author, and editor, a great adventurer, and the love of Mary's life.

Thanks for joining the conversation,

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