

Mark Rabideau

The New York Times recently shared a difficult story about the devastating impacts of the pandemic, forecasting “[A Great Cultural Depression](#)” for the performing arts. The article spoke about alarming unemployment rates and inefficient safety nets for those working within the gig economy. What the article did not explore, however, is how we might harness the collective imaginations of musicians from across the profession to invent a more promising future.

As the largest organization in the U.S. devoted to the profession of preparing musicians for the future they will soon inherit, The College Music Society must take responsibility for imagining that future and crafting strategies and tactics that lead to meaningful change. But where do we begin?

To gain some insight into artists’ experience enduring past crises, my former magazine, 21CM.org asked some notable composers to reflect on a moment of change and challenge and share with us what they learned.

Sarah Kirkland Snider, reflecting on surviving Hurricane Sandy offered this advice:

Non-profit arts organizations should always be ready for change. Our cultures and climates are constantly evolving. You can lose your capacity to be nimble if you try too hard to be something you once were.

John Corigliano, who contracted and survived the Coronavirus, offered comfort in telling a story about when he first learned about “a rare cancer that was killing Gay people.”

Everything comes to an end. AIDS still exists, but it’s controllable. The coronavirus will be controllable, too. I know it’s terrifying, but the majority of people will be okay. We will live through this.

But it was Vijay Iyer’s reflection on 9/11 that spoke to me most deeply.

9/11 was also a global moment experienced simultaneously around the planet. That’s what’s happening with this pandemic and the lockdown, though it’s at another level.

You look at the death tolls and you don’t even know what to do with these numbers. How many thousands of people died today? It’s unfathomable.

It’s like that day when a few thousand people died on the island of Manhattan all at once – but now it’s every day. We’ve not yet caught up to the cumulative emotional impact. It’s going to take time to figure out what just happened.

Art can channel those emotions. We might use it as a means to console people, to grieve together, to hold each other through the worst times. But I think, we as artists also have to ask ourselves what we can offer to this moment that might be received as some kind of invitation to act, that can mobilize us to bring about a change in consciousness.

As a community of leaders, CMS is launching a Presidential Task Force on Leading Change. Co-chaired by acclaimed pianist Awadagin Pratt (CCM) and leading change agent Mary Javian (Curtis Institute), the task force will conduct a yearlong examination of the state of the profession in and out of the academy and recommend a bold, inter-institutional project that tests and implements strategies for leading systemic change in 2022 and beyond. Task Force membership will represent the diversity of our society, the profession, and the breadth of our academic institutions. Interested parties should complete and submit the [Task Force Application Form](#) **no later than March 1, 2021**.

Leading begins by looking inward, recognizing our failures, and discovering the unique challenges and opportunities to serve our members. To this end, I have asked Leila Ramagopal Pertl to chair the [Committee on Cultural Inclusion](#). Professor Ramagopal Pertl will begin her tenure by hosting a series of listening sessions with the explicit goal of advocating and supporting Black, Latinx, women, and LGBTQAI+ members of our community. Strength of an organization is only possible when everyone feels welcomed as their whole selves.

Seeking solutions while drawing on broader perspectives, I have charged Vice President, Brian Chin and the [Committee on International Initiatives](#) to establish a CMS International Chapter and to expand its committee membership to reflect the diversity of musicians from across the globe. Dr. Chin will lead a webinar later this spring entitled: How Music Schools on Five Continents Pivoted to Meet the Challenges of a Global Pandemic: Lessons for a Hybrid World.

And even as our Rochester Conference (October 7-9, 2021) begins to take shape, we are already making plans for Long Beach 2022. I am pleased to share that Eric Hung has agreed to serve as our Program Chair. Dr. Hung – who will shape the conference alongside Program Committee colleagues Anthony Branker (Composition Chair), Amanda Soto (Scholarship Chair), and Carl DuPont (Performance Chair) – says, "For our 2022 conference in beautiful Long Beach, CA, we hope to build on CMS' commitments to anti-racism and the creation of a socially just higher music education ecosystem. We will work to feature presentations and panels on a wide variety of musical traditions and concerts that feature master performers and composers in jazz, popular music, traditional music, and styles that are not easily defined."

Connecting graduate students and faculty members to new employment opportunities via the Music Vacancy List has been a hallmark among the professional services provided by CMS. Responding to new technologies and members' changing needs, the national CMS staff has worked through the past months to reposition the MVL as a web-based interactive tool that includes capabilities for job alerts, CV upload, and extended job descriptions. See mvl.music.org to view the new platform, which is available for member use. The "legacy" version of the MVL, which has now been discontinued, served us well since the 1990s—it's time for this welcomed change, the New Music Vacancy List!

CMS partnership with NAMM's [Believe in Music Week](#) was a great success, including numerous presentations by faculty colleagues through the GenNext Program. Additionally, we've seen positive results from the Donation Partners Program, which provides a dollar-to-dollar match (up to \$10,000 total) for contributions made to CMS through the Believe in Music site. I invite you to view a [video of the Donation Partners Program](#) that showcases all of the organizations featured in the Program, including CMS. NAMM will keep the Donation Partners program live through February, so please consider contributing to CMS through the program. ([Free registration](#) is required, but it includes access through February to archived presentations from Believe in Music Week.)

Together, we must reimagine the definition of what music and what musicians count in music in higher education, including traditions whose music is principally improvised. To this end, the CMS Board has created a new board position for Jazz and Commercial Music. [Nominations](#) for this position and six others are now open. I hope you will nominate leaders from within our community.

These are turbulent times. And the College Music Society has never needed your leadership more. But as a community of leaders, we will meet the challenges of the moment. What makes me believe this?

I have always been inspired and comforted by the writings of MacArthur Prize-winning sociologist and Harvard scholar Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot. Her writing gives voice to the healing powers of the arts, even, and perhaps especially in our darkest moments. She writes:

It is fascinating that the first responses to violence, fear, and despair are often not words, arguments, or analysis. When we feel desperate, words will not do. They do not seem cathartic or productive; they will not carry our complex emotions. The New York City public school teachers from District One who could see the fiery destruction of 9/11 from their classroom windows knew this intuitively. While looking for a way to help their young students rage and grieve, they turned away from the formal curriculum not to words, but to art. They asked their students to draw their fears, paint their pain, dance their anguish, and rap their rage. The raw emotions were channeled into art when words would not do.

Thanks for joining the conversation,

Mark Rabideau
President, College Music Society
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
College of Arts & Media, University of Colorado Denver