

Leading Change in Turbulent Times

Mark Rabideau

The storm of COVID-19 has demanded that we narrow our priorities. Focus on what matters most. Fight for what we love. We should not dismiss the pains of this pandemic, as too many of us have witnessed friends and colleagues become ill or have lost loved ones to the virus' suffocating grip. And as devastating as the mounting statistics are, the depths of the impact of the pandemic cannot be measured alone in body counts, as its far reaching impacts on culture and on the livelihoods of creatives are undeniable. Rather, we need to learn from its stark lessons of what a world void of music feels like.

For me, this has been a reminder of the rare place musicians occupy in society. We are in the business of sparking curiosity, fostering creativity, expanding the imagination, building collaborative capacity, and growing empathy. These are the ingredients that empower people to shape the human experience. These are the mindsets needed to invent a better future. And it is we, members of the College Music Society, who are privileged to carry this torch forward.

What makes me believe this?

Music is embraced throughout every culture, and everywhere music helps to construct identity. Technology provides musicians and scholars unprecedented access to global audiences and to each other. Communities gather around music to mourn collective hardships and celebrate shared moments. And parents understand the cognitive benefits their children gain when engaging in musical experiences.

Yet a convergence of existential threats – an industry-wide pivot toward a failing gig economy; the unprecedented disruption brought on by a global pandemic; an enrollment crisis attributable to crippling student debt, rising costs, and a shrinking student population; institutional structures built on racist hierarchies that center on Euro-centric culture – remind us of the work that lies ahead.

How we respond to these challenges will have long-lasting implications for our institutions, music in higher education, and the music profession writ large. And to those who lead, the questions we ask ourselves in this moment must go beyond “How can we get back to business as usual?” We are not going back. There is no such thing as going back. Worlds end. And worlds begin. And our job right now is exactly the same as it remains from moment to moment: invent the future we hope to live in.

We saw what the emboldening act of invention looks like during Past-President, Dr. Eileen Hayes' tenure. We witnessed the courage required to challenge the status quo, the tenacity demanded to build sturdy coalitions, and the broad shoulders burdened as she carried us step-by-step closer to becoming a Society that is decidedly anti-racist. We will remain indebted to Dr. Hayes for her visionary leadership concerning equity and opportunity during these past two years and build upon her accomplishments.

As 2021 offers the promise of a widely disseminated vaccine, the reopening of our schools and venues, and a re-energized Black Lives Matter Movement, CMS is committed to leading a conversation that will result in nothing short of an epistemic shift in the ways in which we prepare musicians for the challenges and opportunities of living, learning, and teaching in a hybrid world and how we define who and what count within music in higher education.

Together, let's invent a profession that celebrates the immeasurable contributions of Black, brown, and indigenous artists.

Together, let's invent a profession that embraces the very best technology has to offer when living, learning, and teaching within a hybrid world.

Together, I hope we will invent a profession that empowers a generation of artist-entrepreneurs to home-in on the empathy required to problem-find, and the creativity and collaboration to problem-solve.

Together, let's invent a profession abuzz with one-of-a-kind musicians who, through their art, offer a perspective on the world that informs and excites.

During the first 100 days of the new year, this newsletter will communicate:

2021 [CMS Committee](#) initiatives for shaping our future.

a line-up of [webinars](#) that allocates equal time for learning from panelist insights and listening to attendee feedback.

a vision for gathering in Rochester and in the online space, as we plan our first hybrid conference.

Tapping the depth and breadth of knowledge that is embodied within our Society, we have the opportunity to lead change across music in higher education with empathy, insight, and imaginative skills equal to the challenges we face and the future we hope to invent. This is the work at the heart of CMS's mission. And this is an invitation to join CMS in leading change.

Thanks for joining the conversation,

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