

Norman Spivey

An Introduction



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NATS HAS BEEN SUCH A CONSTANT and important inspiration throughout my career, and I feel that I've grown and evolved immeasurably because of my relationship with the Association. I try to make it a practice not to go on and on about myself, but I hope you'll indulge me in my first "From the President" column as I introduce my journey through NATS, and illuminate some of the programs—and key moments of mentoring—from which I've benefited.

My initial encounter with NATS was at local student auditions as a college freshman in the fall of 1978. I'll talk more about these undergraduate experiences in the next column, but it's always good for me to remember the young man I was then when I adjudicate student auditions today. As a NATSAA contestant in 1990, I attended my first national conference, and not long after, when I began my first full time teaching job, colleagues mentored me into NATS membership—writing letters of support for my application and shepherding me into active participation (1991).

When I came to Penn State in the early 1990s, I became active in our local Allegheny Mountain Chapter, serving as president (1994–1996) and assisting with many committees and student auditions over the years. I was also tapped to serve as Pennsylvania district governor (1997–2001).

I've heard it said that the Intern Program is one of the best things that NATS does, and in many ways I've been able to track significant events in my professional and personal life through it. I was fortunate enough to be an intern in June 1994 (during which my wife and I learned we were pregnant with our first child), hosted the program as local coordinator in 1997 (in the middle of which our second child was born!), and served as master teacher in 2010 (without additional stork visits). There is actually a handful of us who have experienced the Intern Program in these three roles, and I have to say that I appreciate being part of an association where there is room for this kind of growth—where emerging teachers can evolve into positions of leadership. Not to get ahead of myself, but one of the duties I am most looking forward to when I transition to past president is serving as director of the Intern Program.

Jean Westerman Gregg affectionately referred to our daughter, Sadie, as "the intern baby," but knowing that she was due during the 1997 program and with necessity being the mother of invention, so to speak, I did my best to organize all the pertinent details well in advance of the event. James McKinney (NATS president at the time and one of the master teachers) took note and thought that my skill set would be a good match for Vice President of Workshops. The next thing I knew, he had nominated me for that office.

My experiences as Vice President for Workshops (1998–2002) were rich and varied. Through the seven national workshops I oversaw, I was often reminded of the adage about “pleasing some of the people none of the time . . .” It was a big job to be sure, but it was also an exceptionally enriching opportunity to program an important variety of continuing education events, to see NATS in action in various regions, and to meet many NATS members. There was quite a steep learning curve at my first national board meetings, but I learned from my colleagues and ultimately came to understand much about the Association and its impact. Jean Gregg suggested that I consider future service to NATS as regional governor, and I was glad to be able to serve the Eastern Region in that capacity (2009–2012). Again, I found it a remarkable way to meet and interact with members.

Meanwhile, Clifton Ware suggested me for membership on the NATS Foundation Board, and I have been pleased to be a part of that group since 2007. I’ll be cycling off of the board this year, but my time there has been invaluable in understanding our sister organization and its philanthropic mission. I feel strongly that the Foundation and NATS are poised to be more integrally related, a topic for a later column.

The 2014 Boston conference is the eleventh national conference I’ve attended, and the fourth at which I’ve presented (the first was Building a Community of Voice Teachers with university colleagues, followed by a one-man show on the life and music of Reynaldo Hahn,

and two sessions with colleagues from the American Academy of Teachers of Singing). I’ve also had articles published in the *Journal of Singing*, was a featured guest for the NATS Chat, and have served on many committees, everything from helping to select poster papers to forming the new National Student Auditions.

It was Martha Randall who first suggested I consider the NATS presidency, and not long after, Roy Delp was in touch to ask about nominating me for the position. As you can imagine, I am honored and humbled to have been elected. Serving as president elect (2012–2014) has given me the chance to look, listen, and learn, and I hope I’ll be able to make meaningful contributions.

At home I continue to bring students to NATS auditions and am faculty advisor to a thriving SNATS chapter at Penn State. Carving out time for all of this can often be a challenge, but, needless to say, my students and I gain much in return.

Having received such supportive mentoring from previous leaders makes me aware that encouraging and fostering leadership at all levels of NATS is vitally important. Many of us serve the Association in innumerable ways and share in a chain of great passion for its mission. I hope we would all agree that “we are stronger together.” More on this to come . . .

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