

# The Buckeye Voice

The Newsletter of Ohio NATS

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## Welcome to Our New Members!

*Lydia Nall, Akron*

*Natalie Sheppard, Cincinnati*

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*Spring Meeting*

**You asked and  
we listened!**

**Join us on ZOOM on  
March 28 at 9am.**

Do you have a colleague who might benefit from connecting with the Ohio NATS community?

Or students who would enjoy engaging with fellow singers? Please invite them to join us for a morning of free professional development and collegial exchange. Check out page 4 for details!

## A Note from the President Andrea Chenoweth Wells

This issue of The Buckeye Voice

celebrates the many ways our community continues to grow and thrive. Inside, we



recognize the winners of our online Children and Youth Competition and celebrate Ohio singers who represented our chapter at the Great Lakes Regional NATS Competition. We also look ahead to our upcoming Ohio NATS Spring Meeting, where members from across the state will share ideas, research, and practical strategies for the voice studio. In this issue, you'll find a preview of several sessions designed to spark conversation and inspire our teaching.

I hope to see many of you online at the Spring Meeting!



Congratulations to all the Ohio singers who participated in the Great Lakes Regional Auditions at Purdue University in Fort Wayne, IN (listed in alphabetical order)

### **First Place Winners**

- Ava Baker, MT 3B (Stephanie Henkle)
- Maya Carpenter, CL 7A-1 (Chad Payton)
- Fiona Coughlin, MT 7A (Susan Wallin)
- Martina DeLuccio, CM 7B (Susan Wallin)
- Grayson Griffith, MT 4A & 4B (Denise Milner Howell)
- Matthew Harris, CL 6A & 6B (Susan Foster)
- Alexandra Horwitz, CL 11 (Laurie Lashbrook)
- Eleanor Howell, MT 2 (Denise Milner Howell)
- Eleanor Lewis, CL &a-2 (Sarah Luebke)
- Sophia Longo, CL 9A (Debra Rentz)
- Ava Kimble, CM 2 (Denise Milner Howell)
- Fiona Thackaberry Stevens, CL 2 (Denise Milner Howell)
- Annalouise Tribus, CL 3A & 3B (Stephanie Henkle)
- Elliott (Ellie) Zupnick, CM 3A & 3B and MT 3A (Riane Gebhardt)

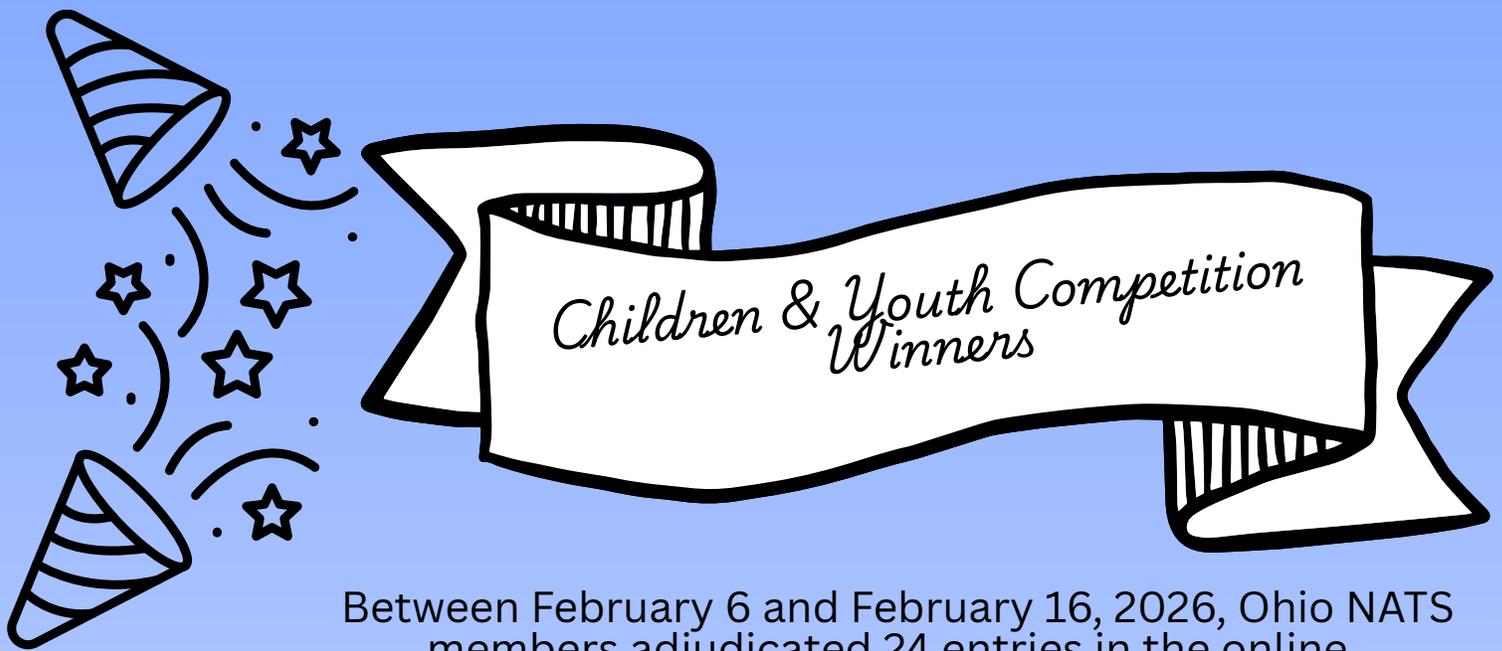
### **Second Place Winners**

- Ryan Boucher, MT 4A & 4B (Denise Milner Howell)
- Colleen Bur, CL 9B (Sarah Luebke)
- Berlin Butzer, CL 5B (Susan Wallin)
- Gianna Chase, MT 2 (Susan Wallin)
- Stella Eppink, MT 3A (Denise Milner Howell)
- Antonio George, CL 8A (Susan Foster)
- Abby Horn, CM 7B and MT 7B (Susan Wallin)
- Eleanor Howell, CM 2 (Denise Milner Howell)
- Lizzy Noall, CM 3A & 3B and MT 3B (Denise Milner Howell)
- Kendall Silber, CM 5A & 5B (Chad Payton)
- Anna Smith, CL 2 (Susan Wallin)
- Stella Vodilko, CL 3A & 3B (Denise Milner Howell)
- Katie Williams-Bravo, CL 9A (Debra Rentz)

### **Third Place Winners**

- Alana Carducci, MT 3A (Susan Wallin)
- Lila Echemann, MT 5A (Sarah Luebke)
- Isabella Farrell, CL 7A-2 (Nancy Maultsby)
- Ava Kimble, MT 2 (Denise Milner Howell)
- Caroline McKendry, CM 3A & 3B (Denise Milner Howell)
- Michael Sheely, CL 8B (Susan Foster)
- Leah Shi, CL 3A & 3B (Stephanie Henkle)
- Fiona Thackaberry Stevens, MT 2 (Denise Milner Howell)
- Britta Williams, CL 9A (Sarah Luebke)
- Gloree Wood, CL 7B (Susan Wallin)





Between February 6 and February 16, 2026, Ohio NATS members adjudicated 24 entries in the online Children and Youth competition.

Awards were given in the following categories:

CM 2B

First Place: Ava Kimble (Denise Milner Howell)

Second Place: Eleanor Howell (Denise Milner Howell)

MT 1A

First Place: Paige Lewis (Kimberly States)

MT 1B

First Place: Norah Langworthy (Kimberly States)

Second Place: Krya Rodenborn (Denise Milner Howell)

Third Place: Alina Nimjee (Justin Swain)

MT 2B

First Place: Ava Kimble (Denise Milner Howell)

Second Place: Natalie Spence (Kimberly States)

Third Place: Morgan Lehman (Kimberly States)

Honorable Mention: Fiona Thackaberry Stevens (Denise Milner Howell)



Congratulations to all!

## Spotlight On: Alison Acord



Alison Acord, DMA, is a Teaching Professor of Voice and the 2025 recipient of the Crossan Hays Curry Award for distinguished teaching at Miami University. She serves as Coordinator of the Voice Area and teaches voice and vocal pedagogy. Alison also serves as the advisor for the Miami Chapter of the Student NATS organization.

Alison has been heard in more than 40 operatic roles and as an orchestral soloist in the United States and abroad. The International School of Performing Arts, The Recording Industries' Music Performance Trust Fund, Grismer Fine Arts Fund, Havighurst Center for Russian

and Post Studies, and Doblinger Publishers Wien have all funded her performances and lectures on composers living and writing art song in the United States, Moldova, Ukraine, Latvia, Belarus, Russia, Great Britain, and Austria.

A native of Houston, Texas, Alison earned her bachelor's degree from Baylor University. As a Corbett Scholar, Alison earned her Master's, Artist Diploma, and Doctorate degrees in Vocal Performance and Vocal Pedagogy from the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music. An active member of the National Association of Teachers of Singing, Alison has served as Vice President, President, and District Governor for Ohio. She is also on faculty at AIMS in Graz and the Schmidt Vocal Institute for talented high school singers. .

Who should we spotlight next?  
Click [HERE](#) to nominate a colleague!

*Spring Meeting*

**You asked and we listened! This Spring's meeting has been shifted to an online experience.**

Click [this link](#) to join us on zoom!

The meeting schedule is as follows:

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 9:00          | Chapter Business Meeting  |
| 9:40 - 10:30  | From Image to Sound: Visualization and Laban Effort in Voice Teaching     |
| 10:30 - 11:20 | Beyond Technique: Teaching Private Voice Students How to Learn            |
| 11:30 - 12:20 | Building a Sustainable Voice Studio: Lessons from a Working Music School  |
| 12:20 - 1:10  | Singing Under Pressure: Stress, Trauma and Regulation in the Voice Studio |

## **Preview: Spring Meeting Sessions, March 27, 2026, on ZOOM**

The Ohio NATS Spring Meeting is just around the corner, and this year's program features a lively range of presentations from colleagues across the Buckeye State. From pedagogy and performance science to studio practice and professional development, the sessions promise fresh ideas and practical inspiration. Here's a preview of what's in store.

### **From Image to Sound: Visualization and Laban Effort in Voice Teaching** **Presenters: Dr. Alexandria Hanhold and Kate Merryman, MM**

Imagery-based strategies can play a powerful role in helping singers develop coordination, confidence, and expressive freedom. This session explores two complementary approaches that shift attention away from excessive internal control and toward intention, sensation, and musical outcome. The presentation will introduce visualization techniques such as mental rehearsal and performance simulation—tools widely used in athletics and performance psychology—as well as the application of Laban Effort theory as a framework for external focus in the voice studio. Participants will experience how effort qualities like glide, press, float, and punch can serve as kinesthetic prompts that support efficient vocal coordination while deepening expressive intention.

Attendees will leave with practical imagery-based strategies ready for immediate use in the studio.

### **Beyond Technique: Teaching Private Voice Students How to Learn** **Presenter: Dr. Chad Payton**

Voice teachers often focus on technique, repertoire, and performance preparation, yet many students struggle to retain concepts, memorize music, and practice effectively between lessons. These challenges are frequently interpreted as issues of motivation or effort when they may instead reflect gaps in learning strategy. This session reframes the voice studio as a space for both musical instruction and learning instruction. Drawing on Sandra McGuire's *Teach Students How to Learn* and Molly Gebrian's *Learn Faster, Perform Better*, the presentation introduces research-based approaches that help singers develop metacognition, strengthen memory, and practice more efficiently. Participants will explore strategies such as retrieval practice, spaced learning, and guided problem-solving that support long-term retention and independence.

Through brief lecture and interactive breakout activities, attendees will experience these methods firsthand and consider how they might reshape studio habits. The session invites voice teachers to cultivate singers who understand not only what to do, but how to learn effectively.

## Spring Meeting Sessions, cont.

### **Building a Sustainable Voice Studio: Lessons from a Working Music School**

*Presenter: Justin T. Swain, MM*

What does it take to build a thriving private voice studio? How can you grow your studio into a successful music school? In this practical session, Justin T. Swain shares insights from his journey as a business owner, academic, and entrepreneur. Now the founder of a rapidly growing music school in Central Ohio approaching its one-year anniversary, Swain will discuss the strategies that have helped him develop a sustainable and profitable teaching model.

The presentation will explore key considerations for voice teachers interested in strengthening the business side of their work, including studio structure, pricing models, student recruitment, and long-term sustainability. Drawing from real-world experience and lessons learned along the way, this session offers practical guidance for teachers who want to build studios that are both artistically fulfilling and financially viable.

Whether you are launching a private studio or looking to refine an existing one, attendees will leave with concrete ideas for developing a sustainable teaching practice.

### ***Singing Under Pressure: Stress, Trauma, and Regulation in the Voice Studio***

*Presenters: Dr. Benjamin Czarnota and Dr. Andrea Chenoweth Wells*

*Voice teachers increasingly recognize that stress plays a central role in how singers learn, regulate breath and coordination, and perform under pressure. Research in neuroscience and performance science shows that stress directly affects executive function, muscular tension, breathing patterns, and expressive freedom.*

*In this session, presenters introduce a practical framework for stress- and trauma-informed voice pedagogy, drawing on research in nervous-system regulation, polyvagal theory, and trauma-informed care. Participants will explore how stress and trauma may manifest in vocal behavior and how teachers can respond with studio strategies that support resilience, technical development, and artistic freedom.*

*Attendees will leave with practical tools for cultivating studio environments that promote both high artistic standards and nervous-system safety for singers.*

***We are looking forward to seeing you online on March 28, 2026 at 9am for this day of information-sharing and connection!***

# From “Apathy” to Agency: Reframing Gen Z Studio Behaviors as Executive Function Opportunities

**Dr. Chad R. Payton**

Voice teachers are noticing recurring patterns among Gen Z students: constant comparison, avoidance of challenging work, and a reluctance to pursue excellence because of the time, focus, and vulnerability it demands. These behaviors are often labeled as apathy, fragility, or a lack of work ethic. How can we reframe this through a growth mindset lens? Many of these behaviors reflect underdeveloped executive function, not a lack of potential.

Drawing on Sandra McGuire’s *Teach Students How to Learn*, Adam Grant’s *Hidden Potential*, and Jonathan Haidt’s *The Anxious Generation*, applied teachers can view the voice studio as a powerful site for teaching the cognitive and emotional skills students need to engage deeply with their learning.

## **A Generation Short on Practice, but Not on Pressure**

Haidt argues that Gen Z is the first generation to grow up with near-constant smartphone access, social media comparison, and adult-managed environments that cleared the way for independent problem-solving. The result is not laziness, but higher anxiety, lower tolerance for discomfort, and fewer chances to develop emotional regulation.

Executive function skills such as planning, sustained attention, emotional regulation, persistence, and self-assessment are not innate personality traits. They are learned through experience, and like any untrained muscle, can be developed. Current students have had fewer opportunities to practice them before arriving in our studios. Voice teachers, who work one-on-one with students over long periods of time, are uniquely positioned to help fill this gap.

## **Comparison as an Introduction to Metacognition**

Students’ frequent comparison to peers, recordings, or social media is often treated as a distraction or confidence issue. But comparison can also signal a student’s attempt to understand progress in a performance environment.

Instead of discouraging comparison altogether, we can redirect it



*Dr. Chad R. Payton serves as Associate Dean for Student Success, Professor of Voice, and Voice Area Head at Capital University, where he teaches voice and vocal pedagogy. Payton won the Praestantia Award for Outstanding Teaching in 2022, the Cotterman Award for Outstanding Service to Students in 2023, and was the inaugural winner of the Cooper Bing Spirit Award from Opera Columbus for his continued contributions to the operatic community.*

*He made his Carnegie Hall and Kennedy Center debuts in Michael Ching’s opera, Corps of Discovery: A Musical Journey. Internationally, he sang his Brazilian debut in Carmina Burana, and Italian debut with his professional ensemble, Payton and the Pipes, which also presented at numerous conferences throughout the United States. Dr. Payton is also on faculty at the Seagle Festival each summer.*

## From “Apathy” to Agency, cont.

toward executive function and metacognition:

- Help students distinguish between outcome comparison (“They’re better than me”) and process comparison (“They plan their practice more clearly”).
- Ask students to articulate what they believe others are doing differently.
- Guide them toward identifying controllable variables: practice structure, use of feedback, and repetition strategies.

This aligns directly with McGuire’s emphasis on teaching students how learning works. Comparison becomes data collection rather than a source of shame.

### **Avoidance Is Often a Planning Problem**

Avoidance - skipping practice, disengaging from technical challenges, or defaulting to familiar repertoire - is frequently interpreted as a motivation issue. McGuire and Grant both suggest otherwise: students often avoid work because they don’t know how to begin, how long it should take, or what “good effort” looks like.

Avoidance can be reframed as information.

Voice teachers can explicitly teach executive function by:

- Breaking practice into specific, time-bound tasks
- Modeling how to plan a 15-30 minute practice session
- Helping students anticipate mistakes and normalize them as a sign of learning

Grant emphasizes that growth accelerates when challenges are *hard but doable*. When students learn to respond to overwhelm with planning instead of withdrawal, avoidance decreases naturally.

### **“I Don’t Want to Be Excellent”...Yet**

Many Gen Z students resist chasing excellence not because they lack ambition, but because excellence appears synonymous with exhaustion, anxiety, and identity-level pressure. Haidt notes that anxiety increases

## From “Apathy” to Agency, cont.

when young people feel constant evaluation without a sense of control. Grant’s Hidden Potential offers a crucial reframe: excellence is not about obsession or intensity, but about consistency, systems, and habits. This creates space for voice teachers to redefine excellence in healthier terms:

- Reliability over perfection
- Technique over hope
- Follow-through over constant self-critique
- Incremental improvement over all-or-nothing effort

Teaching students how to manage time, energy, and attention helps them see excellence as achievable, not overwhelming.

The Voice Studio as a Laboratory for Learning How to Learn

McGuire’s work reminds us that most students have never been explicitly taught how to learn. Haidt shows us why many arrive anxious and risk averse. Grant shows us that potential is unlocked through systematic effort, not innate abilities.

The applied voice studio structure - weekly, individualized, and relational - is an ideal environment for teaching executive function alongside vocal technique. When we name planning, reflection, persistence, and emotional regulation as skills rather than character traits, we remove moral judgment and replace it with instruction.

By reframing Gen Z behaviors as developmental rather than deficient, we do more than improve practice habits. We help students build the cognitive foundations for artistry, resilience, and lifelong learning. In doing so, we are not lowering studio standards. We are teaching students how to reach them, even when we aren’t standing in front of them.

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We are raising funds to offer the **Ohio Vocal Arts Scholarship**.

This scholarship will support students who study voice with Ohio NATS-affiliated independent teachers and plan to continue their education at an Ohio college or university.

Once funded, the scholarship will provide \$2,000 to cover 32 hour-long lessons (\$60/hr) plus music and supplies.

To donate, click [HERE](#).

# Other News of Note



Remember to take a short survey about our chapter and the contents of future issues! Click [HERE!](#)

Save the Date! Next year's Fall Auditions will be held on Saturday, October 17, 2026 at the University of Dayton.



We invite you to submit articles, reflections, or resources for future issues of *The Buckeye Voice*! All perspectives are welcome! Not sure where to start? Reach out to [andreachenowethwells@gmail.com](mailto:andreachenowethwells@gmail.com)

2026 NATIONAL CONFERENCE

**OUR MOSAIC OF MUSIC**

JULY 3-7, 2026 \* SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

**REGISTER NOW**

Early-Bird Deadline is March 15!



**Spring Song**  
**Paul Laurence Dunbar**  
**(1872 - 1906)**

**A blue-bell springs upon the ledge,  
A lark sits singing in the hedge;  
Sweet perfumes scent the balmy air,  
And life is brimming everywhere.  
What lark and breeze and bluebird sing,  
Is Spring, Spring, Spring!**

**No more the air is sharp and cold;  
The planter wends across the wold,  
And, glad, beneath the shining sky  
We wander forth, my love and I.  
And ever in our hearts doth ring  
This song of Spring, Spring!**

**For life is life and love is love,  
'Twixt maid and man or dove and dove.  
Life may be short, life may be long,  
But love will come, and to its song  
Shall this refrain for ever cling  
Of Spring, Spring, Spring!**