

# **MTNA ANNUAL MEETING VIRTUAL CONFERENCE APRIL 21, 2020**

## **Report of the Executive Director & CEO**

It's hard to know how to begin a report to the MTNA Membership during the unprecedented crisis our world finds itself in. The past few weeks have been the most mind-boggling time of my twenty-three years at MTNA.

Prior to January 2020, it appeared to be “business-as-usual” for MTNA. Our programs and activities were moving forward confidently:

- The newly elected national officers—President-elect Karen Thickstun, Vice President Kevin Chance, and Secretary-Treasurer Beth Klingenstein—joined with President Martha Hilley and Immediate Past President in March to lead the association.
- Several cost-saving measures, including a reduction of face-to-face Board meetings along with the start of monthly Board videoconference meetings, were implemented.
- The 20<sup>th</sup> annual Summit for MTNA Leadership was held in early September in Cincinnati, providing our state affiliate presidents with vital information, training, and motivation for their important work.
- The video-only Division Competitions went off without a hitch.
- The MTNA Collegiate Chapters Pedagogy Symposium, held at Ball State University in early January was a great success with 145 attendees, representing 36 colleges and universities.
- The elections for new Division Directors-elect took place with seven new individuals assuming office: Lauren Schack Clark, Jacqueline Herbein, Andrea McAlister, Mary Kaye Owen, Mary Beth Shaffer, Thomas Swenson, and Noreen Wenjen.
- Most of all, the preparations for the 2020 National Conference were proceeding smoothly and deliberately. The 2020 Conference Planning Committee began its work in June. The program was planned and put in place, the registrations were coming in strongly (it was the largest pre-registration since 2014), and the excitement was growing steadily as the date approached.

The only real concern was the fact that MTNA was informed the office building where the National Headquarters is located had been sold and that all tenants, including MTNA, had to move out by July 2020. This set in motion the due diligence process for acquiring a new location for the headquarters. As a result, the space needs were reduced by almost half, which enables MTNA to remain in downtown Cincinnati. A new lease at the new location was negotiated and signed. Architectural drawings were approved, and construction has begun on the office space. The move to the new headquarters will take place in June 2020.

However, everything changed in early February as a whirlwind of entirely unanticipated events related to the COVID-19 pandemic overwhelmed the world, creating a crisis of monumental proportions. A year that began as “the best of times” was suddenly transformed into “the worst of times,” requiring unprecedented decisions with severe long-term impact:

- The 2020 MTNA National Conference in Chicago was cancelled out of an abundance of caution for the health and safety of the attendees, presenters, artists, and exhibitors. The financial impact is yet to be determined, but it will be substantial. Fortunately, after we cancelled, the Governor of the state of Illinois, issued an order forbidding meetings of more than 1,000 people. The illegality of holding the conference made our claim of impossibility compelling, and the contract with the Marriott Hotel was terminated without the severe financial penalty associated with the cancellation, approximately \$550,000.
- The cancellation required refunding the conference fees of over 1,000 individuals as well as exhibit fees for dozens of exhibitors. The financial impact to MTNA of these refunds has been well over \$300,000.
- The finals for the MTNA Competitions were reformulated and set up as video events. All competitors were contacted and given instructions on how to submit their videos. The due date for submission was April 13. Every competitor complied with the deadline, and their submissions were adjudicated by the same judges scheduled for the Chicago Conference.
- Following the conference cancellation, an MTNA Virtual Conference was established as an alternative to the live conference. The *2020 MTNA Virtual Conference* is designed to provide an authentic conference experience for **all** members of MTNA. The 2020 conference presenters were asked to make and submit video presentation of their sessions, master classes, poster sessions and performances. Plus, all exhibitors were asked to participate in the virtual Exhibit Hall and Showcases. It is free-of-charge to all MTNA members as our way of supporting the professional teaching community during this difficult and uncertain time.
- An overall strategy to deal with the impact of the coronavirus on music teachers and to provide reassurance and resources for our members was developed. A curated Resource List of some of the best and most helpful resources to support music teaching and continuing education needs during the crisis was compiled and posted online.
- The decision was made to close the National Headquarters due to the coronavirus. The MTNA staff was instructed to work remotely from home until further notice. New policies and procedures were developed and implemented to ensure effective and efficient work flow and to maintain employee pay and benefits for all.
- At the same time, work continued to proceed on the design and construction documents for the new MTNA Headquarters in order to ensure that everything will be ready for the move in June.

Any one of these events coming individually could command the full attention of the headquarters. But all of them unfolding at the same time required extraordinary effort and teamwork. Much of this was possible because of the devoted and professional MTNA staff. They went into overdrive when the conference was cancelled and haven't slowed down since. All of them are totally dedicated to MTNA and accepted all of the additional tasks willingly and without question. The transition to remote work was made without hesitation or complication,

largely due to Zoom meetings, email, and texts. These individuals deserve our highest gratitude and accolades: Melissa Curtice, Sandy Greeb, Ryan Greene, Marcie Lindsey, Madeleine Lovett, Tonya Schauer, Brian Shepard, and Jenny Thomason.

The torrents of uncertainty and the lack of clarity surrounding the impact of the virus extends to MTNA as an organization. Yes, the conference has been canceled, our office has been closed, and our staff is required to work remotely from home. But, our members are also experiencing their own disruptions in teaching that may well lead to financial pressures and reevaluation of their memberships. Our industry partners face the same uncertainties beyond their control leading to the reconsideration of partnerships.

Despite all of these uncertainties and disruptions, MTNA is better positioned than most organizations to weather the storm. In addition to the dedicated, professional staff mentioned above, its assets are substantial in many aspects.

First, MTNA has been and continues to be led by Board members who always have the best interests of the association at heart. Over the years, Board members have never shied away from making the difficult decisions that were timely and necessary for the preservation and advancement of the association. Two recent decisions stand out in my mind as examples of their wisdom and courage. First, the Board of Directors set in motion the "digital transformation" of MTNA. The Board recognized that our future as an organization is dependent on our commitment to and utilization of technology throughout the association--both in the development of new programs and services based on technology as well as in the reshaping of existing "analog" programs and services into "digitally-enhanced" programs and services. Competitions, festivals, forum, and even Board meetings themselves are now taking advantage of digital enhancements to make them more available, less expensive, and more efficient for our members and leaders. Second, the Board made the unprecedented decision to cancel the 2020 MTNA National Conference. The Board was willing to make this most difficult of decisions to protect the health and safety of the attendees, presenters, artists, and exhibitors, knowing that it could cost MTNA hundreds of thousands of dollars during the precipitous decline of the stock market. It's ironic that these two decisions have become interconnected: the coronavirus and the cancellation of the conference have become the catalysts for our deepest dive into online technology, the MTNA Virtual Conference.

Second, MTNA has almost 20,000 members, many of whom have been and are deeply committed to MTNA. Plus, MTNA has a vast network of state and local affiliates that are interconnected with the national association in a longstanding and vital partnership.

Third, MTNA is the strongest it has even been financially. It has accumulated vast financial resources to cushion the blow of the declining stock market, the cancellation of the conference, and the potential decline in the upcoming membership renewals.

Last and possibly most significant, MTNA has been around since 1876, some one hundred forty-four years. During this century and a half, MTNA has weathered countless crises, especially during this current generation of leaders. We can just add the coronavirus to the long list of unexpected events and crises that have roiled our association: 9/11, the bursting of the dot.com bubble, the 2008 financial crisis, the Federal Trade Commission investigation, the false accusations made to the Ohio Attorney General's Office, and various internal disagreements. What all of these crises had in common was that they were only temporary setbacks. MTNA continued to advance and emerged even stronger. I remain optimistic that the same will be said about the coronavirus.

In conclusion, I want to express my personal gratitude to all of the out-going Division Directors whose support I cherished and whose commitment to MTNA and the music teaching profession I honor. Diane Blanchard, Sharon Callahan, Geri Gibbs, Jill Hanrahan, Cindy Peterson-Peart, Janice Razak, and Nanette Solomon. It was a privilege to serve with and for you.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Gary L. Ingle  
Executive Director and CEO  
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