

power-voting. All of this happens in an instant. Singing well in a choir takes time and is a collective exercise in giving up one's individual voice, one's particular sound and style for the benefit of the group."

So, how can beginners be enticed into choral singing? "Students need early success," notes Carlow. "It's important to choose materials (repertoire, warmups, and games) that are within reach and build sound from the first few minutes

of the first rehearsal. This means songs with limited ranges but that have sufficient complexity to keep singers engaged. I do a lot of work with pentatonic songs and rounds and write simple arrangements to layer parts that challenge a broad range of abilities."

And how can the choral director best structure those important first rehearsals with these beginning singers? "Voice-building is essential, but my focus with beginning singers is to find

ways to help them believe they can achieve success. To facilitate this, I usually start the first few classes with songs—easy group-singing in an accessible key and limited range as opposed to vocal warmups. I also use movement extensively; students are stepping, clapping, and conducting constantly. Movement frees and energizes the sound as well as keeps the engagement high. I use warmups to build the voice—with lower and upper extensions—the development of tone production and articulation, and expressive qualities," says Carlow. "I focus each rehearsal on a musical goal as well as a vocal goal and make sure I build the rehearsal around both goals."

Carlow notes that, ultimately, it is extremely important to give students many opportunities to sing well. "If we can find ways to nurture beautiful voices as the center of our curricula for ALL of our singers, we will continue to enrich the lives of our schools and communities." —Susan Poliniak



Instilling a "Can-Do" Attitude in the High School Guitar Classroom

Students, especially older ones without previous musical experience, can have fixed beliefs about their abilities; these can hinder their chances of successful music-learning. To avoid this, it's best to instill a positive attitude from the beginning. Andrew Pfaff, the music

Photo courtesy of Regina Carlow.

"Students need early success." —Regina Carlow



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teacher at Bergen County Technical High School, in Teterboro, New Jersey, has advice on this psychological aspect.

Most of Pfaff's students are 12th-graders, about half of whom have never played an instrument. "These musically-inexperienced, older beginners have more doubts and misgivings about their ability to learn guitar. This increased insecurity breeds a lot of 'I can't' statements," says Pfaff, who will be presenting on the topic at NAFME's In-Service Conference this November.

According to social cognitive theory, humans learn from observing each other. When students perceive themselves as capable in their accomplishments, through these observations and feedback from others, they have what the psychologist Albert Bandura calls self-efficacy. With this in mind, Pfaff says, "My first order of business is believing in my students from day one! I tell them how psyched I am for them that they are going to go from complete beginners on guitar to performing a concert in nine months!"

Pfaff uses Mel Bay's *Mastering the Guitar—Class Method* by William Bay and Mike Christiansen during the year. As the class progresses, he holds individual meetings in which the students practice a tiny portion of materials—sometimes just a few consecutive notes—and in these sessions he points out how they're advancing. "I make quite a big deal about the progress they just made in only a couple of minutes."

By December and January, the class is usually playing three- and four-part ensemble pieces. If Pfaff senses that the students are getting discouraged, he might ask the group to follow a piece's rhythms but substitute notes that are deliberately incorrect. "The wildly atonal but structurally coherent result usually gets a lot of laughs, but keeps



"My first order of business is believing in my students from day one!" —Andrew Pfaff

things light and makes the point that playing with intention and purpose counts for more than perfect accuracy."

The ensemble work is where things get quite fun. Each year, Pfaff arranges

a medley of six current favorites for his students to play, labeling each song with a rehearsal letter and not a title, so that the students get to figure out what they're playing. Pfaff

says, "Last year, we knew we were doing our job when from the back of the house we heard singing along to songs like 'Cheerleader' and 'Hotline Bling!'" —Adam Perlmutter

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