

From the President

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Fast-Moving Times

Together, Acoustical Society of America (ASA) members, leaders, and staff are forging ahead to discover new ways to disseminate the importance of acoustics. Four endeavors over the past months stand out: the Acoustics Virtually Everywhere (AVE, acousticalsociety.org/asa-meetings) meeting; the Committee to Improve Racial Diversity and Inclusivity (CIRDI); a new policy on acoustic hailing devices; and the new “Reflections” series in *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America (JASA)*. Amazingly, when I became ASA president a few months ago, only one of these was known by members, the replacement of an in-person meeting in Cancun with a virtual meeting. In this column, I describe highlights of the progress and importance of these four ventures.

Acoustics Virtually Everywhere

Thank you to all the presenters and attendees for joining first online meeting of the ASA AVE through our unique lobby (see **Figure 1**). AVE has been a living, constantly moving experiment. The meeting was planned with an eye toward future meetings. Although plans are in flux, it is possible that the ASA will have another virtual meeting in 2021.

The most difficult part of planning AVE was that decisions about attendance were based on estimates from in-person

meetings in single locations. Our goal was to enable practitioners, scientists, and students from around the world to join this meeting. Essentially, problems related to transportation were traded for problems involving time zones. Priority in selecting the time window for technical sessions was given to time zones from Europe through the American West Coast.

As a result of this planning, virtual technology extends the meeting access across the world for all presentations. Recorded videos of the lectures and narration options for posters enables viewing on-demand before and after the scheduled week of December 7-10, 2020. In fact, presentations are viewable for 30 days after the meeting, thereby solving a common complaint that in-person ASA members have to choose between two (or more) simultaneous sessions.

AVE was our first effort to take advantage of the many valuable feature of virtual technology. To help us learn from this experience, the ASA will send a survey to seek feedback from participants about the meeting and its schedule. I encourage all meeting participants to comment on aspects of AVE that they liked and provide suggestions on how to improve online meetings.

A significant advantage for AVE is the large number of options for enhancing poster presentations. For

Figure 1. Lobby at the Acoustical Society of America virtual meeting, December 2020.



example, multimedia is easily integrated within all the expandable panel sections of a poster. Interaction with the authors is available during sessions and, at the authors' preference, outside of sessions as chats and individually by appointment. Narration by authors could be recorded for the whole poster or for individual panels. The poster platform enabled a smaller number of posters to be grouped by topic into shorter sessions. Feedback will help determine how well this poster format succeeded in supporting the culture of the ASA for poster presentations.

On behalf of the Society, I express enormous gratitude and accolades to our staff at ASA headquarters for planning and executing all aspects of AVE. Scheduling our diverse events is always quite challenging because some events have unusual requirements (e.g., miniconcerts, workshops, keynote addresses). Adding to this in AVE was new technology that required time-consuming research, demonstrations, and decisions. Thank you very much ASA staff!

We are also very grateful to Andy Piacsek who chairs the Virtual Technology Task Force (VTTF). VTTF suggested virtual platforms based on screen loads of reports about recent meetings. They also evaluated visits to other online meetings. Then, a subcommittee led by James Lynch turned to social interactions. It had fun and serious discussions about replacing typical socials but still including informal hallway discussions. Two students joined the subcommittee, both for their technical expertise and to plan student socials. Options for making AVE an enjoyable as well as a productive meeting were implemented. Again, this first effort is a test bed for ASA virtual socials that will be revised and expanded at future meetings. Your feedback is needed!

How the Executive Council Manages the Acoustical Society of America in 2020

Along with the challenges that everyone has faced in 2020, boards of scientific societies have been forced to move at a breath-taking pace. Fortunately for our Executive Council (EC) board, last year, Past President Victor Sparrow instituted monthly EC teleconferences on a trial basis. Beyond the improved communication, the EC soon found that teleconferences worked more effectively because they addressed problems as they arose rather than waiting for infrequent in-person meetings. Now, monthly online meetings have become essential and are already the accepted means to

conduct EC business. For example, in March 2020, the ASA leadership hastened to change planned meetings in face of the pandemic. More recently, in June, antiracism protests arose in response to killing of Blacks by police. The ASA rapidly took a stand that condemned racial injustice (see the statement online at acousticstoday.org/racism-statement) and then turned inward to examine systemic racism in STEM. Two committees have helped the EC tackle important issues related to racism.

Acoustical Society of America Committee to Improve Racial Diversity and Inclusivity

Under the leadership of EC member Tyrone Porter, the ASA is moving forward with specific actions and programs to address why few Blacks and other peoples of color participate in our Society. Porter describes how and why the new ad hoc CIRDI was established (see his "Sound Perspectives" essay on page 75). CIRDI is largely made up of current and former ASA leaders. Guided by Porter, we are reexamining the role of systemic racism and how it affects the ASA and science more generally. In particular, we have read and discussed in depth several resources that are now available on the ASA new diversity initiatives website (see acousticalsociety.org/diversity-initiatives). Particularly informative on this website are recent reports from the American Institute of Physics (AIP) entitled the "TEAM-UP Task Force Report" and its "Appendix 9." I encourage all members of ASA to read these.

Together, we believe that the ASA can make progress in attracting more Blacks into acoustics and acoustic-related fields by targeting specific problems that can be accomplished. One step in this process was to write goals for the CIRDI in a mission statement.

This mission statement (see acousticstoday.org/CIRDI) enabled two important outcomes. First, it was presented to the EC and thoroughly discussed, and then the CIRDI was approved as an ad hoc ASA committee. This step widened the group of ASA members scrutinizing systemic racism and how the ASA proposes to move forward. Next, the CIRDI broadcast these intentions more widely by publishing the mission statement on the diversity initiatives website.

Second, the CIRDI is empowered to seek funds to underwrite projects that we envision. For example, the

EC exhibited its full endorsement of the CIRDI mission by rebudgeting travel money that was going unused in 2020 to underwrite initial CIRDI projects. Moreover, the CIRDI is applying to the AIP for a grant from their 2020–2021 Diversity Action Fund. While specific projects are currently under development, the CIRDI intends to move rapidly so that the projects are implemented over the next year. These will be discussed in future essays from the CIRDI in *Acoustics Today*.

On behalf of the ASA, I thank Tyrone Power for his courageous leadership in establishing the ASA CIRDI.

Acoustical Society of America Policy on Acoustic Hailing Devices

Since June, people around the country, indeed around the world, have participated in gatherings to support movements related to Black Lives Matter. Unfortunately, it was once again reported that some law enforcement agencies employed very loud acoustic devices for crowd control. Generally, such devices are in the category of acoustic hailing devices (AHD) that were originally developed for the military to project sound across long distances. They are engineered to produce high-intensity sound levels that may have dangerous effects on hearing at short distances. Edward J. Walsh, chair of the ASA Panel on Public Policy (PoPP) contacted me and others in the ASA leadership in early June about the possibility of writing a policy statement for the ASA to share the idea that AHD systems were not appropriate for civilian crowd control.

An ASA policy statement is written for the general public to express our collective knowledge on important issues related to acoustics. Therefore, the EC votes to approve a draft policy based on background information, thorough discussion, and scrutiny of the language in drafts. Following this procedure, on July 10, 2020, the EC approved the Policy on Acoustic Hailing Devices (acousticstoday.org/hailing-devices). The final recommendation is:

“Recognizing the need to employ emerging technologies responsibly, the ASA recommends suspension of AHD use by law enforcement agencies for crowd-control purposes pending installation of safeguards to ensure the safety of the public.”

How can the ASA make a positive difference to the public? Moving quickly, Walsh brought the AHD policy to the

AIP lobbyists. ASA is a member society in the AIP whose government relations staff brings science policies to Congress and other agencies. Walsh and Victor Sparrow, who chairs the ASA ad hoc Committee on Government Advocacy, met with the AIP staff. I attended that August 8, 2020, meeting where several next steps for publicizing the policy to other societies and organizations were planned. Surprisingly, the AIP noted a current opportunity to incorporate additional language into existing bills in Congress intended to reduce use of AHD systems at civilian gatherings. These several steps, including to pursue bills in Congress, were proposed as a motion to the EC on August 10, 2020, and approved. The ASA, through its committees and EC, is striving to apply acoustic knowledge to benefit the general public.

“Reflections” Series Launched in *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*

Kudos to ASA Editor in Chief James Lynch for launching yet another innovative feature of *JASA*, the “Reflections” series (see acousticstoday.org/forums-reflections). The objectives of “Reflections” are to highlight older *JASA* articles that have had worldwide impact, to showcase the diversity of acoustics, and to focus on articles published before 2000.

This concept was jointly created by Lynch and me in 2018 when I worked for ASA Publications to update their digital presence. In one project, I led a committee to determine a new logo and branding design for *JASA*. In addition, in discussing that *JASA* began with the founding of the ASA in 1929, we envisioned a new *JASA* feature to present historically significant articles, and this became “Reflections.”

“Reflections” then needed a proof-of-concept example. In my enthusiasm, I drafted a version that would exemplify our objective of worldwide impact. The choice of Dennis Klatt’s 1980 article to describe a new digital synthesizer was obvious to me (see article at asa.scitation.org/doi/10.1121/1.383940). Not only was it the foundation for how to make speech synthesis more intelligible, but it enabled development of voices with individual differences. Klatt patterned one voice after his own. “Perfect Paul” was subsequently used by Stephan Hawking to substitute for his own voice for over three decades (hear Perfect Paul at acousticstoday.org/perfect-paul). The full story and many examples of Klatt’s synthesizer are found in the first “Reflections” feature published July 2020 (page 1 is shown in **Figure 2**).



Figure 2. The graphic design of page 1 of the first “Reflections” feature published in July 2020. For a high-definition version of the article, see acousticstoday.org/klattPDF.

A few more comments about the new “Reflections” feature. “Reflections” is a separate section in *JASA* for easy discovery. The format for “Reflections” was selected to be short, one to two pages, in order to be available for other ASA educational and archival purposes. Writing a historical review of the impact of a *JASA* article provides an opportunity for authors to contact colleagues, both to verify memories and to provide up-to-date information about the status of the significant contributions. In my case, I asked Terrance Nearey to be a coauthor because of his novel implementations of the Klatt synthesizer. A most satisfying outcome of this project is that “Reflections” will become an essential and commemorative part of the ASA 100th anniversary in 2029. A goal from the beginning is to have bound copies of 100 “Reflections” articles published in time for the 100-year celebration of the ASA.

In closing, the various initiatives I have discussed in this essay show that the ASA is stepping forward to keep up with these fast-changing times. We are mindful of the hardships endured by many people, but we also look for opportunities to move the Society forward. I am very grateful to so many members and staff who have taken on new and time-consuming projects to benefit the ASA.