





# RECRUITING THE SHOW CHOIR BAND

by Garrett Breeze

Some choir programs struggle to recruit band players every year, while other schools have to turn students away. What usually makes the difference is building relationships. There's no one easy answer, but this article outlines some ideas to get you started.



PHOTO COURTESY HOMEROCK HIGH SCHOOL

### Build a Relationship with the Band Department

Show choir directors should do everything possible to build a supportive culture between the school's band and choir departments. You should encourage—or require—your students to attend band concerts, and consider having choral students surprise band students with locker signs before big contests and performances. Choir directors can volunteer to help in band rehearsals or bring their students to watch a dress rehearsal and give positive feedback. When the band directors feel like you understand and appreciate what their program does, they are more likely to be supportive of yours. Also, if band students feel supported by choir students, they are less likely to feel competitive with or jealous of the choir program.

### Consult with the Band Directors

Most band directors have no idea what is really involved with show choir. Take the time to educate them about your needs and what their students are going to get out of the experience of working with your choir. Ask if they want to be involved in rehearsal—or if they want to be part of the selection process for the band. They may not want anything to do with it—and that's okay—but a clear conversation will get everyone on the same page.

### Emphasize Show Choir's Real-World Significance

Band directors and students alike need to be reminded of this: For instrumentalists, there is no other activity in school that comes even close to providing the same kind of real-world experience that show choir does. If any of your band

students choose to have a career in music, the majority of their gigs are going to be just like show choir: playing with a rhythm section, accompanying singers, working with arrangers, taking the show on tour, dealing with the sound and setup of different venues, working with an arranger or producer, performing in pop/rock styles, and so on. That kind of professional preparation is going to put them way ahead of their competition, since show choir is an activity that so few get to participate in.

### Hold Auditions

You can always ask students to be involved if you're missing certain instruments, but holding an open audition can help those who make it feel accomplished. Plus, for some instruments, like guitar, you may find talented students that are not part of any music class at all.

### Put Band Students in Charge of Recruiting

Never underestimate the power of positive peer pressure. Your students know who the best players are, and they're more likely to participate if their friends are involved. When I was in high school, I had zero idea what show choir was. Sophomore year, my friend Monica told me there was an opening in show band and since I was first chair in jazz band, that meant the spot was mine. And that was it—I had no idea what I was getting into, but here I am.

### It's Okay if You Have to Supplement with Adult Players

Personally, I don't care for rules restricting the number of adults who can play in student bands. The bottom line is that having some students participating in show band is better than having none. And frankly, getting to play alongside experienced adult and professional performers is a great opportunity for students—that's something that should be celebrated and encouraged, not looked down on.

### Invite Your Show Choir Band to Social Activities

The members of your show band should be considered full and complete members

of the choir department. They should be invited to social activities, awards, and other events just like any accompanist would. Do everything you can to make them feel included.

### Give Your Student Band Members Responsibility

Find ways to hand over responsibility to band students like you do to section leaders and dance captains. Let them be in charge of equipment setup, recruiting, listening to judges' feedback, and even running rehearsal from time to time. The more ownership they have, the better.

### Don't Waste the Band's Time

Band kids are busy. The brass players especially are in demand for just about every ensemble in the school. So, make sure that you're utilizing band time effectively. Don't make them come to every rehearsal, and when they are there,

make sure the focus is on them. You can clean choreography or try on costumes at another time.

Having a dedicated student show band is going to make a huge difference to your program. It's a no-brainer—it's an amazing educational opportunity for them, and it's a money and time saver for you. Building up a dedicated show band program takes time just like anything else, but it's definitely worth it.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** With more than 1,000 show choir arrangements in circulation, Garrett Breeze is a sought-after clinician and adjudicator whose credits include film and television, Broadway stars, and Grammy-winning classical artists. His show choir music is available at [breezetunes.com](http://breezetunes.com) and he recently launched a new catalog of music for concert and church choirs at [holidaychoirmusic.com](http://holidaychoirmusic.com).

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