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75 YEARS

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF SINGING
Spring Conference and Student Auditions
University of Mississippi

**OFFICIAL MINUTES of the
Mississippi NATS Chapter Breakfast Meeting**

University of Mississippi Student Union
Oxford, MS
Saturday, March 30, 2019 8:00 A.M.
President Amanda Johnston, Presiding

I. Breakfast

II. Call to Order – The MS Chapter meeting was called to order by President Amanda Johnston.

Members present: A. Johnston; N. M. Balach; M. L. Buchanan; Laurissa Bachlin; J. Lamar Kantack; V. Dacus; J. Dahman; N. Perna; J. Robinson; B. Robinson; E. A. Hart; S. Van Dyke; S. Hurley; S. Shannon; P. Rice; L. Holliman; F. Nabholz; J. Aubrey; B. Johnson; K. Gunn; and K. Davis.

- Review and approve minutes from last meeting, presented by Kimberley Davis, secretary.

Motion to approve the November 9, 2018 Minutes of the Regional Chapter Breakfast Meeting at Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, Louisiana, was made by Bradley Robinson. Approved with no corrections.

- Welcome: All members were welcomed by President Amanda Johnston. New members were welcomed and recognized as well:
Katie Shannon, Northwest Mississippi Community College (Theatre and Speech – originally from Minnesota).
We welcome you, Katie, to Mississippi and to Mississippi NATS!
- President Johnston asked if the membership was receiving notices from her via the official NATS website; if not, this means that you/a member has not “officially” joined this Chapter. Even though we do not pay dues, we still must click to “join” the MS Chapter. If we know of colleagues who are not receiving notifications from Johnston, ask them to contact her or go into the system and make this adjustment. At one point there was a glitch, but it could also mean

that one has not joined the chapter via the NATS website when dues are paid. Pay the \$0 dues, so that you may join her mailing list.

The current membership is 48 active members, so “a pretty healthy number.”

III. **Governor’s Report – Nancy Maria Balach**

Governor Balach began her report by thanking everyone for “being here” at the conference and commented on the “comradery” in our midst.

Her biggest focus for today’s meeting is that membership; not so much “new” but current. “Instead of focusing on new members, which is always important, *always*, we’d like to focus on the idea of our membership being in attendance at our conferences.” Over the years we have discussed why people come or do not come; we’ve discussed the length of the conferences, so we shortened them, etc. So rather than speculate, she is going to collect some hard data. She will initiate an anonymous survey with questions developed by her and Nick; this will help to make sure we are reflecting what the Chapter wants. It will be anonymous, so you may be as candid as you like and share information that we can then process and put forth. Additionally, during her time of NATS, the overarching objective has not changed but we all may change that now. So, this survey also yields the opportunity to respond to “why” we are doing what we’re doing. Inform colleagues, so that they, too, may have their voice(s) heard.

Something that we talked about in the fall was to start a FB Group. She invited all to take out their smartphones and join this closed group: MS Chapter NATS Member Group. Join and share things. Nick added that “if you’re not familiar with how FB works”, he encourages us to read the guidelines for the group, which are posted. As this is a “closed” Group, what you do post, is only visible to members of “the Group,” so no one else on FB can see it; your FB Friends will not be able to see what you have posted. If you are not his FB Friend, he could not send you an invitation. Membership to the Group must be approved. This is just another way for us to communicate.”

So, Balach added that her main focus as Governor is to charge is on membership and she will shift the focus and start with the members we have and the start from there to strengthen our organization.

Amanda added that we are hoping that this survey will give us new information on what we want to have at these conferences. At our meeting yesterday, Nick raised the important point at yesterday’s Board meeting that so often we associate NATS that it is just for our students – their performance opportunities, adjudications, etc. – but it is also for us; it is easy to forget that and what we get out of it. If we, as teachers, are not getting much out of it, we’d like to know, so that we can improve it and it does become something that people look forward to, whether it’s the social aspect, the opportunity to present a lecture recital that will count towards your own career ladder, coming to hear a guest artist, or something that we’ve never thought of.

IV. **Auditions Chair's Report – Laurissa Backlin**

Chair Backlin reported that a few months ago, she received an email from National that was given to all Auditions Chairs at the Chapter and Region/District level and it was a survey asking about how we do some of our processes at the Chapter level; one of the questions she thought was interesting was "Does your entity use the present NATS policy to include transgender students in your audition?" And, "Should NATS categories be defined by voice type instead of gender?" The example they gave was "First Year College – Sopranos, Mezzos, Contraltos" or "First Year College – Tenors, Countertenors, Baritones, Basses." They wanted to know what our current policy was. We do have a present policy to include transgender students; this is stated in our Handbook. In our Board meeting yesterday as to whether we should start thinking about changing to "voice type" instead of by "gender." At this point, we are keeping it as it is, but this is something we are interested in your (the Chapter's) opinions about this because it will be included in the survey (mentioned earlier). Amanda added that this is not a topic that we will be voting at now but it's probably going to be a decision made by National; however, if we have a sense of what our Chapter feels about it, that would help.

The next item in report was a reminder that for today's session we are "ranking" the singers with #1 being the Best, and with ever how many singers are in that category, go (rank) from there. Also, as a reminder to all judges that there should be no talking or conferring with one another. Score and rank. If you only have one person in the category, then rank them "1."

Judges assignments were made. She thanked everyone. Members offered "Thanks" to *her* for her service.

V. **Treasurer's Report – Mary Lenn Buchanan**

Treasurer Buchanan begin by reiterating Nancy's comments regarding membership stating that "...we have a great membership; we've just got to get the people to come." Last year she shared a five-year plan, she has it now as a six-year plan, starting in 2014 we had 43 faculty in attendance and 239 students; today, we have 27 faculty and 105 students. "That's a big, big drop...to our togetherness, our comradery, our learning." Please encourage colleagues around the state to attend our conference. As we travel for recruiting to colleges, high schools, etc., anywhere there are teachers of singers, encourage them to attend (join) the NATS conference.

She announced that we are okay but there are suggestions that were included in the Regional Meeting Minutes (please see the November 9, 2018 Minutes). We are starting the conference with a little over \$800. She reminded the members that she does not give a full report until the year ends (the November conference) because expenditures are not completed until then. She also reminded those present that funds are now going to the National Headquarters with Administration cost of \$1 per student and *Audition Ware* is \$2 per student. Fees were raised slightly to cover those costs. Board members agreed to pay for their own breakfast yesterday, which makes another savings to the Chapter. "This year, our guest artist's fee was smaller because by the wonderful graces of Living Music Resources here (at UM), they made a significant contribution" to our expenses.

She also spoke to the significance of the Community College but someone added that “It’s a tough nut to crack.” Buchanan agreed but added, that with the adjustments that were made with the schedule in combination with ACDA, we’ll be able to see more of them.

VI. **President’s Report – Amanda Johnston**

ACDA has announced their Conference dates for the next three years and she would like to do the same for us. That we have three years in advance notice of knowing where we are going to be; we are going to hold to our Bylaws in that we are going to hold NATS the first weekend directly after Spring Break beginning next year. This does not match with this year, as this year was an anomaly. So, as we have always planned it, we are going to have the first week after Spring Break. We will be at Delta State to begin this next year. 2021 will be March 19 & 20, so if there is anyone here now who would like to volunteer, now is your chance! A member from MUW spoke up and stated their interest in hosting and asked for clarification. Amanda then asked for takers for 2022. That’s a good, central location. Thank you, MUW! It will be great to publish 2020 – 2022.

Another subject President Johnston raised is often we have conflicts within different schools; not just with ACDA. She would like to think that this is not intentional but that things just happen; that the department, as a whole, organizes other events on top of our conferences. Often, we know as a vocal area when we are attending NATS, but the rest of the department does not. Depending upon how our respective Institutions work, she would like to encourage everyone to place NATS on our Departmental calendars. All of our colleagues will then know that we will either be out-of-town for or hosting NATS. Then, hopefully, the “Opera department does not schedule something that’s going to give your students a difficult choice of what to attend. We want to try to avoid that. Of course, some things are not always avoidable but in thinking this far in advance and working so closely now with ACDA to ensure that we never conflict, it will be better for everyone...especially those of us who are involved in Organizations.”

Johnston’s next big announcement was that we will now have MS Chapter dues. A lot of brainstorming went into this decision and how we are going to help ourselves financially. We do not want to cut back on the operations we currently have, we certainly do not want to raise registration again and impose any more cost to the students. We looked at the list of Chapter dues; of the 50 states there are only two that do not have dues and we are one of them. Everyone else in our Region has been charging dues for years and they charge a minimum of \$20; Louisiana charges \$25. Arkansas and Alabama charge \$20.

What this means is that when you renew your membership in January, you will pay the \$90 to National NATS and now pay \$15 to our Chapter. With the 48 active members we now have, this will give us an additional \$720 bumper that will help us when, like now, we only have 20 members here rather than 48. With all of the revenue that is missing, this gives us protection through dues. This will also give us extra to hire someone that has a higher fee, we will not have to say “No” because every year we will have the extra \$720 dollars. She hopes that all are on board with this. She thinks there is “a bit of a mentality that when we invest in something, we are more committed to it...perhaps you might go more! This \$15 will start next January at the time of renewal. She will send a reminder about that.

Johnston then moved on to New Business, announcing Regional NATS will be this November at Arkansas State in Jonesboro, as well as the events listed below. The NATSAA Competition deadline is coming up in September – September 9th. Check this on the National website. All of the sessions at the NATS Summer Workshop will be geared toward professional development, so not so much toward students but on teacher development – “for us!” – she named the participants, inclusive of herself.

There will be master classes for us to participate in and work with the featured presenters. Four presenters: Scandinavian Music, Ann Hershey; Anton Milov, Russian diction specialist; Cheri Montgomery who has written a number of specialized workbooks from Vanderbilt; and Amanda Johnston who will present German diction using her book on the subject.

The National Conference in Knoxville was discussed. Nick is a contact for the National Conference.

Next year at Delta State will be the year for member proposal. A peer-reviewed proposal process. There will be an application process that she will send out to the membership.

VII. New Business

- NATS National poll on whether categories be classified according to voice type and not gender.
- Future regional conference sites:
2019 – November 7-9, 2019 at Arkansas State University (Jonesboro, AR)
- Future state conference sites:
2020 – March 20-21, 2020 at Delta State University (Cleveland, MS).
- Future conference presentations:
2020 – Member presentations, refereed submissions.
- **NATS Summer Workshop** is June 27-29, 2019 (St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN). The theme is diction and the conference is catered to professional development.
- **National Conference** is June 26-30, 2020 (Knoxville Convention Center)

- Additional topics from the floor.
 - a. A member asked if we could receive conference information the “old fashioned” way because *Auditionware* only gives certain information but not all pertaining to you and your/other students/teachers. Laurissa affirmed her ability and agreement to do this.
 - b. Nick announced his podcast on vocal pedagogy called *Vocalfri*.
 - c. “So that we are all on the same page,” Jennifer Robinson asked if she could speak again to the change in the judging forms and the rubric, numerical system we are now going by. Nancy Maria Balach addressed this and its genesis. Audition’s Chair Bachlin also commented. Deep discussion ensued, as there were conflicts with what was being stated and the printed judging criteria. There is an obvious contradiction. Balach suggested that all take a look at the Minutes because this has all been discussed. “We need to make sure that this (holding up judging sheet) is reflecting what we’ve discussed. Because, she believes, it was

two years ago that we had a real in-depth conversation about this, so we will go into the Minutes and make sure.” The two need to be in alignment, Davis added, because the change came from National. Nick added that this will be clarified by November.

Jennifer asked if we could fix this for now; Laurissa responded that we could not (this may have only been in the hearing for those at our table).

VIII. Adjournment

Johnston called for Motion to adjourn – made by Nicholas Perna; seconded by Brad Robinson.

Respectfully submitted,
Kimberley Davis, Secretary
MS NATS Chapter