

NSSBE Welcome Address
2018 Professional Conference
Chris Tanner, NSSBE President

Good morning, and welcome to the Inaugural Professional Conference of the National Society of Steel Band Educators. My name is Chris Tanner, and I am honored to serve as President of this organization. I extend warm greetings to each of you, not only in this capacity, but also as Professor and Interim Chair of the Department of Music at Miami University. I am very pleased to host you on our campus today.

This conference is in one sense a culmination, an arrival point, an end-game. It represents the collective dreams and desires of a dedicated group of individuals, our Board of Directors and Steering Committee, who have worked diligently for several years, molding the raw material of ideas and thoughts into concrete plans of action and tangible deliverables. That we are here together today to engage in sharing best practices and building community around this thing that we love, steel band, is in itself an achievement worth celebrating, and I thank you all for participating in this historic moment.

At the same time, this first NSSBE conference is a beginning, a starting point, a launching pad. It represents the emergence of a new initiative, one that is responsive to the reality that the steel band movement in the United States is substantive, vibrant, and sustainable. The National Society of Steel Band Educators is dedicated to advancing steel band education in the United States, and we recognize that meetings such as this are an important and indeed necessary means for achieving that mission. We fervently hope that this conference is the start of a long and productive journey that will continue for generations, and that our Society will grow and develop apace with the steel band movement in this nation.

Rare is the spark of genius in our world: the inspired thought that comes to mind swiftly and fully formed, ready to be unleashed on the world. Rather, most big ideas are the product of slow and deliberate consideration. These ideas often begin as small seeds of thought that are carefully and steadily nurtured until they grow and mature, over a long period of time. NSSBE was born through such a process. Indeed, many of us have long wished for an organization dedicated to the steel band art form, parallel to those in practically every other music discipline. While the story of NSSBE is a recent tale that has unfolded over the past few years, it is important to recognize that steel band practitioners in this country have imagined the existence of such an organization for much longer.

To trace the origin of our Society, one would have to visit a small Mexican restaurant on the outskirts of Toledo, Ohio, where on one cold, January afternoon in 2014 I met Dr. Brandon Haskett for lunch. I had come to know of Brandon and his work in the steel band idiom through the Steel Band Directors Facebook page, which he still maintains, and through his research on the topic of steel band pedagogy. After several email exchanges, we determined Toledo as a convenient halfway point between our homes in Saginaw, Michigan and Fairfield, Ohio, respectively, and we set a meeting to discuss our mutual interest in developing a professional organization for steel band directors.

During that initial conversation, we agreed that success would be in no small measure determined on our ability to persuade a number of key individuals to join our cause. We recognized a simple but profound truth: that it would be impossible for the two of us alone to fully comprehend all of the issues, challenges and opportunities that we would face in bringing our shared vision of a professional society to fruition. It was therefore paramount that we bring others on board.

The first person we turned to for advice and counsel is someone well known to nearly everyone in this room, Tom Miller. Due to his long-standing presence and impeccable reputation in the idiom, Brandon and I deemed Tom indispensable in our quest to bring NSSBE to life.

Together, we serve as the Board of Directors, and as such are deeply committed to the success of the organization. It is my distinct pleasure to serve with these two friends, and I greatly appreciate the time, energy and sincere effort that each has contributed. Please join me in thanking Brandon and Tom for their commitment to NSSBE, and for their willingness to serve in this capacity.

Additionally, we proceeded to identify a team of collaborators that would work together to lay the foundation for our Society; a collection of experts in the field, from diverse backgrounds and dispersed across the nation in different locations and settings, who shared our passion for steel band and who were dedicated to excellence. These individuals are our Steering Committee, and since 2015 they have convened on several occasions to connect, brainstorm, share ideas, make decisions and move the organization forward. I thank each of the Steering Committee members for their service, and I would like to recognize those present with us today: Patty Dee, Matt Dudack, Mike Greer, Emily Lemmerman, Eugene Novotney, and Mike Wendeln.

In this age, a digital presence is essential for all organizations, and so initially much of our focus revolved around the design and functionality of our website. While working to develop a framework and content for the site, we launched a silent fundraising campaign among close friends and associates, to cover costs associated with the design and ongoing maintenance of the website. In the conference program you will find a list of donors who contributed to this effort, and these individuals deserve our thanks and praise. Without their contributions, we would not have been able to launch the site and begin fulfilling our mission. Our website is an important vehicle for communicating and sharing content among our members, and indeed around the world. We look forward to future contributions to this forum from our members.

The first NSSBE conference is without doubt an auspicious occasion, one that demands excellence and substance. We are proud to feature a slate of accomplished presenters today, each of whom has earned a stellar reputation in the field. We will hear from Dave Longfellow and Jason Koontz, who will each provide information on how to improve a steel band's engine room. Our panel discussion featuring Patty Dee, Matt Dudack, Ed LeBorgne and Emily Lemmerman will address the state of steel band education in the United States today. We are of course very pleased to welcome a truly transcendent figure in the pan realm, Victor Provost, who will offer his thoughts on how best to approach steel pan technique and performance. We will also have the opportunity to hear

Victor perform with the Miami University Steel Band and with special guest musicians Rusty Burge, vibraphone, Michael Sharfe, bass, and John Taylor, drumset.

Lastly, you – our members in attendance today – are providing a significant contribution to this gathering through your very presence. We should not underestimate the power that can be generated by people of like mind, meeting together in person. In our digital world much is accomplished online, remotely, and in the cloud. Yet we are here together, face to face, on the ground. Consider: how many faces will be put with names today? How many conversations will take place among colleagues? How many new friendships will be forged? How many connections will be established: connections that cannot be foreseen or anticipated, that happen through chance? The relationships that will be created anew or strengthened today at this organized professional meeting will be without doubt its most significant outcome.

You may be here today because you are already firmly committed to the steel band art form in the U.S. Perhaps you're here to learn something new, or to be inspired. Maybe you're here because you're simply curious. No matter your purpose, it is my hope that you leave today energized, and eager to spread the word that our organization is poised to become a thriving community devoted to steel band education, an engine for growth and sustainability, a beacon of excellence and a force for advocacy. Let us hope that this professional conference is the first of many; that in 50 or 100 years our members will reflect on this day with a sense of pride, recognizing that this is where and when it all began.

Thank you, and enjoy the day.