

Bruce Bednarsky

School Music Teacher

While reading this column each month, did it ever occur to you that the person who handed you the magazine has a cool career? That's right—let's give it up for your music teacher!

Bruce Bednarsky, an especially hip instructor, usually brings his electric guitar to class at East Shore Middle School in Milford, Connecticut. When he isn't teaching with his six-string, Bruce is busy performing. He was psyched to tell MUSIC ALIVE! how these two activities interact in a very fulfilling profession.

Tell us about your earliest musical experiences.

I come from a musical family; my father played violin, and my mother played piano and flute. When I was 7, my parents were always catching me playing guitar with a broomstick, so they got me a real guitar. I had two years of guitar lessons, but the teacher eventually complained that I was moving too fast, and he asked me to leave! I said, "Forget about it," and I learned everything else by ear. Growing up in Stratford, Connecticut, I was around a lot of cool musicians—Aerosmith's future bass player was my best friend—and I learned a lot from just hanging out and playing in a rock band throughout high school.

When did you first decide to become a teacher?

Well, after I graduated from high school, I wasn't sure if I wanted to be a musician or go to a four-year college, so I went to community college to test the waters. There I met this amazing guitar teacher

named Sal Salvador, who showed me a whole different way of approaching music. I learned how to improvise—how to tell a story rather than just playing cool riffs. Immediately I delved into jazz musicians like [John] Coltrane and Miles [Davis]. I really wanted to get inside music on their deep level, and be able to teach others how to do so. There was no turning back.



What were your first teaching jobs like?

When I graduated with a music education degree from the University of Bridgeport in 1976, teaching jobs were scarce. I took an administrative position at Sacred Heart University, where I hired 11 teachers of various instruments: string, brass, woodwind. In the '80s, I taught part-time at Fairfield and Bridgeport Universities. To make ends meet, I took on private students, and I also played at a lot of weddings and nightclubs.

Did performing help your teaching?

I think playing benefits my teaching a lot. I think it helps bring an enthusiasm that I wouldn't otherwise have, and playing also allows

me to solve students' technical problems more easily.

Do you incorporate guitar in your teaching?

Absolutely! A while back, I thought it'd be ideal to bring the guitar to the classroom. Since students' favorite music usually has lots of guitar, they could really connect with the instrument. I spent some time researching methods of teaching class guitar, and then, armed with lots of ideas, I implemented a program. Now I find that the guitar really makes my job a lot easier, and it makes classes more enjoyable for the students.

What have your students taught you?

To be open-minded. They've kept me sharp on current trends and styles that I wouldn't normally gravitate to—rap-rock groups like Linkin Park. By taking an interest in their music, I've then been able to open them up to all periods of classical and jazz—music they might have gone through life knowing nothing about. This exchange helps my musicianship. It's ironic—my students make me a better performer.

What are the most rewarding aspects of your career?

I like being in a position where I can enrich lots of kids' lives through music and the arts. But even if I only got through to one student, my career would be rewarding! 