

Vision: 2020

Chancellor John Mauceri
Installation Speech

April 3, 2007

*North Carolina School of the Arts
Winston-Salem, N.C.*



NORTH
CAROLINA
SCHOOL
OF THE
ARTS

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Photos by: Donald Dietz

At the celebration of his installation as the seventh chancellor of NCSA, John Mauceri stepped up to the podium and expressed a vision for the school in keeping with his point of view toward the role of art in society and the challenges the school must embrace in preparing students for the professional arts world of the 21st Century.

Vision: 2020

A Pure River of Optimism. It's Called Art.

Thank you, President Bowles. I would like to gratefully acknowledge the presence of three former chancellors: Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Robert Ward, dance impresario Alex Ewing, and choral conductor and musicologist Philip Nelson. In addition, two of our founding fathers, John Ehle and Philip Hanes, are with us. Along with many distinguished guests, permit me to single out one who especially honors us by her presence — the poet, writer, and educator Maya Angelou.

Ladies and Gentlemen — I have accepted the post of chancellor for two reasons: the world we live in and the world we might live in.

When I was a boy, I remember seeing a photograph of earth taken by astronauts from outer space. It inspired many of us to see the world in a holistic way. This blue-green planet, flecked with white, floating, solitary in a sea of blackness, was indeed a single organism of mutually dependent ecological systems — and we, the human race, understood, perhaps for the very first time, how we are one world — fragile and dependent on one another.

And during the decades that followed, our poetic souls inspired the development of new technologies to increase our ability to communicate instantaneously to all the people on the earth and guard its treasures, protecting its future.

At the same time, the negative forces of sectarianism — that residue of pre-historic tribal behavior — have selectively used that technology to foment violence and separation. It is what we euphemistically call “the news,” and we see it and hear it every day in the newspaper, on television and on the Internet.

But there is the other history: the real one that transcends the names and dates of wars and military leaders. It is the history found in every song, every poem, and in our collective memories. It is found in the clothes we wear, the ingredients in the food we eat, and in every object you see before you.

I believe this is perhaps the most important moment to support the arts since the last days of the Dark Ages. That is because art celebrates and affirms the continuity of humanity.

This is crucial, because in the midst of destruction there is a pure river of optimism — and its name is *art*. Even when it delivers a message that might be pessimistic or controversial, art functions as

a warning. If we didn’t believe that we could change the world or teach the world or inspire the world to better things, we wouldn’t write that poem or sing that song in the first place.

But the idea that we still want to communicate with each other through the arts is what unites us back through time, to the very first cave painters, who lived 40,000 years ago. And at the same time, our contemporary art forms simultaneously link us to everyone living at this moment — the 6.7 billion people inhabiting the blue-green planet we call home.

The North Carolina School of the Arts has completed 41 journeys around the sun. It has responded to a wildly improbable idea of Governor Terry Sanford and over the years has established itself as a great laboratory of creativity: an inspiration to other lawmakers on the true function of politics — that which the Greeks called “the highest art” and which occasionally is not.

Inspired by what art fundamentally teaches us — the knowledge that we are one and that we all need each other — let us begin to imagine together the arts school and thus, the society and finally, the world, we want to have — that we *must* have.

In the coming months, come join me in imagining NCSA in the future. Call it *Vision: 2020*. Let us have a holistic and integrated approach to training artists in a century that is already exploding with creativity and new delivery systems. We need to train artists who not only excel in their craft but also have the agility to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Vision: 2020 means imagining everything that constitutes an arts school of the future. That future began yesterday, after all, and it is our job to catch up to what is already out there, learn it, teach it, mentor it and move beyond it.

We must examine what we teach and how we teach, because we know why we teach. American art has become the world’s art because America embraces change and influence. It maintains its pre-eminence by morphing with each creative and cultural surge.

Let France’s intellectual community fret when foreign-born writers win five of its top seven literary awards this year, while just a few years ago the Academy Award nominations for the best musical score went to an American, an Englishwoman, an Italian, a German, and a young man born in Beijing. No one in America objected, and that Oscar epitomized a world view of our arts. We export American arts, but they can never be outsourced.

We have the greatest schools and conservatories in the world. North Carolina took the lead in 1795, when its legislature created America’s very first public university.

Winston-Salem took the lead in 1949, when it created America’s first arts council. And in 1963, the North Carolina General Assembly again distinguished itself when it voted to create the world’s first public arts conservatory — this great school.

America continues to be the No. 1 country in the world when it comes to creative thinking and NCSA is here to train our students in creative problem-solving. We might not all become profes-



sional artists. That actually does not matter. Artistic sensibilities and perspectives are intangible and intrinsically valuable. Business and industry throughout the world are seeking multi-dimensional, creative individuals.

We, who are the professional artists, must also give permission to those who do not see themselves as artists, to own artistry and recognize it as part of an ongoing continuum. It will be the wild idea of some scientist that will cure cancer, just as it was the wild idea of Wilbur and Orville Wright to take a heavier-than-air craft into the skies of North Carolina a century ago. The creative leap, supported by technical skill, is the partnership this school represents.

And so, as part of *Vision: 2020*, let us bring forward the desire to learn from all of the arts. Can we find the way to create cross-disciplinary studies? George Balanchine was perhaps the greatest choreographer of the 20th century because, in addition to his genius, he was a trained musician. He had the tools with which to sit with Igor Stravinsky and read a musical score. Perhaps this is a program for a fifth or sixth year at our school. If we could do that, it would be a unique opportunity for young artists.

Let us also imagine a library for this great institution: not a library for 1963, but a library ready for 2020, one that makes use of new technologies, linking world-wide archives, and is available to every child in North Carolina, as well as everyone with a question and a little dream.

Let us take time to reinvestigate the artworks of the last century that we rejected. We must show our respect for those great creators and rescue what we cannot currently access: musicals, films, plays, symphonies, designs, dances, and operas consigned to the warehouses and basements of libraries and archives. We owe it to them, for they still can teach and inspire us.

And so, I call on you: students, faculty, staff, and those of you who raise and give us financial support as well as give of your time, to look at the whole school with me. Let us meet in surprising groups and invent something glorious, built on the dreams from the 1960s.

Let us risk failure. Failure is not the end of a process. It is part of a process that is positive, natural and transformative. Change is the only way to respect the past and embrace the future.

At the heart of all we are doing here is one group, our students, the ones who trust us to teach them to dance, sing, act, create visual and aural stories, and design and produce imaginary worlds in which those stories are told. We are here to teach them the technical skills of their art while being inspirational and demanding. We teach tradition and its antithesis. They return our care by being equally inspirational and demanding of us.

On this day, we salute the faculty of NCSA, which has carried the weight of putting practicality into that dream ever since the school opened its doors in 1965. Each and every one of us here represents the blossoming of those seeds planted years ago by someone older who explained something, who answered a question that began with “Why?”

Every upbeat I give and every word I utter is connected to those teachers in my life, starting with Mrs. Reddy, my kindergarten teacher. My mind fills with images of the hundreds of teachers who made me me: Mr. Gerardi, my chemistry teacher, who threw out his notes every summer and began afresh each September; Mr. Rossi, who volunteered to advise our high school newspaper; Mr. Rosen, who taught me to read music; Aunt Jenny, who took me to Broadway when I was nine and Aunt Rose, who shared her subscription to the Metropolitan Opera when I was thirteen; Kingman Brewster, president of Yale, who had time for a senior who wanted to create an

undergraduate orchestra; my mother, who said yes, and my father, who said you can do better.

They are all standing by me at this moment and will travel with me for the rest of my life. That is what teaching means and why we do it.

And we must also take this moment to thank those of you who have supported us. Monies given to NCSA affirms both education *and* the arts. The arts and philanthropy go back to the beginnings of Western Art with Gaius Maecenas – the wealthy advisor to Caesar Augustus and patron of Virgil and Horace. Without patronage there would be no *Aenied*; no Sistine Chapel; no *Ring of the Nibelungen*; no *Appalachian Spring*; no *West Side Story*. It is a tradition of symbiosis that is noble and essential. Artists have always counted on the kindness of friends, and we at NCSA need you to be a fundamental part of *Vision: 2020* and the *Whole School Fund*. You have the power to sustain the school. You have the power to make scholarships available to every young person with talent and commitment, regardless of race or financial ability. In return, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that unknown millions of people will benefit from your beneficence.

And let us not confuse healthy criticism with negativity. *No* is not our enemy. It is our response to *no* that tells all. *No* is the shadow that defines the light whereas negativity is a maladaptive response to fear. Franklin Roosevelt may have preferred being right to being president, but he was only partially right when he said, “We have nothing to fear but fear itself.” It is the non-constructive response to fear that is to be shunned.

We artists live at the borders of our comfort zone and frequently cross into the world of fear. Michelangelo had little practical knowledge of painting frescos when he was ordered by the pope to paint the Sistine Chapel’s ceiling. Imagine what he felt like when the scaffolding was being erected. I saw Leonard Bernstein be afraid before the opening night of *Carmen* at the Met. Madonna and I were both afraid before we recorded *Evita* together. Like all of them, we artists must face fear fearlessly. Being an artist is not comfortable and should not be.

Acknowledging that, we shall explore, invent, stumble and fly. Artists are the can do people in society. We, as a school of the arts, can do whatever we imagine, provided we do it together.

I have just been installed as the seventh chancellor of this institution. The word *chancellor* derives from the Latin word for gatekeeper. And, in case I have not made myself perfectly clear, the gate is open. Thank you.

The First Annual University of North Carolina Festival of the Arts

Winston-Salem, N.C.

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On the occasion of his installation, Chancellor Mauceri invited students from all the campuses throughout the University of North Carolina system to Winston-Salem for a celebration of the arts. Hundreds of students from the farthest reaches of the state converged on NCSA, filling every performance space with singing, dancing and instrumental music. We thank the following schools, students, and groups who participated to make this festival a powerful, passionate, and transformative artistic experience.

- Hayes String Quartet from Appalachian State University
 - East Carolina University Chamber Singers
 - Elizabeth City State University Choral Ensemble
 - Fayetteville State University Chamber Ensemble
 - Richard B. Harrison Players, North Carolina A&T State University Theatre Program
 - North Carolina Central University Spirit
 - North Carolina State University Dance Program
 - University of North Carolina at Asheville Jazz Choir
 - University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Chamber Singers
 - University of North Carolina at Greensboro Jazz Ensemble
 - University of North Carolina at Pembroke Jazz Combo
 - University of North Carolina at Wilmington Film Studies Department
 - Western Carolina University Department of Music
 - Winston-Salem State University Burke Singers
- AND
- The North Carolina School of the Arts Symphony Orchestra Conducted by Chancellor Mauceri