

2018

# Translucent Voices: Creating Sound Pedagogy And Safe Spaces For Transgender Singers In The Choral Rehearsal

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TRANSLUCENT VOICES: CREATING SOUND PEDAGOGY AND SAFE SPACES  
FOR TRANSGENDER SINGERS IN THE CHORAL REHEARSAL

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in

Conducting

School of Music

University of South Carolina

2018

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## DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to conductors, music educators, and singers who use their craft to fight for LGBTQ rights and social justice.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many hours of research and work have converged to create this document. The interest in this research would not have surfaced without my One Voice Chorus family in Charlotte, NC. While I have, of course, been exposed to amazing, talented, transgender persons, I have never had to give vocal training and advice (knowingly) to a transgender singer. One Voice challenged me to publicly take a stand for gender-inclusive language and to find answers to challenging questions—questions some of my colleagues would rather ignore.

I'm grateful for the support of the University of South Carolina School of Music faculty who've helped me become a better musician and scholar. I'm especially thankful for Dr. Larry Wyatt, Dr. Alicia Walker, and for the wisdom and grace of Dr. Birgitta Johnson, whose passion for excellence always propelled me towards my fullest potential.

The person for whom I'm most thankful is my father, John W. Gurss, who has always shown me the unconditional love and support all parents should show their children.

## ABSTRACT

While transgender rights and issues are gaining an increasing amount of attention in both pop culture and, to some extent, in the education sector, little information is available for the choral conductor that provides pedagogical tools for transitioning voices. This document provides conductor-educators with both a brief look at the transgender experience and also tools to create safe learning environments, from gender-inclusive language to vocal exercises to encourage healthy vocal transitions in transgender singers.

Twenty-first century choruses are not the first institutions in the realm of Western art music that have faced visual, aural, and enigmatic conceptualizations of gender and stereotypical gender roles. This document bridges centuries of gender nonconformity found in Western art music spanning Renaissance churches, to Baroque theatres, to the choral rehearsal spaces of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Both sonic and visual gender presentation are examined as well as the points at which these two seemingly diverge and intersect.

The study of transitioning transgender singers' voices is emerging research. However, Western music history does offer several examples of both visual and sonic blurring of gender presentation, such as boy choirs, castrati, pants roles, and popular music styles like Doo-Wop where high falsetto singing is a key element.

A review of current literature concerning transgender issues in music education and speech pathology is discussed. Additionally, this document is built upon a survey of

154 singers, both cisgender and transgender. The survey respondents share both positive and negative experiences relating to interactions with choral conductors and the rehearsals in which the singers engage. Their experiences are case studies on the impact of the conductor-teacher's use of language during rehearsals.

Language, especially the use of gendered pronouns and gendering entire sections within the chorus, can be psychologically damaging to both cisgender and transgender singers. The document examines ways in which conductor-teachers can avoid using gender altogether when addressing members of the chorus. In addition to language misuse, transgender survey respondents who are undergoing physical transition identify vocal hurdles due to the introduction of artificial hormones and thus, undergoing (for many) a second puberty.

By comparing FtM and MtF vocal transition to cisgender male and female puberty, one can extract the similarities that both singers will face in terms of developing a healthy new voice. The document will offer a series of exercises designed to help transgender singers transition into their new voices with maximum success. Finally, the document will offer two methods by which conductors can be inclusive of transgender singers in the programming choices of choral repertoire. The first type aids transitioning singers in being successful with a new voice with an ever-changing range. The second type of repertoire is that which champions the work of transgender composers or whose text is concerned with transgender persons, thus normalizing the transgender experience and creating opportunities for educational discussions within the chorus.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
List of Figures.....	x
List of Acronyms and Abbreviations.....	xi
Glossary.....	xii
Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Methodology.....	2
A Note About GALA Choruses' Impact on Choral Music in America.....	5
What's the T?.....	6
Sonic and Visual Gender Blurring Examples in Western Music History.....	9
Speech Pathology.....	14
A "T" in the Road: A Guide to the Document.....	17
Chapter 2: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF GENDER PRESENTATION IN WESTERN MUSIC.....	20
Painful Truth: The Castrati.....	21
Countertenors: High Voice Without the High Price.....	24
Male Falsetto Singing.....	26
Pants Roles and Female Tenors and Basses.....	28

...And the Rest is Drag: Crossing Gender Lines On and Off Stage.....	30
Breaking Out: Contemporary Classical Trans Singers .....	33
Chapter 3: CREATING SAFE SPACES IN THE CHORAL REHEARSAL: INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE.....	35
The Transgender Experience: Who is in Your Rehearsal Space? .....	39
Voice as Identity .....	45
The Clothes Make the Man or Woman: Performance Apparel .....	47
Chapter 4: THE “SECOND PUBERTY:” FACTS AND MISCONCEPTIONS OF COMPARING CISGENDER MALE PUBERTY TO FEMALE TO MALE TRANSITION.....	50
Cisgender Puberty.....	50
Cisgender Male Puberty and FtM Transition: A Comparison .....	52
Vocal Problems During Cisgender Male Puberty and FtM Transition.....	57
Vocal Range and Gender Identity.....	59
Healthy Transitions: Breath Support and Head Voice.....	61
Chapter 5: A BRIEF DISCUSSION OF THE TRANSWOMAN’S SINGING VOICE AND SUGGESTED VOCALISES FOR FTM TRANSGENDER VOICES IN TRANSITION .....	62
MtF Transition: Vocal Possibilities .....	62
Vocal Hurdles and Misleading Information .....	65
Vocalises: Coaxing the Voice Into Healthy Phonation.....	67
Repertoire Aiding in the Success of Transgender Singers’ Choral Experience ....	79
Other Factors Inhibiting Vocal Success.....	81
Helping the Trans Singer Find a Speech Pathologist.....	83
Chapter 6: CONCLUSIONS AND AREAS OF FURTHER REASEARCH.....	85
Research Conclusions .....	85

Areas of Further Research .....	89
References.....	92
Appendix A: Translucent Voices Survey Questions .....	99
Appendix B: Choral Repertoire Suggestions for Trans Inclusivity .....	102
Appendix C: Sandi Hammond Phone Interview: September 10, 2017 .....	104
Appendix D: Noah Beller In-Person Interview: September 5, 2017, 6:25PM Unitarian Universalist Church Of Charlotte .....	109
Appendix E: Mari Esabel Valverde Skype Interview: October 23, 2016.....	120
Appendix F: Gerald Gurs DMA Conducting Recital Programs.....	123

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Brief List of Male Falsetto Singers in 20 <sup>th</sup> Century Popular Music .....	27
Figure 2.2 Popular Music Examples of Females with Low Vocal Ranges .....	29
Figure 3.1 Sexual Orientations of MtF Respondents.....	40
Figure 3.2 Sexual Orientations of FtM Respondents.....	41
Figure 3.3 Incidents of Harassment or Assault by Geographic Region.....	43
Figure 3.4 Participation in the Underground Economy by Race .....	44
Figure 3.5 Daniel R. Boone’s Voice Fingerprint Components.....	46
Figure 4.1: Average Ages of Transition for Transgender Persons .....	54
Figure 4.2 Comparison of Bio-Male Puberty and FtM Transition Vocal Problems.....	58
Figure 5.1 Example of Post-Phonolaryngeal Surgery Vocal Range.....	64
Figure 5.2 Exercise to Increase Vocal Range .....	70
Figure 5.3 Vocal Exercise to Create Forward Tone Placement .....	71
Figure 5.4 Vocal Exercise Designed to Encourage Vocal Fold Closure .....	71
Figure 5.5 Unvoiced and Voiced Fricative Consonant Pairs.....	72
Figure 5.6 Exercise for Building Greater Breath Capacity .....	73
Figure 5.7 Exercise Categories Needed for Healthy FtM Transition .....	75
Figure 5.8 Vocal Exercise to Reduce Jaw Tension .....	77
Figure 5.9 Vocal Exercise Designed to Reduce Tongue Tension .....	78
Figure 5.10 Psychosocial Issues in TS/TG Transition and Voice Disorders .....	82

## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- Cis**.....Cisgender. Denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their assigned sex at birth.
- FtM**.....Female to Male. A transgender person who has physically transitioned from female to male.
- GALA**..... Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses.
- LGBTQ** ..... An acronym used to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning individuals and communities. LGBTQ is often incorrectly used as a synonym for “non-heterosexual,” which incorrectly implies that transgender is a sexual orientation.
- LGBTQIAA**..... The longer, less often used, acronym used to refer to the broader Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and Affirming communities.
- MOGAI (adjective)**..... Marginalized Orientations, Gender Alignments, and Intersex
- MtF**.....Male to Female. A transgender person who has physically transitioned from male to female.
- Trans** .....Transgender.
- TS**..... Transsexual.
- TS/TG:**..... Transsexual/Transgender.



## GLOSSARY

**Affirming:** Usually used in the context of the LGBTQ community, “affirming” is a label designated to the unconditional support and value of persons regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.<sup>1</sup>

**Agender:** Denoting or relating to a person who does not identify themselves as having a particular gender.

**Androgynous:** The state of being outwardly undetectable by one’s physical appearance or mannerisms as either female or male.

**Asexual:**

1. (adj.) Without sexual feelings or associations.
2. (noun) A person who has no sexual feelings or desires.

**Binder:** A restrictive garment which is worn over the breasts to create the appearance that one does not have breasts.

**Biological sex:** The combination of genitals, chromosomes and hormones,

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<sup>1</sup> Some definitions in the glossary are based on definitions found in *The Teaching Transgender Toolkit: A Facilitator’s Guide to Increasing Knowledge, Decreasing Prejudice and Building Skills* (Green and Mauer, 2015).

usually categorized as “male” or “female” at the time of birth, based on visual inspection of the genitals via ultrasound. Many people make the assumption that a person’s gender identity will be congruent with their biological sex assignment.

Everyone has a biological sex.

**Bisexual:** A person who is sexually attracted to both men and women.

**Cisgender (also abbreviated. “cis”):** An adjective describing someone whose gender identity and biological sex assigned at birth are congruent.

**Coming Out:** The process through which a person acknowledges and explains their identity to others and themselves. Coming out may involve gender identity, sexuality, health status, or any number of identity components one has previously chosen not to share. Before coming out, a person is said to be “closeted” or “in the closet” regarding their choice to hide specific components of their identity.

**Gender:** Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men—such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies between cultures and can be changed over time. Gender is not the sex assigned at birth, but rather the learned behaviors and norms shaping interactions with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities, and work places.

**Gender Attribution:** The process by which an observer decides which gender they believe another person to be. Attribution occurs at both the personal and societal level. A person or society may ascribe a gender and/or sex onto a person with or without knowing concretely which sex that person is or with which gender they identify. Parts of attribution include: mannerisms, apparel, makeup, vocal inflection, walk, and sometimes name.

**Gender Dysphoria:** Gender dysphoria is a formal diagnosis in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition (DSM 5)*. Gender dysphoria is the condition whereby one's feelings and psychological identity as male or female are opposite to their biological sex. A gender dysphoria diagnosis is used by psychologists and physicians to indicate that a person meets the diagnostic criteria to engage in medical transition, or the "medical diagnosis for being transgender." The inclusion of Gender Dysphoria as a diagnosis in the DSM 5 is controversial in transgender communities because it implies that being transgender is a mental illness rather than a valid identity. On the other hand, since a formal diagnosis is generally required in order to receive or provide sexual reassignment surgery in the U.S., it does provide access to medical care for some transgender people who wouldn't otherwise qualify for medical care if they care to transition via surgical means.

**Gender Expression:** A person's outward, physical and material presentation of gender identity which may vary depending on differing societal norms. The expression is usually comprised of personal style, clothing, makeup, hairstyle, jewelry, body language, and even vocal inflection and range. Gender expression may be categorized as feminine, masculine, or androgynous. All people, subconsciously or consciously, express a gender. The expression may be congruent with a person's gender identity. It can also be incongruent, as a defense mechanism if a person does not feel safe expressing their gender identity in a given environment, or if one does not have the resources needed to engage in the gender expression that reflects their gender identity.

**Gender Identity:** A person's deep-seated, internal sense of the gender with which they identify themselves. All people have a gender identity.

**Gender Neutral:** A term that describes something, an inanimate object, not a person, that is not segregated by sex/gender. Some language, such as pronouns, can also be gender neutral. Sometimes a space, such as a bathroom, or an item, such as a piece of clothing can be described as gender neutral.

**Gender Non-Conforming:** A person whose gender expression is perceived as being inconsistent with cultural norms expected for that gender. Specifically, when boys/men are described as not being masculine enough or are feminine, or when girls/women are described as not being feminine enough or are masculine. Not all

transgender people are gender non-conforming, and not all gender nonconforming people identify as transgender. Cisgender people may also be gender non conforming, for example, when wearing gender neutral clothing or performing gendered mannerisms that do not match their assigned cisgender presentation. Gender nonconformity is often inaccurately confused with sexual orientation.

**Heterosexual:** A person who is attracted to persons of the opposite sex.

**Homosexual:** A person who is attracted to persons of the same sex.

**Intersex:** The term for a person who is born with both male and female reproductive and/or sexual anatomy. A person may appear outwardly to be male, while having internal sex organs that are female and vice versa. A person's internal and external sex organs may be underdeveloped or aligned with both sexes making visual designation of sex at birth difficult. Sometimes a person's intersex organs are not discovered until the onset of puberty. An intersex person may also have a chromosomal genotype other than the typical XX or XY seen in human females and males, respectively. Being intersex is completely separate from sexual orientation.

**Questioning:** A person who is exploring their gender identity or expression. Some may later identify as transgender or gender nonconforming, while others may not.

Questioning can also refer to someone who is questioning their sexual orientation. A questioning person is not considered homosexual or transgender.

**Second Puberty:** The puberty-like period and associated physiological changes that coincide with the introduction of testosterone in transmen. Second puberty, due to its nature, is experienced by transmen at various ages.

**Sexual Orientation:** A person's attraction (emotional, psychological, physical, and/or sexual) towards other people. A person may be attracted to people of the same sex (homosexual), to those of a different sex (heterosexual), or to both sexes (bisexual), or to people regardless of sex, sexual orientation, gender, or gender-identity (pansexual). And some people do not experience primary sexual attraction, and may identify as asexual. All people have a sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is distinctive from biological sex, gender identity and gender expression.

**Transgender (also abbreviated “Trans” or “TG”):** An adjective used to describe someone whose gender identity is incongruent with (or does not “match”) the biological sex they were assigned at birth.

**Transman/men:** A person who identifies as male but was assigned female at birth. This is preferred because other language, such as FtM or female-to-male, puts more

emphasis on biological sex rather than affirming gender identity. This term does not assume or infer sexual reassignment surgery has taken place.

**Transsexual (also abbreviated “TS”):**

1. A person who emotionally and psychologically feels that they belong to the opposite sex.
2. A person who has undergone treatment in order to acquire the physical characteristics of the opposite sex.

**Transwoman/women:** A person who identifies as female, but was assigned male at birth.

This is preferred because other language, such as MtF or male-to-female, puts more emphasis on biological sex rather than affirming gender identity. This term does not assume or infer sexual reassignment surgery has taken place.

**Womyn/myn’s:** nonstandard spelling of “women” adopted by some feminists in order to avoid the word ending *–men*. The first print appearance of this word was in 1976 referring to the first Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In most choruses, a gender-binary construct exists within the voice classification system. Most adult/young adult choruses, by nature, designate the soprano/alto classifications for women, and the tenor/bass classifications for men. This very structure, thus, creates two specific problems for today's choral world in relation to gender identity—for both the singers and the conductors. For example, a transgender singer (a singer who might not outwardly display their inward gender), or a singer who outwardly presents their gender, but whose voice does not match the traditional gender associated with a specific voice placement in the SATB construct, may be assigned to sing in a section where the ascribed vocal range is uncomfortable or unhealthy. Additionally, the conductor could easily fall into the habit of addressing sections of the chorus, colloquially, as “ladies,” or “men.” Furthermore, very little information is available to most choral conductors regarding the changes experienced by transgender singers undergoing physical transitioning processes, particularly those that involve hormone therapy. My hope is to provide a chart for those trajectories based on specific hormone usage, so that conductors can help transgender singers identify the range where their voices will sound over the course of a typical 3 or 4-month concert rehearsal cycle.



This document will serve choral conductors as both a resource for understanding transgender individuals and voices in the chorus, and a resource for creating gender-inclusive rehearsal spaces. The project will explore the nature of both the FtM (female to male) and MtF (male to female) transgender voice and offer a trajectory of vocal range changes during the course of specific hormone treatments. The document will provide a repertory of vocal exercises and pedagogical practices to help these singers with their vocal transitions. This document will incorporate but also expand upon the literature that addresses changes in young cisgender<sup>2</sup> males due to the onset of puberty, as one way to help examine healthy vocal development for the FtM voice transition. In addition to physical, vocal, comfort and health, this document will aid conductors in creating psychologically comfortable, healthy, rehearsal spaces.

### **Methodology**

I developed and disseminated an IRB-approved qualitative survey entitled the “Translucent Voices Survey” to document transgender singers’ experiences and suggestions related to healthy, safe, rehearsal spaces. The survey, executed via the online survey platform SurveyMonkey.com, asked singers to expand upon moments when transgender singers felt uncomfortable or threatened in choral rehearsals. Singers were asked open-ended questions regarding what made rehearsal spaces feel either safe or unsafe. Additionally, survey respondents were asked general surface data including: geography, preferred gender pronouns, and voice classification both pre and post hormone therapy. I disseminated the survey through both the GALA Choruses email listserve; whereby, conductors distributed the survey to their singers if they chose. The

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<sup>2</sup> Cisgender refers to those individuals whose gender identity and physical presentation of that identity align.

survey received 154 responses, which encompasses respondents from 22 of the 50 United States, and 12 respondents from Ontario Canada. The respondents were both cisgender and transgender singers.

Interviews with transgender persons or professionals who work with transgender singers accompanied and supported both the survey data and extant literature concerning transgender singers. An important amount of these interviews took place at the Trans Voices Conference at Earlham College in January of 2017.

In January of 2017, I attended the first national Trans Singing Voice Conference at Earlham College in Richmond, IN. There I listened to lectures by and had interviews with other scholars who were researching the transgender voice. Two of the scholars were Lindsey Deaton, the former director of the Trans Chorus of L.A., and Danielle Steele who, at the time, was the assistant director of choral studies at Earlham College and who had many private voice students who identified as transgender. Another important component of the conference was vocal pedagogy of transgender singers. Assistance was offered to choral directors in the direction of leading healthy warm-ups, choosing repertoire, and voice placement testing. Speech pathologist and voice specialist, Erin N. Donahue, gave additional presentations regarding vocal health.

Two other important interviews were the results of my own personal networks as a choral conductor and composer. The first was with Mari Esabel Valverde. Mari is an emerging transgender composer of choral music and a semi-professional singer. The second interview was with Noah Beller, a singer in the One Voice Chorus in Charlotte, NC, which I conduct. Noah shared his experiences as a transgender singer in grammar school choirs as well as his experience as an out, adult, transgender singer. Finally, Sandi

Hammond, voice teacher and founding conductor for the Butterfly Chorus in Boston, MA, was interviewed, and she shared her ideas on choral warm-ups for the transgender voice as well as her voice placement strategy for transitioning trans voices.

In addition to a review of current literature regarding transgender singers and voices, I compared the research already performed in the field of puberty onset in the cisgender male voice with extant research regarding the FtM physical transition as it relates to the singing voice. I also reviewed both YouTube and Facebook resources concerning transitioning transgender voices, which yielded both safe and unsafe pedagogical practices for transitioning voices.

Since the inception of this project, I interviewed transgender singers, created a survey that will be sent to GALA member choruses using the Survey Monkey online survey platform, and have reviewed several online blogs and videos by transitioning transgender singers. I was invited to and attended the first national transgender singing workshop in January of 2017, entitled, “The Transgender Singing Voice,” hosted by Earlham College in Richmond, IN.

Little research has been done outside of the realm of private voice instruction in terms of meeting the needs of transgender singers in choral rehearsals. The knowledge and training required for choral singing can be vastly different from the training received for solo performance. From 2000-2012, only 1.6% of all articles published in education journals had any mention of LGBT students.<sup>3</sup> Astonishingly, the first article to appear in a peer-reviewed music education journal pertaining to LGBT students was in 2009. In that article, “Sexual Orientation and Music Education: Continuing a Tradition,” author

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<sup>3</sup> Danielle Steele, “New Directions: What's Next?” (lecture, Earlham College, Richmond, IN, January 22, 2017).

Louis Bergonzi discusses the harmful effects of strict heteronormativity as it relates to both language and repertoire in the classroom.<sup>4</sup> Since that time, educator Joshua Palkki has led the research initiative of trans inclusivity in music education. Palkki has had two articles published in *The Choral Journal* (2015 and 2017). Much of what is known about the actual pedagogy of transgender singers as it relates to the choral warm-up and rehearsal process is known because of the GALA (Gay And Lesbian Association of Choruses) choral movement.

The goal of this document will be empowering conductors with not only a gender-inclusive language for rehearsals, but also with knowledge to assist in the voice placement (and testing) of transitioning transgender singers, including a trajectory chart for prescribed hormones. The chart will assist conductors in making educated assertions as to the affected highness or lowness in vocal range during the various stages of a transitioning transgender voice, whether FtM or MtF.

### **A Note About GALA Choruses' Impact on Choral Music in America**

Although both feminist and gay men's choruses emerged in the mid to late 70s<sup>5</sup>, GALA as an official organization began in 1983. The GALA movement was mostly a response to the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic in the gay community as a way to protest the lack of government acknowledgement of the crisis. The movement also provided financial support for needed research. The GALA Choruses website, [www.galachoruses.org](http://www.galachoruses.org), has a specific page dedicated to helping transgender singers with

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<sup>4</sup> Louis Bergonzi, "Sexual Orientation and Music Education: Continuing a Tradition," *Music Educators Journal* 96, no. 2 (December 2009): 21. The *Music Educators Journal* is the official journal of MENC (Music Educators National Conference).

<sup>5</sup> Ana Crusis Women's Choir of Philadelphia, PA. was founded in 1975, and the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus was founded in 1978.

their voice and has a section helping choral conductors to learn how to incorporate gender-inclusive language into the rehearsals.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the GALA, the LGBTQA (LGBT, Queer and Allied) choruses, two transgender-specific choruses have emerged in the United States: The Butterfly Chorus of Boston, MA (founded in 2014), and the Trans Chorus of Los Angeles, CA (founded in 2015). The Trans Chorus of LA was a grassroots effort financially backed by the Gay Men's Chorus of LA to bring awareness to the social inequities faced by the transgender community, and thus, the Gay Men's Chorus of LA is an umbrella organization for the Trans Chorus of LA. The most helpful technique to choral conductors from the directors of these two choruses has been how to make transgender singers successful in traditionally gender-binary SATB, TTBB, and SSAA choral structures.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the GALA movement supplies creative ways to promote emotionally-safe spaces.

### **What's the T?**

Since the Stonewall riots of 1969, the rights of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) people have advanced significantly in social sectors. In 1968, the Metropolitan Community Church was founded in Huntington Park, CA as an international Protestant Christian church whose focus was outreach to LGBT families and communities. In 2011, President Barack Obama signed the repeal of "Don't Ask Don't Tell:" a law that kept many military men and women closeted in order to keep their jobs. In 2015, the Supreme Court ruled that gay marriage was not unconstitutional, which forced the individual states to legally recognize same-sex unions. Today, many schools

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<sup>6</sup> <http://galachoruses.org/resource-center/singers/transgender-voices>

<sup>7</sup> Sandi Hammond, cisgender, is the director of the Butterfly Chorus of Boston and is a teacher at the Boston Conservatory. The Trans Chorus of L.A. is directed by Lindsey Deaton, former director of the Cincinnati Youth Chorus, and is herself a transwoman.

have anti-bullying regulations, many places of employment have LGBT-specific nondiscrimination policies, and some mainstream Protestant denominations have welcomed the LGBT community to their congregations and vocations of service.

However, the acronym LGBT is a complex conglomeration of several communities, and this has impacted how transgender persons have been regarded by society. Three of the letters, “LG and B,” denote sexual orientations, while the “T” is not at all a sexual preference, but rather, is a realm of gender identity (i.e., a transgender individual may be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or straight). Yet, “T” has been lumped together with “LG” and “B” as if they were the same and diametrically opposed to heterosexuality. While civil rights have evolved significantly for gay and lesbian people, the transgender community struggles to gain equality in many spheres, including, employment, education, healthcare, and acceptance by the general public. Ultimately, transgender persons are still fighting to be accepted for their expression of gender regardless of their physical presentation and not regarded merely as a lifestyle choice or deviant behavior.<sup>8</sup>

Compared to 4.6% of the cisgender population, an estimated 41% of transgender people will attempt suicide during their lives.<sup>9</sup> While public and social places have made the quality of life safer for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, many institutions have made

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<sup>8</sup> Historically, the medical community has described transgender persons as having the condition known as gender dysphoria. This phenomenon is defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders as, “A marked incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender, of at least 6 months’ duration” and manifested by a series of other symptoms and behaviors further described in the most recent edition of the manual. See [https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria?\\_ga=1.6789810.147256135.1488203794](https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria?_ga=1.6789810.147256135.1488203794)

<sup>9</sup> Laura Ungar, "Transgender People Face Alarming High Risk of Suicide," *usatoday.com*, last modified August 16, 2015, accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/08/16/transgender-individuals-face-high-rates--suicide-attempts/31626633/>.

little progress in the protection and welcoming of transgender (T) people. The chorus is a social institution lacking gender inclusiveness. As leaders of musical social institutions, choral conductors not only have a professional responsibility to provide sound vocal pedagogy to transgender singers, but also a social responsibility to create equitable space for all singers in the chorus, regardless of their gender identity or identity questioning status.

Choruses, stereotypically, operate within a gender-binary construct, both visually and aurally. Presumptive expectations exist about the pitch one hears from male and female singers and what type of performance attire each will wear. One may sing in a men's chorus (TB), a women's chorus (SA), or a mixed chorus (SATB)—mixed gender, where the women singing the SA parts and the men singing the TB parts. Visually, the men will wear black tuxedos, and the women will wear black dresses. What do female tenors and baritones do? The countertenor? What does the transwoman do? Wear the tux because, although female in gender, she has the outward appearance of being male, when she wants to wear the garment that most correlates to her gender identity? And the transman—wear a dress? It makes just as much sense as asking the cisgender man to wear a dress - - not visually conforming to the gender to which he identifies. A parallel problem of outward presentation is the aural presentation that transgender singers may or may not be able to match to the visual. FtM singers, due to the introduction of testosterone in the body, typically, will eventually acquire a lower-sounding voice, thus matching the outward male appearance. MtF singers however, will have a harder time acquiring a higher, more female-sounding, voice due to the fact that testosterone has already lengthened their vocal folds during puberty.

## Sonic and Visual Gender Blurring Examples in Western Music History

It is said that the voice does not possess gender; however, singers do. However, one often hears singing and attributes that sound as either male or female. An early example of sonic gender blurring<sup>10</sup> is found in the early Catholic Church. The Second Synod of Troyes, A.D 551, forbade lay persons (including women) within the chancel. This tradition continued well into the Twentieth Century. The Pope did not sanction women to sing during the Mass until 1955. In 1955, Pope Pius XII sanctioned the singing of women during the Mass in his encyclical writing *Musicae Sacrae*. Because women were not allowed to sing in the Mass up to that point, only men and boys were employed in the choir. Thus, the traditionally gender-biased SATB construct was actually all male, allowing the soprano and alto parts to be sung by both boys whose voices had not undergone the hormonal changes of puberty and by adult men singing in their falsetto, or countertenors. Without the visual aspect of a performance, the untrained listener could easily assume that the higher notes being heard were being sung by biologically female sopranos and altos. One should note that, a difference exists between historical examples of liturgical and performance-based sonic and visual gender crossing from actual instances of the transgender voice as it is identified in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Musicologist Joke Dame asks and notes the following, “Does the voice have a gender? One is inclined to say that it does. After all, in most cases we do hear correctly whether a voice comes from a female or a male body . . . Equally in Western art music

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<sup>10</sup> In this specific instance, “sonic gender blurring” refers to experiencing a sound that while knowingly or unknowingly is produced by males, yet has the range stereotypically associated with female singers. For example, an amateur musician hears an evensong at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. To the amateur ear, one hears an SATB chorus, when in fact, the same aural experience created by an SATB chorus is being created by a choral ensemble composed of adult men and boys whose voice have not yet changed, thus capable of singing in the soprano range.



and non-Western music there are examples that might give rise to the doubts as to the “genderedness” of the voice.”<sup>11</sup> Her point is that; while one’s singing voice is related to gender identity, it does not itself define gender. Arguably, examples exist that give rise to doubts about fixed ideas regarding the genderedness of a singing voice. Some examples include: the countertenor voice, male falsettists, and female basses.

Like modern conflicts with the acceptance of gender identity, historical examples exist surrounding gender presentation and the practices whereby gender presentation was executed. The Baroque practice of castrating young boys with promise to have amazing singing careers as castrated male sopranos (or *castrati*) was gender and sonic blurring at its worst. In the hopes of riches, the operatic world of the Baroque era gave rise to mutilation in an effort to have men singing in the soprano range, in a powerful and virtuosic way. Often times, because the male hormones released during puberty were not yet present, the *castrati* not only had a powerful soprano range, but also an androgynous appearance. Naturally then, to the audience member, the aura of the *castrati* lay not only in the soprano or alto sound coming from a male voice, but also in the context of a male whose appearance was somewhat feminine—both an aural and visual ambiguity of gender. This exploitive and harmful practice saw its end by the late 1800s.

Pants roles, or *travesti* roles, present a similar aural ambiguity alongside the visual gender presentation. The pants role spans Western art music from the early operas of Handel in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the modern Janáček opera, *From the House of the Dead* in

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<sup>11</sup> Joke Dame, *Unveiled Voices: Sexual Difference and the Castrato*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary Thomas, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2006), [139].

1928.<sup>12</sup> The unsuspecting opera-goer could experience the role of Cherubino in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* as both a sonic and visual illusion. In the *travesti* role, not only is the adolescent male character, Cherubino, being played by a woman, but also the sound of the male character's voice is that of a mezzo-soprano—a usually female-associated sound. To the listener, Cherubino's singing voice sounds nothing like an adolescent boy's voice singing in the same register. Additionally, musicologist Naomi André addresses not only the pants role, but also the pants role in its relationship to the power dynamics of the characters within opera. She writes that the pants role is often the “second woman” - - a role of lesser importance and of lesser social stature.<sup>13</sup> Other writings on pants roles include Joy Ratliff's, doctoral thesis, “Women in Pants: Male Roles for the Mezzo-Soprano or Contralto Voice,” which includes a comprehensive guide to male roles traditionally played by women as well as an account of the roles that were intended to be pants roles but are not done so today by repertory opera companies.<sup>14</sup>

Voice pedagogues have also written on the topic of modern study of the countertenor voice, which is a sonic gender blur. In 1996, the late vocal pedagogue, Richard Miller, wrote about the teaching of countertenors and male falsettists and included language addressing the need to teach not only vocal technique, as appropriate to the modal voice,<sup>15</sup> but he also addressed the comfort level of the singer trying to sing

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<sup>12</sup> Tabita C. Iwamoto, “Trouser Roles – The Development of the Role in Opera from the Seventeenth to Twentieth Century” (master's thesis, Georgia State University, 2012), [43-45].

<sup>13</sup> Naomi André, *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early-Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Joy Ratliff, “Women in Pants: Male Roles for the Mezzo-Soprano Or Contralto Voice” (doctoral thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Modal voice is another term for the vocal register most closely associated with the speaking voice. For example, a tenor sings in “modal voice” up to a certain height, before the need to switch to the falsetto register, which will only serve to continue singing up to a certain height beyond the modal voice.

in a register not normally ascribed to his/her specific sex.<sup>16</sup> He states that as long as there is a public appreciation (demand) for the voice, the training of that voice should proliferate, even though the performance life of the countertenor is often limited due to the tendency to sing with laryngeal gapping (some degree of open vocal folds, whereby breath escapes and is thereby not turned into tone).<sup>17</sup>

The presence of the countertenor voice is prevalent today throughout the English boy choir tradition and some Anglican choral traditions with both men and boys. One can readily hear the voice in such modern choral ensembles as Chanticleer and Voces8. Composers are also utilizing the solo countertenor voice. American composer, Jake Heggie, composed “Encountertenor” in 1995 for countertenor and piano, and Estonian composer, Arvo Pärt, composed “My Heart is in the Highlands” in 2012 for countertenor and organ. While the countertenor has endured, that aural blur does not stand alone as the only aural enigma spanning centuries of vocal practice. In addition to Western art music, a male singing in falsetto is prevalent in popular music, for example, the iconic 1961 release of the Tokens’ “The Lion Sleeps Tonight.”

Men singing in their falsetto range was a common feature of jubilee gospel groups of the 1920s and 1930s. These groups were all-male jubilee groups, and they usually sang predominantly a cappella. Unlike their distant and choral-based forbearers with groups such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Hampton Institute Singers, the jubilee-style groups featured a high lead tenor who often sang in falsetto. The jubilee tradition endured well into the 1930s and 1940s. At that time, some of the jubilee groups crossed over into

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<sup>16</sup> Renae Perry, "Countertenors or Male Falsettists: The Problem of the High Male Voice," prezi.com, last modified May 5, 2014, accessed November 20, 2016, <https://prezi.com/qnww-0jnp-ed/countertenors-or-male-falsettists-the-problem-of-the-high-m/>.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Miller, *On the Art of Singing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), [133].

pop music styles like doo-wop and vocal group rock and roll. Some of the jubilee groups recorded gospel records under one name and rhythm and blues and rock and roll records under another.<sup>18</sup>

During the 1950s and 1960s, American popular music saw the rise of the rhythm and blues doo-wop groups, who were (usually) all male or all female vocal groups characterized by the use of both repetitive rhythmic vocal fillers and repetitive chord progressions such as I-vi-IV-V or I-vi-ii-V. Their contribution to popular music vocal groups was the use of the double tenor or two-tenor vocal line. Typically, the high tenor voice in the doo-wop group had mastery of the high falsetto voice and was often referred to as the “floating tenor.” A good example of the floating tenor is Alexander Sharp who sang floating tenor for the Orioles 1953 cover of “Crying in the Chapel.”

Falsetto singing stretched the decades of the twentieth century pop music scene with artists like Smokie Robinson, Barry Gibbs, Michael Jackson, Aaron Neville, and Prince in the realms of soul, disco, folk, and rock music. Contemporary pop artists who use falsetto singing include Justin Timberlake, Sam Smith, Frank Ocean, and Pharrell Williams. Even though the ear may perceive the falsetto sound (at times) for being a female singer, the aforementioned singers are biologically male. The gender of those singers is something completely unknown to anyone except the singers themselves, as that concept is not outwardly apparent.

Musicologists, especially the pioneering works of Susan McClary, have started studies to demonstrate how issues of sexuality, gender and music intersect. Her 1991 book, *Feminine Endings* is the first book-length work to address gender and sexuality as

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<sup>18</sup> Nelson George, *Death of Rhythm and Blues*, NY: Penguin Books, 1988.

they relate to music.<sup>19</sup> It has set a precedent for the analysis of music through these lenses. The book is a collection of essays exploring sexuality and feminism in Western music. Its scope spans the musicological timeline from Monteverdi, to Schubert to modern composer Jenika Vandervelde. Musicologist Jann Palser of the University of California San Diego says, of McClary's writing, that it makes the reader ponder the following questions: What is or might be the feminine in music? How is music a gendered discourse? What constitutes feminine pleasure and desire, especially as suggested or manipulated in musical compositions?<sup>20</sup>

### **Speech Pathology**

Even though one is inclined to prescribe gender based on the highness or lowness of the voice, to reiterate Dame's point, the voice itself does not have gender; however, singers do. When a transgender person seeks to express their gender through the singing voice, the result is sometimes unsuccessful due to physical limitations, and the end result is the singer's inability to "pass"<sup>21</sup> as their chosen gender. As academic institutions and choruses within those institutions progress in their acceptance of all people regardless of gender identity, a clear need for the vocal pedagogy of transgender individuals presents itself. Much of the early research in this field parallels rehabilitation exercises used in speech pathology presented in the *Academic Journal for Singing* published in 2006.

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<sup>19</sup>Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

<sup>20</sup> Palser, Jann. "Some Thoughts on Susan McClary's 'Feminine Endings'" *Perspectives of New Music* 30, no. 2 (1992): 203. doi:10.2307/3090634.

<sup>21</sup> Passing is a term designated for those people whose gender identity and their physical expression of that identity match. In the case of the voice, "passing" would occur when the aural nature of the singing voice matches the stereotypical association with the outward physical expression of a specific gender (e.g. a transwoman whose voice sounds like a mezzo or soprano, and not a baritone).

Speech Pathologists such as Erin Donahue are beginning to see an increasing number of transgender patients, primarily MtF patients whose physical transitions and HRT (hormone replacement therapy) cannot reverse the effects of male puberty, whereby, their vocal chords are both thickened and lengthened, producing a speaking voice approximately one octave lower than before puberty. The goal of the therapist in working with the MtF patients is to provide vocal function exercises leading to the production of a healthy, higher, speaking pitch.<sup>22</sup>

Speech pathologist Shelagh Davies has created a video blog for MtF persons wanting to use their voices more in the female register. Davies is a clinical Assistant Professor in the School of Audiology and Speech Sciences, Faculty of Medicine at the University of British Columbia (Additionally, she is a member of the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) and has published an article on transgender voices in transition, published in the NATS e-newsletter, *Intermezzo*).<sup>23</sup> Speech pathologist Donahue offers an admonition that, many YouTube channels and vlogs circulate misinformation from other singers who are neither medical professionals, nor experts of the singing voice. Davies' practice is based out of British Columbia, Canada; however, many transgender singers receive her help via her website.<sup>24</sup> While the vlog primarily focuses on the speaking voice, basic singing techniques are also discussed.

Mary Gorham-Rowan and Richard Morris and others note what is known about the transitioning voice of the transgender singer is that the achievement of the “passing

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<sup>22</sup> Erin Donahue, “Speech Therapy, Singing and Transgender Clients: Medicine Meets Music” (lecture, Earlham College, Richmond, IN, January 22, 2017). Donahue works at two progressive speech pathology clinics in Ohio, where she sees transgender patients: Blaine Block Voice Institute (Dayton, OH) and Professional Voice Center of Greater Cincinnati (Cincinnati, OH)

<sup>23</sup> “Training the Transgender Singer – Finding the Voice Inside.” Published in *Intermezzo*, the e-newsletter of the National Association of Teachers of Singing, April 14, 2016.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.shelaghdavies.com/workshops/>

voice” for FtM (Female to Male) is much more easily [sic] achieved than the MtF transformation. In MtF transition, estrogen blocks the production of testosterone, but does not reverse the thickening of the male vocal folds, thus resulting in the stability of a male-sounding speaking and singing voice.<sup>25</sup> Recent publications and resources that address transitioning voices include both Vindhya Khare’s doctoral thesis from the University of Miami, “The Influence of Sex Hormones on the Female Singing Voice: A Review of Literature, 1971-2016” and the Nancy Bos blog, “Considerations for Teaching Transgender Singers in College Voice.”<sup>26</sup> Khare’s thesis, while not specifically addressing transgender singers, addresses the hormones prescribed to MtF patients, and similar trajectories for the FtM voice on continued use of testosterone are found in the writings of Richard Alder.

Emerging research has been done in the research of both solo voice pedagogy and choral methodology in regards to transgender singers. The most recent book aiding in the pedagogy of transgender singers was published in 2012: *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Transsexual Client: A Comprehensive and Clinical Guide*.<sup>27</sup> This book by Adler, Hirsch, and Mordaunt is an excellent advocate in promoting the field of vocal health in clinical spaces, but it does little to aid educators in helping their transgender students to produce healthy singing with their new voices in performance and rehearsal settings. The next step in the advancement of transgender singing research is

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<sup>25</sup> Mary Gorham-Rowan and Richard Morris, “Aerodynamic Analysis of Male-to-Female Transgender Voice,” *Journal of Voice* 20, no. 2 (June 2006).

<sup>26</sup> Nancy Bos, “Considerations for Teaching Transgender Singers in College Voice,” entry posted September 16, 2016, accessed November 20, 2016, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/considerations-teaching-transgender-singers-college-nancy-bos-costlow>.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Kenneth Adler, Sandy Hirsch, and Michelle Mordaunt, *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Transsexual Client: A Comprehensive Clinical Guide* (San Diego, CA: Plural Pub., 2012).

both the fusion (clinical and pedagogical) and distribution of the research. In developing a transgender pedagogy, one must look backward to the earlier research made in the boy's changing voice, as similarities will exist particularly for the FtM transformation (which is a form of secondary puberty for FtM persons). While most of the research in speech pathology focuses on the FtM transitioning voice, my research is in the interest of creating healthy rehearsal techniques for choral conductors with the consideration of both FtM and MtF singers.

### **A “T” In the Road: A Guide to the Document**

Given that little research exists in the field of vocal pedagogy for transitioning singers, especially as it relates to the choral rehearsal, this research is socially relevant. A need also exists for available pedagogical tools to assist conductors as transgender singers make a transition not only into their physical gender but also into the world of choral music. To add to the research, this document will fuse together helpful examples from research on the boy's changing voice and research on the FtM transitioning voice to create exercises aimed at helping transgender singers with a smooth, healthy, vocal transition.

Chapter two, “A Brief Historical Overview of Gender Presentation in Western Music,” discusses sonic and visual examples of both Western art music and Western pop music and culture. The chapter discusses the extinct castrato practice and the pants role—both emerging from Baroque opera of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Additionally, male falsettists/countertenors and female basses are discussed in the context of both popular music and modern choral ensembles of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Additionally, drag



performance in today's popular culture is discussed. Finally, the chapter concludes with the accounts of two modern transgender opera singers: one MtF and one FtM.

Chapter three, "Creating Safe Spaces in the Choral Rehearsal: Inclusive Language and Pedagogical Practice," focuses on providing conductors and music educators with the transgender narrative. Conductor-teachers may not have access to the latest information and statistics surrounding the transgender community: socioeconomic struggles, access to healthcare, sexual assault, domestic abuse, and race-related factors influencing the occurrence of these statistics for different people. This chapter also provides conductor-educators with knowledge in using respectful and inclusive language in rehearsals as well as creative solutions to gender-based performance attire.

Chapter four, "The 'Second Puberty:' Facts and Misconceptions of Comparing Cisgender Male Puberty to Female to Male Transition," offers a comparison between cisgender male puberty and FtM transition. The physiological ramifications of hormone therapy for transmen are compared with natural development of cisgender puberty. The chapter exposes and examines misconceptions that cisgender male puberty and FtM transition are largely similar. The discussion continues by drawing parallels between vocal problems that can occur in both cisgender male puberty and FtM transition. The work of transmale speech pathologist and professional singer, Alexandros Constansis, serves as a model for the comparison, and further examples are drawn from the Translucent Voices survey.

Chapter five, "A Brief Discussion of the Transwoman's Singing Voice and Suggested Vocalises for Transgender Voice in Transition," furthers the discussion of FtM singers, offering conductor-teachers some vocal exercises to assist in a healthy transition

from a former higher-pitch voice into a more traditionally male tenor/bass voice. Much of the pedagogy behind the exercises are a synthesis of the vocal development theories of speech pathologist and trained trans singer Alexandros Constansis and Henry Leck's research concerning the boys' changing voices. Finally, the chapter discusses the spectrum of extant possibilities for the MtF voice, which can be much more difficult to train as passably "female-sounding."

## CHAPTER 2

### A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF GENDER PRESENTATION IN WESTERN MUSIC

For centuries, examples of aural and visual gender-based ambiguities were woven into regular practice in Western classical and popular music. The earliest Christian singers appointed to office in the Church were called cantors, and they were found primarily in wealthy port cities, such as Naples and Marseilles, around 500 A.D.<sup>28</sup> Author Christopher Page notes that the Church at that time was not yet practicing Catholicism as it is known today, but rather it had an evangelism focus in port cities and the Asian trade routes. The earliest Roman Catholic ‘canonical singers’ or *kanonikoi psaltai* were inducted into the office of psalmist. The major criteria for being selected to the office of psalmist was literacy, especially the ability to read from parchment paper.<sup>29</sup> In terms of hierarchy of Church leadership, the earliest offices descended: bishop, presbyter, deacon, subdeacon, reader, singer, exorcist, doorkeeper, and ascetic.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the first sonic blurring of gender seen in the early Church was the favorable sound of young boys. Prepubescent boys, obviously, has the range and purity as their prepubescent female

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<sup>28</sup> Christopher Page, *The Christian West and Its Singers: The First Thousand Years*, London: Yale University Press, 2010: 11.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 91-92.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 98-99.

counterparts. Since the Church saw innocence and sexual purity as favorable character traits of the cantors and lectors, young boys were often believed to be the epitome of these qualities.<sup>31</sup> These ideals were based on the writings of Matthew (18:3) where Christ tells his disciples they shall not pass into the kingdom of heaven unless they become as little children.<sup>32</sup> The Synod of Antioch in 379 specified that men and women could not “combine together on the same melody,” so most congregations divided into two choruses for antiphonal psalm singing: one men, and the other women and children. Both St. Boniface (c675-754) and Pope Leo IV reigned 847-855) forbade female choirs from singing in the church.<sup>33</sup> Some scholars believe that the Church based that mode of thinking on the words of St. Paul, who said in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, “Let your women keep silent in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also says the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husband at home: for it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church.”<sup>34</sup> Composers still writing for SATB ensembles used boy sopranos and altos as well as castrati, rather than employing the female altos and sopranos who were forbidden to sing. In 1958, Pope Pius XII allowed for female singers only outside the presbytery and altar precinct. The Codex of Church Law of 1983 granted that any layperson, male or female, could fulfill the role of a singer in the chancel choirs.

### **Painful Truth: The Castrati**

In Italy (predominantly) from 1550 to the late 19th Century boys who were singing in the chapel choirs were castrated in their guardians’ hopes of having a viable

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 111-112.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>33</sup> Laura Prichard, “What Did Women Sing? A Chronology Concerning Female Choristers,” Presented at The Phenomenon of Singing International Symposium IX, July 7-10, 2013.

<sup>34</sup> King James Version translation.

singing voice worthy of a higher financial compensation. Feldman notes that the last castrato died in 1922.<sup>35</sup> In the castration process, boys were either given opium or had their carotid artery pressed upon to induce coma-like effects. Additionally, they would be soaked in ice baths to create a type of anesthesia.<sup>36</sup> The testes were removed either by crushing them into atrophy or by, more commonly, excision.<sup>37</sup> An 1898 photograph of the Sistine Chapel choir reveals that a quarter of the choir was castrati: seven castrati out of a total of twenty-eight singers.<sup>38</sup>

The term “castrato” was considered derogatory, and thus, these singers in their time were referred to politely as “musicians,” “eunuchs,” “emasculated singers,” or simply “sopranos.”<sup>39</sup> The castrati were men who were castrated before puberty and whose resonating structures (larynx and chest) would grow larger than that of a biological woman. This procedure gave those who had the innate ability to sing not only the vocal range of a biologically-female alto or soprano, but also a vocal resonance and power greater than their female counterparts. The vocal effect was not similar for all castrati, thus, some singers had lower, contralto voices, and others had more medium-range mezzo-soprano voices; others developed high soprano ranges. No standard instrument was produced from the castration procedure. Even the tone quality of the singers’ voices after castration was varied; some singers had sweet tones, while others were strident and

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<sup>35</sup> Martha Feldman, *The Castrato: Reflections on Natures and Kinds*, Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015: xi.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Patrick Barbier, *The World of the Castrati: The History of an Extraordinary Operatic Phenomenon*, London: Souvenir Press, 1996: 16.

<sup>39</sup> Martha Feldman, xi.

harsh.<sup>40</sup> Patrick Barbier, author of *The World of the Castrati*, noted, “The castrato embodied the trinity - the man, woman and child.”<sup>41</sup>

The castrati were the vocal heroes of their time, and they often performed operatic roles portraying powerful heroes. Master composers such as Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643), Georg Frideric Handel (1685-1759), and Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714-1787) were certainly no strangers to both recognizing heroes and writing music for male heroes. Sometimes, the castrati were also given leading female roles, thus creating a homoerotic element in the story. The central figures of their *opera seria* were male heroes drawn from Greek tragedies. The listeners had an aural experience of the male role being sung by castrati – the male hero thus having a female attribute to the pitch of the voice. In his 1607 opera, *L’Orfeo*, castrati played both female roles of Eurydice and Prosperina. The idea of the trinity embodiment – male, female, and a “third sex”— is most noticeable in the world of 17th-Century opera. Musicologist Martha Feldman notes:

As interest in elite forms of singing coincided with a late-16th-century economic crisis that left parents worried for their children’s survival, the number of castrations sharply increased . . . many had noble patrons, and as performers they impersonated heroes and princes to an audience of kings—while simultaneously taking part in an increasingly mercantile system. The most successful virtuosos became rich, independent professionals, acting as their own agents in a new economy. One of the most acclaimed castrati, Farinelli, was “absolutely benighted with royalty, absolutely loyal, a monarchist 1,000 percent.”<sup>42</sup>

While the castrati reached its height of popularity in the 17th and 18th centuries, operatic roles were still being written for the castrato voice in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as well: Arsace in Rossini's *Aureliano in Palmira* (1813) and Armando in Meyerbeer's *Il crociato in Egitto*

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Patrick Barbier, *The World of the Castrati: The History of an Extraordinary Operatic Phenomenon*, London: Souvenir Press, 1996: 31.

<sup>42</sup> Martha Feldman, “Hit the High Notes,” In *University of Chicago Magazine* online, Vol. 99, No. 6: July/August 2007.

(1824). The lines of gender presentation - both aural and physical - and gender roles were crossed by the very nature of adult males whose voices sounded like females, and who often played opposite each other. For example, two castrati portraying heterosexual lovers on stage, yet sounding, if not looking, like two women. Some of the effects of prepubescent castration often included longer limbs and feminine features. Researcher Leah Mickens notes, “The *castrati* had a peculiar “in-between” status in European society, in that they were biologically male but weren’t considered men in the social or psychological sense.”<sup>43</sup> Mickens adds:

The *castrati* issue needs to be raised more as a reminder that in the not-so-distant past, the Catholic Church didn’t have a problem with certain people modifying their bodies in ways that it would now consider to be “against nature.” In fact, the current Church teaching that a person’s birth sex should never be altered or blurred has more in common with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment view that the Church once found so threatening than its own previous opinion that considered the existence of a perpetual eunuch class to be essential to the operation of the Church. The Catholic Church of the Baroque and Classical eras could appreciate and exploit the sense of the grotesque and the uncanny that *castrati* evoked, whereas the contemporary Church must defend a rigid gender binary to justify its reactionary teachings on the all-male priesthood, LGBT rights, and the role of women.<sup>44</sup>

### **Countertenors: High Voice Without the High Price**

Like the castrato, whose vocal range more closely associated with a traditionally female range, the countertenor is a biologically male singer whose singing voice resembles that of a biologically female voice. As seen with castrati, countertenors also come in various timbral colors and vocal ranges. Some sing higher, like sopranos, while others singer in the lower, contralto, range. Two huge differences distinguish the countertenor from the castrato: physical structure and experience. First, countertenors

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<sup>43</sup> Leah Mickens, “Theology of the Old Body: The Castrati, the Church, and the Transgender Movement,” In *Free Inquiry - The Journal of the Council for Secular Humanism*, Vol. 35, No. 5 (July 2015).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

have testes, and were not castrated at any point in their life. Additionally, countertenors are singing in head voice (falsetto)—not a true voice that has been carried over from blocking the onset of male puberty. Second, most countertenors were trained as either baritone or tenor before making the decision to perform and train as a countertenor. For example, American Countertenor David Daniels trained as a tenor before making the switch to countertenor while studying at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. Opera historian Rupert Christiansen compares the countertenor and castrati voices:

Today most countertenors regard castrati as a gold standard that cannot be matched. For a start, their hormonal peculiarities gave castrati an unbeatable advantage. Their rib cages were absolutely enormous, like battery chickens, and they never needed to breathe. This lung capacity made their voices even more powerful than a woman's or a boy's, while their child-size vocal cords enabled them to zip up and down registers with dizzying speed and agility.<sup>45</sup>

Like the castrati, countertenors also have various timbres. David Daniels' sound is pure and lyrical, while English countertenor, Andrea Scholl's tone is more earthy, dark, quality.

As the practice of castrato singers was eliminated, many of the operatic roles originally conceived for them are now performed by countertenors or mezzo-sopranos. One such role is the title role in Handel's *Giulio Cesare*. The Metropolitan Opera first placed countertenors on stage in its 1988-89 season for their production of Handel's *Giulio Cesare*. The program featured countertenors Jeffrey Gall and Derek lee Ragin. The Met revived the opera in 1994 and featured three different countertenors: David Daniels, Brian Asawa, and Daniel Taylor.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Fernanda Eberstadt, "Who Can Resist a Man Who Sings Like a Woman?," in *The New York Times* online, November 19, 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Mary Campbell, "Countertenor's Voice Challenges Conventions of Music, Masculinity," in *LA Times* online, May 2, 1999.



French countertenor Philippe Jaroussky remarks on the nature of the countertenor voice: “It’s true that there is something potentially ridiculous about this voice coming out of a man’s body. People talk about the countertenor being a third sex, or something quasi female, but I think for me it’s more a way of staying a child.” Typically, the countertenor singer has the gender presentation of a man, but can sing in the range of most female mezzos and/or sopranos.

The use of countertenor today is common in both choral and solo voice mediums. In both English and American professional choirs, one sees extensive employment of the countertenor as a viable alto-soprano supplement for example, The King’s Singers, Voces8, and Chanticleer. While the countertenor has endured, that masculine/feminine aural blur does not stand alone as the only aural enigma spanning centuries of vocal practice.

The appearance of the voice type in classical solo performance capacity is equally pervasive. American composers Ned Rorem (b.1948) and Jake Heggie (b. 1961) have both written art song cycles for countertenor Brian Asawa: “More than a Day” and “Encountertenor,” respectively. Contemporary composer Arvo Pärt has a work for countertenor and organ entitled, “My Heart is in the Highlands.”

### **Male Falsetto Singing**

In popular music from pop to gospel to rock, many examples exist of males using the falsetto. While the countertenor voice is primarily a classical music phenomenon, falsetto singing is one of a few registers in which males can sing and is not the only register male singers choose when singing popular music. For example, when Frankie Lymon (1942-1968) sings, “Why Do Fools Fall in Love?” (1956), Lymon easily flips

back and forth between singing in his chest voice and his falsetto. One can hear falsetto singing from the sounds of 1961 release of the Tokens’ “The Lion Sleeps Tonight,” to the early 2000s recording by Daniel Beddingfield, “If You’re Not the One.” Most recently, English pop artist, Sam Smith (b. 1992), became a sensation with the release of his first album, *In the Lonely Hour* (2014). His Grammy Award-winning song, “Stay With Me,” is on that album, and for his vocals on that song and his first chart-topper, “Latch,” he has been referred to as the “male Adele.”<sup>47</sup> Decades before Sam Smith, Frankie Valli showed off his falsetto with hits such as “Walk like a Man (1963)” and “Big Girls Don’t Cry (1964).” The Motown label also provided great examples of falsettists such as Smokey Robinson and The Miracles’ “I Second that Emotion (1969)” and Marvin Gaye’s “I Heard it Through the Grapevine (1968).” Falsetto singing is prevalent in multiple genres including: doo-wop, rock, R&B, gospel, and soul. For further examples, see Figure 2.1.

Artist	Genre	Group	Song Example
Jay Siegel	Doo-wop	The Tokens	“The Lion Sleeps Tonight” (1961)
Frankie Valli	Rock and Roll	The Four Seasons	“Sherry” (1962)
Eddie Kendricks	R&B/Soul	The Temptations	“My Girl” (1964)
Freddie Mercury	Rock	Queen	“Take My Breath Away” (1976)
Philip Bailey	R&B, soul, disco, funk	Earth, Wind & Fire	“The reasons” (1975)
Barry Gibb	Disco	Bee Gees	“More Than a Woman” (1977)
El DeBarge	R&B, soul	The DeBarge	“I Like It” (1982)
Prince	Rock, R&B	Solo artist	“If I Was Your Girlfriend” (1987)
Daniel Beddingfield	Pop/rock	Solo artist	“If You’re Not the One” (2002)
Justin Timberlake	Pop	Solo artist	“Mirrors” (2013)
Thomas Allen	Gospel	Solo artist	“And He Blessed My Soul” (2013)

Figure 2.1 Brief List of Male Falsetto Singers in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Popular Music

<sup>47</sup> Smith was a fan of Adele since he was 16 years old, and in an interview with Rolling Stone magazine in 2015, Smith admits he hates being compared to her.

## Pants Roles and Female Tenors and Basses

Both the castrati and the countertenor create a sonic/aural gender blur bridging the masculine to the feminine, and the reciprocals to those voices are both the pants (or trouser) role mezzo-soprano and the female tenors and basses. Both create a gender blur in the reverse direction, from the feminine to the masculine. While historically there are no accounts of the mutilation of young girls to maintain some favored vocal characteristic, many Western composers have written pants, or “trouser,” roles for women singing mezzo-soprano or soprano parts but portraying male roles on stage.

As seen with the castrati, both sexuality and gender can become ambiguous when one watches a pants role performance. Tabita Iwamoto writes in her thesis:

Understanding the trouser role in opera is also to understand the importance that they have as a sexual icon, even if it is covered and only exist inside peoples’ minds, in the audience, and also inside the singer’s. With the exception of the numerous roles that were once written for castrati and are now performed by women, trouser roles written intentionally for women is a way of exposing the sexuality in some way. It will be either a character of a young teenager speaking of an immature love or a young man, awaking the imagination, as Strauss uses Octavian<sup>48</sup> for his expression.<sup>49</sup>

While many of the pants roles performed today are from *opera seria*, and were originally written for castrati, a large body of works exist whose roles were intended to be sung by women portraying male roles including: Edoardo in Rossini’s *Matilde di Shabran* (1821), Hänsel in Humperdinck’s *Hänsel und Gretel* (1893), and Aljeja in Janáček’s *From the House of the Dead* (1928),<sup>50</sup> and Ariel in Ades’ *The Tempest* (2004).

In the vocal group context, one can find examples of female tenors, baritones, and basses in the all-female and Grammy Award-winning group, Sweet Honey in the Rock.

<sup>48</sup> This character is found in the Strauss opera, *Der Rosenkavalier*.

<sup>49</sup> Tabita C. Iwamoto, "Trouser Roles - The Development of the Role in Opera from the Seventeenth to Twentieth Century," Thesis, Georgia State University, 2012: 13-14.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

Sweet Honey in the Rock is a performance ensemble rooted in African American historical and cultural song repertoire. Ysaye Maria Barnwell is notably the most prolific female bass to have sung with the group, and one can hear a prime example of her vocal bass prowess in the 1993 recording of her composition “No Mirrors in My Nana’s House,”<sup>51</sup> from the album, *Still on the Journey*.

As seen earlier with examples of falsetto singers in popular music, women also have a role in sonic gender blurring within popular music. Although rare, some female singers have the ability to sing as low as the bass range. Two examples are Icelandic cabaret singer, Hallbjörg Bjarnadóttir (1915-1997), and contemporary gospel singer, Melonie Daniels. Bjarnadóttir, who lived a portion of her life in the United States, had the ability to sing “Old Man River,” from the musical, *Showboat*, in the original key,<sup>52</sup> which was written for a bass.

Artist	Genre	Song Example	Lowest Range
Shirley Bassey	Pop, jazz, film	“This Is My Life” (1968)	Tenor
Billie Holiday	Jazz	“God Bless the Child” (1968)	Tenor
Oleta Adams	Soul, gospel	“Get here” (1990)	Tenor
Annie Lennox	Pop-rock	“Why” (1992)	Tenor
Lady GaGa	Pop-rock, jazz, singer/songwriter	“You and I” (2011)	Tenor
Tracy Chapman	R&B, singer/songwriter, pop-rock	“Give Me One Reason” (1995)	tenor/baritone
Toni Braxton	R&B	“Unbreak My Heart” (1996)	tenor/baritone
Marlene Dietrich	Cabaret, film	“La Vie en rose” (1950)	Baritone
Lalah Hathaway	R&B, soul, jazz	“Naked Truth” (2008)	Baritone
Hallbjörg Bjarnadóttir	Cabaret	“Old Man River” (1960)	Bass
Melonie Daniels	Gospel, R&B	“He Lives” (2012)	bass

Figure 2.2 Popular Music Examples of Females with Low Vocal Ranges

<sup>51</sup> This song was disseminated to a generation of American children via animated music video featured on the children’s television network, Nick Jr., years later in the 2000s.

<sup>52</sup> This excerpt can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kJWGMGdJwkk>

A more contemporary example of a female with an ability to sing in the bass register is gospel singer, Melonie Daniels. Daniels is featured in a fan-created compilation video posted to YouTube.com where she is heard singing from F2 up to D6.<sup>53</sup>

For more examples of popular music where female singers are singing in tenor, baritone, and bass ranges, see Figure 2.2.

### **...And the Rest is Drag: Crossing Gender Lines On and Off Stage**

In addition to the realm of classical operatic and choral music, and popular music genres, one finds examples of blurred gender lines in drag performance among both drag queens and drag kings.<sup>54</sup> Not only does drag performance cross lines of gender presentation, the performers themselves also cross those same lines as some queens are cisgender and perform as opposite gender personalities, while other queens are trans women or men who perform in drag culture as the gender with which they identify. While most drag kings and queens do not actually sing, but rather lip-sync, some drag performer do. San Francisco-based drag quartet “The Kinsey Sicks” sings all of their performances a cappella, which often includes original music and lyrics.

Two other drag performers who sing their own music are Shangela Wadley and Willam Belli. Wadley appeared in seasons two and three of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, and Belli was a contestant on season four of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*. Both are masters of female impersonation and creating parodies of known pop songs. In 2015, Wadley released a parody of Bruno Mars’ “Uptown Funk,” called “Uptown Fish” in which, she sang her

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<sup>53</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFXZQAU NXag>

<sup>54</sup> Drag performance is included in the discussion of Western music gender blurring because many drag queens and kings do not lip-sync, but rather, they provide the lead vocals to their own performances.

own vocals. Also known simply as “Willam,” the drag performer Willam Belli has had two hit parodies including “Chow Down at Chik-fil-A,” and “That Boy is a Bottom.”

Researcher Loran-Renee Marsan says that drag is more than wearing the clothes of the opposite sex; “It has come to refer more specifically to ‘queens’ and ‘kings’ who perform parodic, excessive, or hyperbolic femininity or masculinity, and has a rich history of challenging and subverting traditional ideals of gender and sexuality.”<sup>55</sup>

Whereas transgender individuals sometimes want to strive for passing—the successful presentation of the opposite sex or gender—Laran adds, drag has the “specific intention to fail.”<sup>56</sup> Trans personas are not attempting to fail, nor are those personas making an attempt to entertain an audience.<sup>57</sup> Another difference between drag performance and trans person’s gender presentation is personal safety. For some transgender persons, failure to pass could ultimately lead to death. Certainly, transgender persons and drag performers are not the only individuals trying to “pass” in daily life. A gay man in an attempt not to be harassed or ridiculed may try to pass in public places by being closeted or even married—marriage being a social convention that often assumes heterosexuality of males.

One of the leading modern drag performers is Emmy Award winner (2016 and 2017), RuPaul, and in an interview that same year with NPR’s radio personality, Kelly McEvers, Rupaul discusses both the essence and importance of drag performance. RuPaul states, “Drag, at its core, is about challenging the idea of identity. It actually mocks identity.” He continues, “You’re born naked, and the rest is drag. Drag is what

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<sup>55</sup> Loran-Renee Marsan, “Critical Crossings: Intersections of Passing and Drag in Popular Culture,” Doctoral thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2012: 5-6.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>57</sup> Some drag performers are also transgender.

you put on after you get out of the shower. We're all playing these roles, you know? Even as a kid, I remember thinking, why aren't we talking about the fact that everybody's playing a role, right?"<sup>58</sup> Everybody is playing a role gay people, straight people, transgender people, professionals and blue-collar workers. RuPaul began performing drag in the Deep South during the Reagan era in the 1980s as a sort of revolt. He states, ". . . not just a revolt against the status quo, but as a revolt against, you know, this hyper masculine culture. Especially even in the gay culture that idolizes hyper masculine culture. You know what? F-you to all you. I'm gonna do all of the things that we were told not to do."<sup>59</sup> RuPaul's reality show is now in its tenth season. The show began airing in 2009 on the TV station, LOGO<sup>60</sup>, which targeted LGBTQ viewers. In 2017, the show became more popular, if not mainstream, when it was moved to cable TV station, VH1 while going into syndication on LOGO. *RuPaul's Drag Race* brought the art form of drag performance to an international audience, thus increasing its visibility and popularity

Drag, at its most basic purpose is a not a phenomenon exclusive to the LGTBQ community. As drag relates to heteronormativity and gender, researcher Elizabeth Ruchti discusses the "John Wayne effect. John Wayne - American, white, masculine - is noted as a symbol of twentieth century masculinity in America, but where is the truth in his masculinity? Actors play roles for a living. Should American males be held to a masculine norm created by an actor . . . an actor born Marion Mitchell Morrison? John Wayne's birth name was Marion Mitchell Morrison. Ruchti writes, "To understand John Wayne and his relationship to American masculinity, we must trace the history of his

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<sup>58</sup> Kelly McEvers, "Shante, He Stays: RuPaul Reflects On Decades Of Drag — And 2 Emmy Nominations," *All Things Considered* (blog), Entry posted August 25, 2016.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> LOGO is an American digital cable and satellite television channel that is owned by Viacom Media Networks, and caters to a primarily LGBTQ audience.

nomenclature, but first we must establish the goal that Morrison's renaming aspired to achieve: the ideal American masculinity."<sup>61</sup> She continues, "Inherent to John Wayne's identity are the unmarked elements of his whiteness, Christianity, financial independence, heterosexuality, able-bodiedness, and his masculinity. . . . Gender does not exist in and of itself, but in relation to all other identity markers."<sup>62</sup> If one can don the markers of masculinity through the elements of drag, then, certainly, the same can be said for feigned femininity. Toward either end of the gender spectrum (male-female), one does not have to be a castrato, a countertenor, portraying a pants role, nor be a drag king or queen to engage in some element of drag performance in one's daily life.

### **Breaking Out: Contemporary Classical Trans Singers**

In contrast to the drag performance the world of opera has recently welcomed both MtF and FtM singers. In 2015, soprano Breanna Sinclairé became the first transgender singer to perform the national anthem at a professional U.S. sporting event when she sang for the Oakland A's. Sinclairé is a Baltimore native whose operatic inspirations are Marian Anderson, Leontyne Price, and Jessye Norman. She received her formal training at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music where she graduated in 2014.<sup>63</sup>

Native American tenor, Holden Madagame, moved to Berlin in 2013 and came out as transgender. Before that time, Madagame was studying as a mezzo-soprano, and graduated with an undergraduate degree from the University of Michigan. Madagame

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<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth A. Ruchti, "Gender Royalty: Kings, Queens, Patriarchs, and the Duke: Queering Normativity through the Performance of Gender," Doctoral thesis, Ohio University, 2006: 30.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>63</sup> Brian Schaefer, "Opera singer Breanna Sinclairé becomes the First Transgender Woman to Sing the National Anthem at a Professional Sporting Event," in *OUT Magazine* online (June 17, 2015).



said, “I really made the decision after sending an email to my pedagogy teacher at university. I asked her what she thought might happen, and if she thought it was possible that I could still have a career after starting testosterone. I didn't realise I was looking for permission, but she gave it to me. “Well, it will be an adventure – and who knows, maybe you'll be a tenor?”<sup>64</sup> He continues,

“What testosterone does to the body is act like a steroid. It increases muscle, and changes the fat/muscle distribution. So although I still have an anatomically female larynx and bone structure, my vocal cords have thickened and lengthened, which makes them resonate at lower frequency, which in turn produces a deeper pitch. Even if it were possible to explain how complicated and miraculous this is to people, it's not necessarily graceful to constantly be making excuses for oneself, no matter how legitimate or interesting. My voice is much stronger, but I haven't done my Bachelor's as a tenor. I still have many more years as a mezzo soprano under my belt than I do as a tenor, and my physiology is different from any tenor you will ever meet.”<sup>65</sup>

Both Sinclairé and Madagame are professional singers who have come out as transgender and have successful operatic careers. Many more singers who are not yet out will likely emerge in academic choirs, community choruses and church choirs. Examples like theirs give hope to singers who face uncertainties surrounding the vocal changes accompanying the passing of their chosen gender.

Looking to the future, transwoman and baritone Lucia Lucas will become the first transwoman to perform a principal operatic role in the United States. In May of 2019, Lucas will sing the title role of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* with the Tulsa Opera.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Holden Madagame, Interview with Independent online (December 4, 2017).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Lizzie Davis, “Singer Becomes First Transgender Woman to Appear at a US Opera House,” Classicfm.com, February 27, 2018, <http://www.classicfm.com/music-news/first-transgender-woman-us-opera>

## CHAPTER 3

### CREATING SAFE SPACES IN THE CHORAL REHEARSAL: INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

People are most comfortable being their true selves in private, when alone in their own comfortable and familiar environments. The phrase, “dance like no one is watching” has become a ubiquitous motivational quote for every type of situation from public speaking to actual dancing. Obviously, the choral experience is structured around the principal of communal giving - giving of time, talents, and personal experience. In a chorus, one may feel as if they are “singing like no one is watching;” however, the reality exists that not only is everybody in the chorus and audience watching, they are also listening and analyzing. Every outward aspect of one’s self-identity is exposed to both colleagues and audience alike. The choral conductor-teacher has the potential to assist transgender singers in both being comfortable with gender-identity in the social setting of the chorus and teaching the whole chorus about gender-identity issues. Conductors can model affirming practices such as: proper use of language like pronoun use and section titles, allowing singers to sing the part with which their gender aligns, allowing singers to wear concert attire that aligns with their gender-identity, and choosing repertoire that is not overtly wrought with gender stereotypes, but framing the repertoire in contexts which

allow for multiple interpretations. These practices can become habit, and choral conductor-teachers can create choral rehearsals that allow for the freedom of gender expression, thus creating healthier singers and ultimately, healthier choirs. Music educator, Molly Rastin, adds:

“The choir director holds an intrinsic role of power over the choristers. This hierarchal structure can be minimized, but it is extremely rare that it is completely dismantled . . . Therefore, directors have the benefits and responsibilities that come with power. Choir directors are capable of making an ensemble feel like a safe space; conversely, they may allow outside oppressive forces to marginalize members of the choir. They may even act as oppressors themselves.”<sup>67</sup>

Music educators are often influential components of students’ lives, and especially in the lives of transgender students. Recent research suggests that a large number of music teachers in America will eventually have a trans student in their program who chooses to disclose their gender identity. Joshua Palkki adds, “So, for most secondary choral teachers, having a trans student may be inevitable.”<sup>68</sup> In a study of transgender youth, “researchers Arnold H. Grossman and Anthony R. D’Augelli reported that 75% of respondents disclosed their gender identity to their teachers – a larger percentage than disclosed to their parents (66%) or grandparents (50%).”<sup>69</sup>

Conductor-teachers wanting to create a more inclusive environment now have an easily accessible resource where they can ask questions and share stories: Facebook. Facebook is a global social media platform that has the power to house virtual communities of like-minded individuals. Two important virtual communities exist to assist conductor teachers. The first is “Gender Spectrum & Communication,” which is

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<sup>67</sup> Molly Rastin, “The Silenced Voice: Exploring Transgender Issues within Western Choirs,” in *The Canadian Music Educator* Vol. 57, No. 4 (Summer, 2016): 28

<sup>68</sup> Joshua Palkki, “Inclusivity in Action: Transgender Students in the Choral Classroom,” In *The Choral Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 11 (June 2017): 28.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

useful for asking technical questions and researching articles related to speech pathology and voice modification. This group is administered by Leah B. Helou and Jan Potter Reed. Helou is an assistant professor of neuroscience at the University of Pittsburgh, and Reed is a speech pathologist at the Chicago Institute for Voice Care. The second virtual community is “LGBTQA Safe Space for Music Educators,” administered by Jenny McGraw, Erin Hansen, and Matthew Nix. McGraw holds music degrees in cello performance and music education from Vanderbilt University and Michigan State University, respectively. Hansen holds a PhD in music education from the University of Michigan. Nix is the director of orchestra at Maine Township High School in Chicago, IL. This community is more useful for the educators wishing to share stories and ask questions directly related to pedagogical practices in the choral context. Additionally, the virtual community is a community announcement board of sorts, where web links advertising LGBTQ-themed events such as the 2018 Trans Voices Festival in St. Paul, MN are posted. Another resource found in the latter community is advice for working with transgender singers. In the “LGBTQA Safe Space for Music Educators” community, transman and voice teacher, Eli Conley shares a link to his latest article titled, “Creating Gender Liberatory Singing Spaces: A Transgender Voice Teacher’s Recommendations for Working with Transgender Singers.”<sup>70</sup>

Both Facebook communities are closed groups; therefore, access to the group is by monitored requests. The closed group structure ensures that those using the group are not only aligned with the values of the group’s creators, but also concerned for the best interest of those existing members of the groups, as not all persons using social media

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<sup>70</sup> Eli Conley, “Creating Gender Liberatory Singing Spaces: A Transgender Voice Teacher’s Recommendations for Working with Transgender Singers,” Eliconley.com, October 9, 2017.

will offer the same care and support of trans students. This is evidenced by a December 2, 2014 incident recorded on Facebook in a choral director virtual community as reported by Joshua Palkki in the *Choral Journal*:

Teacher: “Recently, one of my sophomore sopranos came out to me as transgendered [sic] and would like to identify as male. Since then, I’ve switched out that student’s choir dress for a black vest and black shirt (male concert choir outfit), and of course, I have switched to using male pronouns when addressing this student in order to support him. However, I need guidance on what part I should have him sing.”

Palkki adds that the teacher went on to explain that the student in question wanted to sing tenor and had been “practicing low.” The student very much wanted to switch voice parts. The first reply in a string of advice, however, was not so encouraging:

Comment: “Tell him there is such thing as a boy-soprano. Then, tell him you didn’t wake up one day and decided [sic] to be a choir director; you went to college to learn the difference between a soprano and a tenor and that he has to sing soprano.”<sup>71</sup>

The uninformed educator’s response is problematic, because the singer in question is being denied their gender identity. “Boy-soprano” denotes a cisgender boy who has the range of a soprano. Contrarily, a transman may have an outwardly female presentation but desire to sing in a tenor or bass range that more closely matches their gender identity, or maleness. An appropriate action would be to assess the singer’s current range and work to find a voice part that is both physically and psychologically healthy for the singer. However, the sound of the chorus as a whole must be considered. The conductor-educator cannot allow a singer to sing in a way that will be obtrusive to the health of the sound of the ensemble.

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<sup>71</sup> Joshua Palkki, “Inclusivity in Action: Transgender Students in the Choral Classroom,” In *The Choral Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 11 (June 2017): 33.

## The Transgender Experience: Who is in Your Rehearsal Space?

The first step toward success for transgender singers in the choral environment is giving conductor-teachers knowledge about transgender people and transgender singers. One might wonder why educating themselves concerning transgender issues is important. Danielle Steele, professor of choirs and voice at Earlham College says, “Trans issues are important because they represent someone’s life, and safety is universal. All students deserve to feel safe.” Constansis adds, “The vocal persona cannot be disassociated from developments in the general persona of the trans individual.”<sup>72</sup> Thus, to properly assist a transitioning voice, one must make an effort to understand common transgender life experiences.

For most people, being transgender is neither a mental disorder nor a sexual orientation marker. The World Professional Association of Transgender Health, amidst the discussion of DSM-V,<sup>73</sup> removed “gender identity disorder” from its list of mental disorders. It replaced the disorder with the non-disorder term, “gender dysphoria.” The statement was made, “One thing seemed clear, and that is the decision that gender identity issues will no longer be listed as a disorder.”<sup>74</sup>

As aforementioned, one’s gender identity is not tethered to one’s sexuality. Therefore, importance must be placed separating an individual’s sexuality from their gender identity. One cannot assume the sexuality of a transgender singer to be bisexual or

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<sup>72</sup> Alexandros Constansis, “The Female-to-Male (FTM) Singing Voice and its Interaction with Queer theory: Roles and Interdependency,” In *Transposition: Music and Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, 2013.

<sup>73</sup> The DSM-V is the official publication of the American Psychiatric Association. The acronym stands for “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association changed the wording in the DSM-V regarding transgender individuals from “gender identity disorder” to “gender dysphoria.”

<sup>74</sup> Richard Kenneth Adler, Sandy Hirsch, and Michelle Mordaunt, *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Transsexual Client: A Comprehensive Clinical Guide*, 2nd edition, San Diego, CA: Plural Pub., 2012: xix.

homosexual - no more than one can assume a transgender singer to be heterosexual. Sexuality is completely separate from gender identity. While creating a safe space in choral rehearsals, conductor-educators can help other singers by teaching the difference between sexuality and gender identity. According to a 2011 survey of 6,450 transgender and gender non-conforming people by the Lesbian and Gay Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality, 29% of MtF respondents identified as homosexual and 23% identified as heterosexual. Of the FtM respondents, 13% identified as homosexual, while 25% identified as heterosexual (See Figure 3.1 and 3.2).<sup>75</sup>

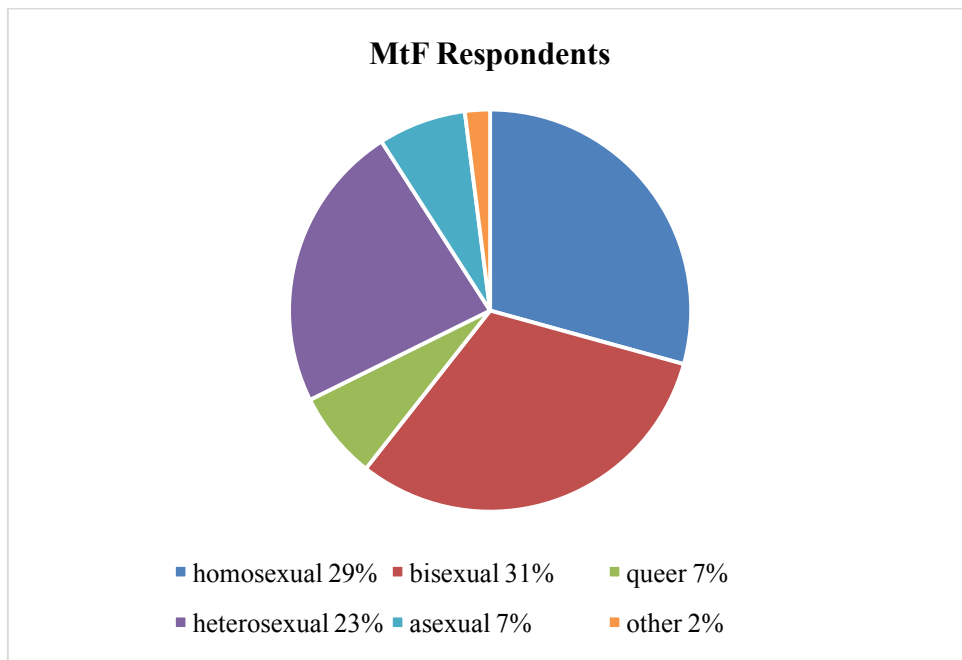


Figure 3.1: Sexual Orientations of MtF Respondents

<sup>75</sup> Jaime M. Grant, Lisa A. Mottet, Justin Tanis, Jack Harrison, Jody L. Herman, and Mara Keisling, *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*, Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011: 29.

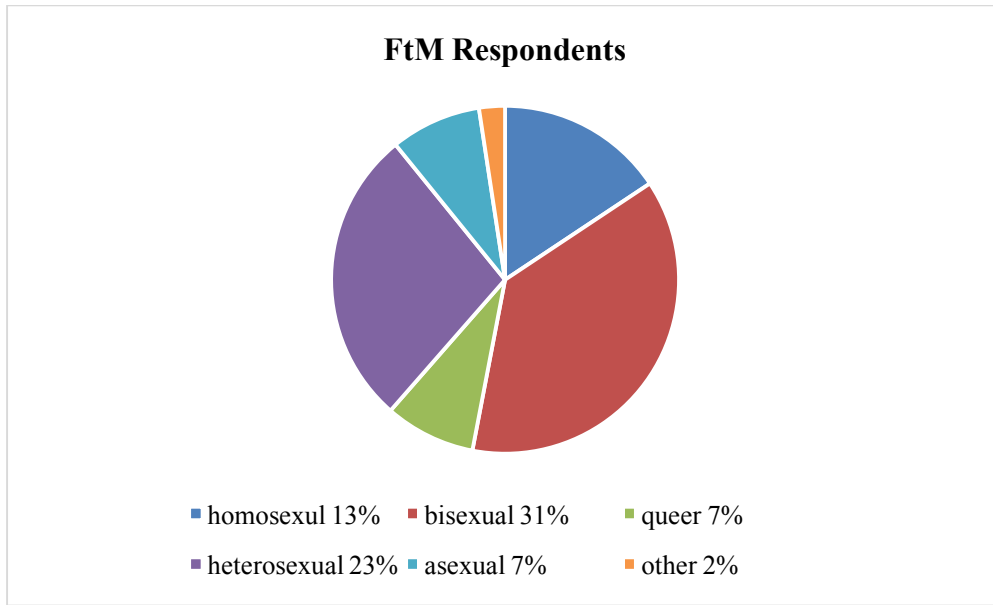


Figure 3.2: Sexual Orientations of FtM Respondents

Another component of transgender experiences is geography as it relates to the treatment of transgender individuals. This facet comes with its own stereotypical trap: trans students in rural areas are in need of more support than those living in metropolitan areas. Transgender individuals in both large metropolitan areas and small rural communities face the same social challenges. Palkki adds, “Choral teachers in small rural communities across the country can provide safe spaces for all youth – regardless of gender identity. Teachers in more traditionally progressive communities should not assume, however, that their school and/or communities are supportive of trans youth.”<sup>76</sup> According to the 2001 survey led by the Lesbian and Gay Task Force, 53% of MtF respondents reported mistreatment (including harassment or assault) in K-12 school

<sup>76</sup> Joshua Palkki, “Inclusivity in Action: Transgender Students in the Choral Classroom,” In *The Choral Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 11 (June 2017): 24.



setting, and in the same setting, 82% of FtM respondents reported mistreatment. A total of 76% of the trans respondents reported being harassed, and 35% of those respondents reported being physically assaulted. Alarming, 11% of trans-identified respondents reported being sexually assaulted in the K-12 school setting.<sup>77</sup> The reported cases of harassment or assault against trans students by K-12 faculty and staff are perhaps even more disappointing. 31% of respondents reported being harassed by teachers/staff. 5% reported being physically assaulted by teachers/staff, and 3% reported being sexually assaulted by teachers/staff in the K-12 setting.<sup>78</sup> Again, one must not be led to think that these reports of abuse are only in rural settings. The Lesbian and Gay Task Force Survey broke the respondents' location into six geographic categories: New England, Mid-Atlantic, South, Midwest, West, and California. The reporting statistics do not support evidence that any geographic area is representative of more or less cases of abuse than another.<sup>79</sup>

Just as the trans community is subject to a high level of abuse in academic settings, the employment sector also presents some alarming statistics for the transgender population, which experiences unemployment rates twice that of the general population.<sup>80</sup> The Lesbian and Gay Task Force survey revealed that 90% of respondents experienced harassment on the job, or took actions to avoid being harassed. What's worse, is that discrimination in the workplace for Black, Latino, or American Indian respondents was two-three times the rate of white respondents. Those respondents who had lost their job

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<sup>77</sup> Jaime M. Grant, et al., 37.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 51.

due to bias or who were currently unemployed reported a much higher involvement in underground means of employment, such as drug sales or sex work.<sup>81</sup>

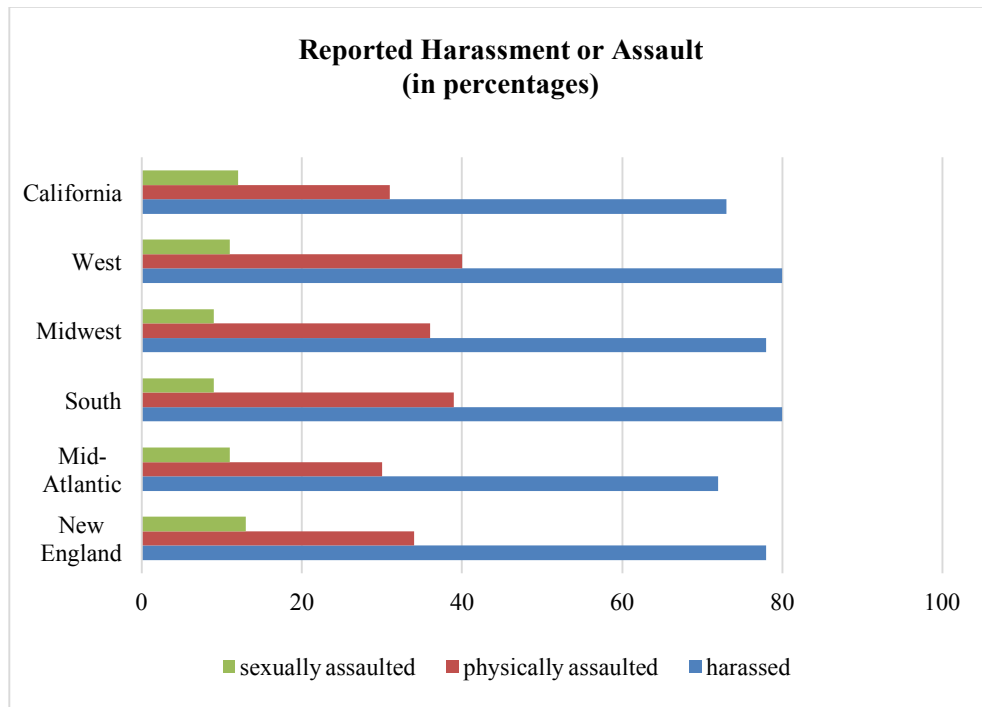


Figure 3.3: Incidents of Harassment or Assault by Geographic Region

In addition to maltreatment in academia and the workplace, conductor-teachers should be aware of the statistics surrounding the transgender community and healthcare issues. Key findings in the 2011 Lesbian and Gay Task Force survey reveal some alarming information. Transgender persons face serious access to healthcare. Of the over 6,000 respondents, 19% reported refusal of care due to their gender identity (with even higher numbers among people of color). 28% of respondents reported that they were subjected to harassment in medical settings, and 2% were victims of violence in the

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

doctor's office.<sup>82</sup> 50% of respondents reported that their medical care provider lacked knowledge of the needs facing transgender persons. Moreover, 48% of respondents lacked the ability to afford medical care at all.<sup>83</sup>

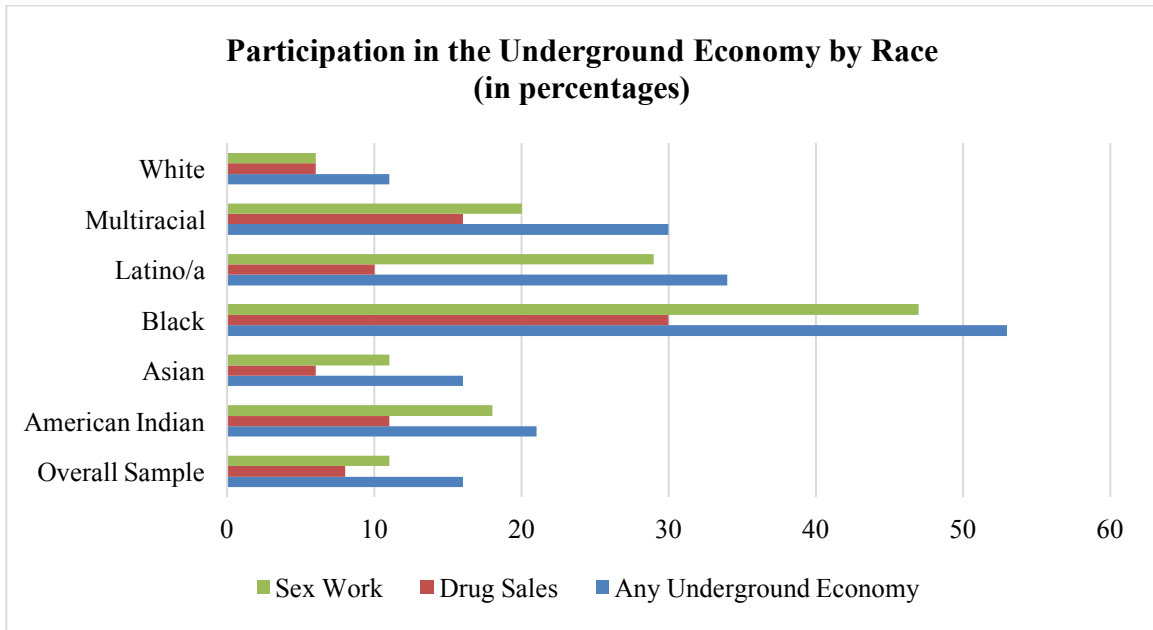


Figure 3.4: Participation in the Underground Economy by Race

Beyond the seriousness of the lack of medical access and education of medical professionals concerning the transgender community, suicide attempt rates and HIV infection rates add sadly alarming statistics surrounding transgender persons and healthcare. In comparison with the general population (1.6%), 41% of respondents reported attempting suicide, and 2.64% of the survey sample reported HIV infection<sup>84</sup> compared to .6% of the general population.<sup>85</sup> The rates of HIV infection of the surveyed

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> 8% of the sample did not know their status.

<sup>85</sup> Jaime M. Grant, et al., 72.

trans persons are vastly different based on race, with the black respondents who reported HIV infection nearly 24 times higher than the general population.<sup>86</sup> These statistics do not infer that all transgender singers will contemplate suicide or become infected with HIV, or that a higher percentage of black transgender singers will be HIV positive. The data exists as a tool for understanding at the potential experiences that could exist for transgender persons.

A majority of the transgender community faces challenging obstacles - ones that require education and sensitivity on the part of the conductor-teacher. However, there is another piece of the experience much more familiar and positive, if not universal on some level: voice as identity. That identity must be considered when the conductor makes decisions concerning: voice parts, planning rehearsal and concert seating/standing arrangements, concert attire, and repertoire.

### **Voice as Identity**

Perhaps the most important piece of the transgender experience concerning choral conductor-teachers is the relationship between the singing voice and personal identity. The singing voice as it relates to one's identity is not foreign to most choral conductor-teachers, but to a transgender singer, the voice is a pathway to both the singer's personal and gender identity. Speech pathologist Daniel Boone refers to each person's distinct vocal characteristics as their voice "fingerprint." He explains, "Just like a fingerprint, the human voice and speech pattern is amazingly distinctive. Actually, a few words on the telephone spoken by someone you know, or hearing a friend or family member talking on

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 80.

the phone in another room, is all we need to identify who they are.”<sup>87</sup> Boone presents the following as components of each person’s voice “fingerprint” (See Figure 3.5).

Daniel R. Boone: Voice “Fingerprint” Components
Number of words spoken on one breath
Rate of speech
Rhythm of speech
Ease in breathing
Pitch of the voice
Loudness of the voice
Relaxation/Tension of the voice
Mood
Clarity of articulation
Resonance of the voice

Figure 3.5: Daniel R. Boone’s Voice Fingerprint Components

For the transgender singer, voice placement and section assignment play a large role in gender identity. Trans singer Joshua Riverdale explains, “Singing was as fundamental to my identity as gender.”<sup>88</sup> Because the traditional SATB voice labels carry such a strong tie to the feminine-masculine binary, labelling an FtM singer “soprano,” for

<sup>87</sup> Daniel R. Boone, *Is Your Voice Telling On You: How to Find and Use Your Natural Voice*, San Diego, CA: Singular Publishing Group, Inc., 1991: 2-3.

<sup>88</sup> Joshua Riverdale, “Testosterone and the Trans Male Singing Voice (December 28, 2009),

Transguys.com. <http://transguys.com/features/testosterone-ftm-singing>.

example, or an MtF singer “bass,” could potentially cause further anxiety surrounding gender identity for those singers. While some singers experience anxiety surrounding gender identity due to being placed in a section that traditionally disagrees with their gender identity, other trans singers may not be psychologically hindered at all by the same situation. Palkki adds, “Trans people are not monolithic, and when it comes to issues of voice and gender, there are no one-size-fits-all solutions.”<sup>89</sup> Conductor-teachers also have to be aware of the same gender-related cautions when considering their cisgender singers. A cisgender male who sings countertenor cannot be assumed to identify as female any more than a cisgender female who sings tenor can be assumed to identify as male. A final conclusion to voice as identity come from the Adler text:

“The gifts we can give to the singer are the encouragement to sing and the acceptance of the singer’s choices regarding vocal range and sectional part . . . The chorus members develop an intuitive solidarity that bonds them, no matter if they are MtF, FtM or whether they are transitioning or not. The empowerment comes from finding the voice and using it . . . from knowing that others want to hear you sing.”<sup>90</sup>

### **The Clothes Make the Man or Woman: Performance Apparel**

Another factor conductor-teachers may need to be aware of is gender attribution - the subconscious process that determines if someone is male or female. Everyone engages in that process. It happens in seconds and informs one, correctly or incorrectly based on stereotypes, of one component of another’s identity – gender. Gender attribution is a conglomerate process that synthesizes information about a person’s physical cues and behavior. Physical cues may include: size, shape, hairstyle, language, vocal inflection and articulation, and clothing. Behavior cues may include: gait of walk, gestures, and

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<sup>89</sup> Joshua Palkki, “Inclusivity in Action: Transgender Students in the Choral Classroom,” In *The Choral Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 11 (June 2017): 25.

<sup>90</sup> Richard Kenneth Adler, et al., 453-54.

mannerisms.<sup>91</sup> Transwoman, singer and composer, Mari Valverde, comments on her coming out process during her sophomore year as a music student at St. Olaf College:

In college, I “took the reins” and asserted my gender identity. You go from being a spectator, to being the real character - - like in a video game when you control the character. Then you *are* the character. Name socialization, dressing, make-up, started my sophomore year of college. When I came out to my choral director as transgender, he looked at me and said, “I’m not blind, dear.” He then allowed me to wear the female-style robe.

Of all these components of gender attribution, the conductor-teacher has major influence over one: wardrobe.

Most choirs have some guidelines for concert attire, if not a standard uniform each singer must wear when performing. One of the most helpful decisions a conductor-teacher can make is to allow each singer to wear the concert attire that most closely aligns with their gender identity. For example, a transman who sings in a chorus where the men wear a tuxedo, and the women wear a black dress; can be allowed to wear the tuxedo option. Even if he has an outwardly female presentation, his gender identity is male and, therefore, should be allowed to wear the tuxedo. Gender-neutral concert attire choices are even more helpful. While the liturgical choir robe is not appropriate for all choruses, such as schools and community choirs, the robe is a unifying garment that usually has no gender marker. Some liturgical choruses use stoles as gender markers, even though the robe is gender neutral. In that case, a conductor has influence to choose one stole that each singer wears that is gender-neutral, or, as was the case for Mari Valverde, to allow the singers to wear the robe that matches their gender identity. Another popular option, especially among community choruses, is to give a list of wardrobe guidelines, and allow

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 71.

each singer to wear the wardrobe choices that align with their gender identity. For example, a conductor can tell the chorus to wear all black. With those parameters, any singer could wear a black dress, or black slacks, black dress shirt and a black vest. This option allows each singer to honor their gender identity while conforming to wardrobe guidelines.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE “SECOND PUBERTY:” FACTS AND MISCONCEPTIONS OF COMPARING CISGENDER MALE PUBERTY TO FEMALE TO MALE TRANSITION

Cisgender males between the ages of 13.5 and 14.5, on average,<sup>92</sup> experience a rapid introduction of hormones and physical growth in their bodies; this is known as puberty.<sup>93</sup> The puberty time frame is typically two-three years, lasting as late as ages 17-18.<sup>94</sup> Aside from the physical sex characteristics and growth in boys’ height, puberty brings about vocal changes as well. Most noticeable is the approximate drop of an octave in the speaking and singing pitch. The lowering of the voice can start as early as age eight; however, the rate of change is not nearly as drastic as that experienced during puberty. Pubescent boys will often struggle with the voice “cracking” or “breaking” while speaking or singing. This is due to the accelerated asymmetrical growth of the larynx.<sup>95</sup>

#### **Cisgender Puberty**

The onset of puberty and the vocal characteristics associated with that time period are caused by the surge of the hormone testosterone. The lowering of the voice is primarily

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<sup>92</sup> John Marion Cooksey, *Working with Adolescent Voices*, St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992: 11.

<sup>93</sup> The author acknowledges the existence of cisgender female puberty; however, the purpose of this chapter is primarily the comparison of cisgender male puberty and FtM vocal transition.

<sup>94</sup> Cooksey, 11.

<sup>95</sup> Vindhya Khare, “The Influence of Sex Hormones on the Female Singing Voice: A Review of Literature, 1971-2016,” Doctoral thesis, University of Miami, 2016.

caused by the changes in the larynx. Testosterone causes a disproportionate growth of the larynx, thyroid cartilage, and lengthening of the vocal folds, resulting in the protrusion known as the “Adam’s apple.”<sup>96</sup> The puberty process creates two distinct voices in males: head voice and chest voice, sometimes referred to as “modal” voice. Chest voice is developed when the puberty process causes the bottom of the vocal folds to bulge out medially, making the glottis more rectangular in shape. This, in turn, allows glottal closure to be obtained over a greater portion of the vibration cycle, and more of the body of the vocal folds are able to be set in to vibration and amplitude.<sup>97</sup> The aforementioned “cracking” of the voice is due to the singer’s inability to fully negotiate muscle control over the new, thicker, vocal folds, which now require different pressure for approximation (closure) and consistent vibration.<sup>98</sup>

Briefly, vocal changes in cisgender females during puberty are far less dramatic. In comparison with pubescent cisgender males, the drop in vocal range in cisgender females during puberty is only a few notes in range. This is primarily because cisgender females do not experience the testosterone surge seen in their cisgender male counterparts. Additionally, the female puberty is usually earlier than the male puberty, initiating between the ages of 10-14. A final maturation phase occurs 6 to 12 months after that.<sup>99</sup> Another vocal difference caused by the lack of the presence of testosterone in females is a much smoother laryngeal transition, resulting in more ease of singing without the “cracking.” Physiologically, the female puberty is driven by the hormone

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<sup>96</sup> Ingo Titze, “Critical Periods of Vocal Change: Puberty,” in *Journal of Singing* Vol. 49, No. 3 (Jan/Feb. 1993): 24.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Khare, 33.

catalysts: estrogen and progesterone.<sup>100</sup> Oto-rhinolaryngologist, Wivine Decoster states, “because of the lack of significant distinctive changes, the gradual female voice transition from child to woman is part of a developmental continuum.”<sup>101</sup>

### **Cisgender Male Puberty and FtM Transition: A Comparison**

Similarities between cisgender puberty and FtM transition include: introduction of higher amounts testosterone than what is biologically occurring at other times, a deepening of the vocal pitch (caused by testosterone), and an emotional variance due to the fluctuation in hormone homeostasis. One less obvious similarity is that both cisgender males and FtM persons identify as male. The “masculinity” of the voice is the end result of the process. This masculinity is both harmful and productive when it comes to the presentation of gender and loss of the voice one once had. For many pubescent cisgender boys, the lowering of the voice can be rewarding. For once, the singer is being labelled “tenor” or “bass,” rather than “cambiata,” or, even worse for some, “male alto, or boy soprano!” For some of the same singers, a mourning period can exist for the loss of glorious upper extension that used to define their voices. The masculinization of the voice can be even more important to the FtM singer, since the speaking and singing voice is so closely tethered to one’s gender identity - - the hope that one more piece of the masculine presentation will emerge from the inner identity that’s always been present.

While similarities exist between cisgender male puberty and FtM vocal transition, those similarities are far outnumbered by the stark differences in the two. FtM singer and speech pathologist Alexandros Constansis remarked,

“I anticipated my own changes by initially focusing on academic works dealing with the closest possible equivalent [to FtM transition] – the vocal and gender passage from

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 34.

childhood to adolescence and subsequently to adult biomasculinity. However, other significant factors, such as age and laryngeal structure, started coming to the surface and needed to be taken into consideration.”<sup>102</sup>

In fact, a direct comparison of the two processes is problematic. One needs understanding of the many facets surrounding FtM transition to fully understand this period of life for the transman undergoing vocal transition. Factors contributing to the differences between the two processes are: age, duration of the process, societal acceptance, laryngeal structure, gender dysphoria, and the types of vocal hurdles an FtM person may encounter during transition.

Transgender persons undergo three types of transition: medical, social, and legal. Medical transition involves the introduction of hormones and elective surgery to alter physical attributes. Social transition involves gender presentation, pronoun changes, and coming out to family and peers. Finally, legal transition involves changing names and gender identity on all legal documents, such as a marriage license, driver’s license, or passport.

As mentioned, the age range for the start of cisgender male puberty is between 13.5 and 14.5 and ends between 17 and 18. For a majority of transmen, FtM transition happens at an age after the biological puberty has occurred. Depending on the individual’s access to healthcare, family support, and geography, FtM transition may occur at age 18 or well into mature adulthood.<sup>103</sup> For example, a 21-year old transman who lives in a metropolitan area, and who has a supportive family who will help him

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<sup>102</sup> Alexandros N. Constansis, “The Changing Female-To-Male (FTM) Voice,” In *Radical Musicology*, Vol.3 (2008): 32 pars., 17 May 2009.

<sup>103</sup> Constansis’ 9-year study “does not support the loss of singing ability in FtMs as something inevitable, even for singers facing transition in their 40s or beyond.”

access the right resources for a successful transition, is in a much different living situation than a 21-year old transman who has been kicked out of his house, has no contact with his family, has a minimum wage job, and lives in a rural area. The probability of a healthy transition is much higher for the former scenario. According to a 2011 survey by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the majority of transgender persons transition between the ages of 18 and 44 (See Figure 4.1).<sup>104</sup>

Age Range	MtF	FtM
Under 18	5%	8%
18-24	18%	46%
25-44	40%	41%
45-54	25%	5%
55+	12%	1%

Figure 4.1: Average Ages of Transition for Transgender Persons

Not only is the time of change during one’s life different for cisgender males and FtM singers, the rate of change is also different and unpredictable for the FtM person. The most recent data of voice frequency ( $F_0$ ), or pitch, lowering over time suggests that an FtM person can expect to hear a noticeable change in vocal frequency in 6-12 weeks.<sup>105</sup> In some cases, FtM persons obtain hormones illicitly, and thus, they have no professional

<sup>104</sup> Jaime M. Grant, Lisa A. Mottet, and Justin Tanis, *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*, Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011: 26.

<sup>105</sup> Richard Kenneth Adler, Sandy Hirsch, and Michelle Mordaunt, *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Transsexual Client: A Comprehensive Clinical Guide*, 2nd edition, San Diego, CA: Plural Pub., 2012: 155.

administration of those substances causing the start of vocal frequency change to be either earlier or later than those under the supervision of a healthcare professional, and, in some cases, the misuse of the illicitly-procured hormones will result in no vocal change whatsoever.<sup>106</sup> Constansis adds, “The secretion of testosterone in bio-males does not suddenly commence at the highest level. The boy does not turn into a man within six months or a year.”<sup>107</sup> Transmen are often started on the highest recommended doses of testosterone, which brings changes that would normally occur in cisgender males over several years in a much shorter time.<sup>108</sup> Part of the reason FtM persons seek to transition vocally at such a fast rate is the sociological need to pass - - to be socially accepted as male. Constansis notes, “Nonetheless, I am not sure that this approach is physiologically the best for our [FtM persons] bodies . . . Vocally – here I am more than convinced – this approach is definitely not in our best interest.”<sup>109</sup> In some instances, the medical community may not be giving adequate doses of testosterone to transmen. Constansis notes,

“lower doses, either in the UK or abroad, have been associated with medical bias against the trans community. The standing prejudice has been acknowledged by medical practitioners who have indicated that doubts about the integrity of transgender individuals and the authenticity of gender dysphoria as a diagnosis [...] may lead some members of the medical profession to withhold treatment or prescribe inadequate doses of cross-sex hormones on safety grounds.”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>107</sup> Constansis.

<sup>108</sup> Joshua Riverdale, “Testosterone and the Trans Male Singing Voice (December 28, 2009),” Transguys.com, <http://transguys.com/features/testosterone-ftm-singing> (accessed September 8, 2017).

<sup>109</sup> Constansis.

<sup>110</sup> Alexandros Constansis, “The Female-to-Male (FTM) Singing Voice and its Interaction with Queer theory: Roles and Interdependency,” In *Transposition: Music and Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, 2013.

Two important anatomical differences between the cisgender puberty and the FtM transition involve the vocal folds and the larynx. Testosterone in the bio-male puberty initially creates swelling of the vocal folds (edema). Then, collagen accumulates, thickening and lengthening the vocal folds, these new folds become permanent and the voice acquires a lower fundamental frequency.<sup>111</sup> When a transman introduces testosterone to his body, the vocal folds will thicken; however, they will not lengthen to the degree of the biological male counterpart.<sup>112</sup> Akin to the strings on a violin versus a cello, the shorter vocal folds found in bio-females will not produce as low frequencies as the post-puberty vocal folds found in bio-males. The other significant anatomical difference is the lack of the development of the laryngeal structure during hormonal treatment of FtM persons. Constansis calls this phenomenon the “entrapped FtM voice.”<sup>113</sup>

Constansis refers to the FtM voice as entrapped because of the imbalance in growth between the vocal folds and the larynx of transitioning FtM persons. During transition, the testosterone causes the vocal folds to grow thicker (but not significantly longer, as previously discussed); however, they are restricted in length by the size of the larynx<sup>114</sup> which is neither malleable nor affected by the introduction of testosterone. Cartilage growth concerning the larynx only happens during cisgender male puberty.<sup>115</sup> Simply, the FtM person will experience a thickening of the vocal folds within a structure that does not grow to accommodate them, hence Constansis’ term, “entrapped FtM voice.” Another limitation of the development of the larynx in FtM persons is the

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Richard Kenneth Adler, et al, 164.

<sup>113</sup> Constansis.

<sup>114</sup> The FtM larynx is typically smaller than that of the bio-male counterpart.

<sup>115</sup> Riverdale.

testosterone itself. Testosterone further limits the growth of the trans male larynx due to early ossification of the cartilage comprising its structure.<sup>116</sup> Constansis adds,

“In this case, the new male vocal folds can become entrapped within a less-than-adequately enlarged larynx. The resultant voice will sound weak and permanently hoarse and lack the right harmonics. By contrast, when the vocal tract is given time to adjust and when a programme of carefully selected exercises is followed throughout vocal transition, the results are not only more predictable but also very encouraging. . . . Anyone dealing with FtM voices should understand that the vocal reactions to artificial testosterone are rarely stable or smooth, especially during the first year.”<sup>117</sup>

Both bio-male puberty and FtM transition involve a rapid introduction of testosterone into a biology not normally accustomed to those unbalanced hormone levels. In FtM transition, the body is receiving testosterone as a completely foreign guest. As one would imagine, as the voice is changing, certain maladies will afflict the voice as it transitions from boy to man or from bio-female vocal mechanism to transmale voice. Constansis notes, “. . . abrupt changes are rarely beneficial to the vocal instrument. Even in a flexible adolescent laryngeal structure and with gradual hormonal changes, the voice is rendered uncontrollable and of limited use for a certain period of time.”<sup>118</sup>

### **Vocal Problems During Cisgender Male Puberty and FtM Transition**

Henry Leck, founding artistic director of the Indianapolis Children’s Choir, points out the following vocal problems during bio-male puberty: cracking, unpredictability, tiring of the voice, inaudibility of certain pitches, and vocal strain.<sup>119</sup> The chart below compares the problems of the bio-male puberty voice with those reported in Gurss’ “Translucent Voices” survey (See Figure 4.2). The Translucent Voices survey also

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Constansis.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Henry Leck, "The Boy's Changing Voice," DVD, (2001).



reveals personal, anecdotal, evidence of vocal problems regarding vocal transition of non-bio-males.

Bio-Male Puberty Vocal Problems	Transgender Transition Vocal Problems
cracking	
unpredictability	
tiring of the voice	Vocal fatigue
inaudibility of certain pitches	Missing notes (in the middle voice)
vocal strain	Difficulty initiating tone
	Hoarseness, or “fuzzy” tone
	Prolonged or lingering breathy vocal quality

Figure 4.2: Comparison of Bio-Male Puberty and FtM Transition Vocal Problems

Respondent #16: “I lost a lot of breathing strength I had before. I have a hard time finding a full breath like I used to.”

Respondent #35: “Learning where to place the notes in my register. As a result of the changes, it took several years before I had a range larger than an octave or so.”

Respondent #36: “Matching note and pitch. Before transition, I would hear a note, think about/feel in my throat where that note should be, and be able to sing it perfectly. Since my voice shift, I have to slide around and eventually land on the correct note. And even when it lands it doesn’t always stay there.”

Respondent #53: “Knowing where my break begins and ends, as well as using falsetto.”

Respondent #66: “Just the transition and myself getting used to my new range.”

Respondent #76: “I have to consciously remind myself to hold my larynx as open as possible any time I’m not in my comfort low. Also, I’m a bari-bass with lots of good low notes, not an actual tenor. I can hit the highest needed notes, but I have a bad rough bit/drop out right around middle C. Luckily the other T1s have that handled.”

Respondent #125: “One challenge that is as much a challenge of my ear as voice, is differentiating when I am in the correct octave. Also, vocal fatigue. I figure puberty when nearing 50 versus in one’s teens . . .”

A final vocal admonition for the trans singer comes from the research of Adler, Hirsch, and Mordaunt: what is done to the voice regarding hormone therapy has the possibility of being permanent. The study warns, “TG/TS clients who sing, and certainly professional singers, should be warned that their pitch range will be irreversibly altered consequent to the administration of cross-gender hormones. They (FtM singers) should also be told that the loss in the high tones might not be fully compensated for by a gain in the lower frequencies.”<sup>120</sup>

### **Vocal Range and Gender Identity**

A final difference between bio-male puberty and FtM transition is the value of gender identity. For the cisgender male, his gender is not at stake at the conclusion of

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<sup>120</sup> Adler, et al, 159.

puberty. Certainly, due to gender stereotypes, a cisgender male could feel more or less masculine based on the lowness or highness of his speaking and singing range. However, all feelings of masculinity aside, he still identifies as male, and the pitch of his voice cannot define his gender identity. For transgender persons, vocal pitch and inflection are large components of gender identity and the need to outwardly pass to society as the gender they are but do not always physically present. The failure of hormone therapy to successfully attain a desired speaking or singing range could not only be a matter of gender dysphoria, but could, in some cases, be a matter of personal safety when the individual cannot pass in a hostile social environment.

Conductors and educators can assist transgender singers during transition (and pre-transition) by allowing the singer to sing with the section (SATB) with which their gender identity most closely matches. Sometimes, a singer's gender identity and vocal range will not be congruent; at this time, the conductor-teacher has to consider not only the singer's mental health, but also the physical, as allowing a singer to sing in a range that will do damage to the voice would be pedagogically unsound practice. A solution would be to help the singer jump between voice parts that most easily complements the instrument at the time, for example, allowing a singer to switch between tenor and alto depending on the ease of singing in the different ranges of the parts at any given point in the music. Music educator Joshua Palkki endorses, "Making changes to one's vocal habits can be challenging for everyone, and so while switching voice parts might not initially be possible, re-assessing and providing ongoing individualized feedback might enable a healthy change in vocal range at a later time."<sup>121</sup> Palkki continues, "This process

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<sup>121</sup> Joshua Palkki, "Inclusivity in Action: Transgender Students in the Choral Classroom," In *The Choral Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 11 (June 2017): 25.

may involve trial and error and may be time consuming. But consider this: if a student is told they must sing a voice part that triggers gender dysphoria, they will likely leave choral music – potentially forever.”<sup>122</sup>

### **Healthy Transitions: Breath Support and Head Voice**

One might be led to think that, with the numerous changes hormonally and physiologically surrounding male puberty, vocal use during that dynamic time of growth could be harmful. In fact, that was the thought at one time in the field of voice pedagogy; however, research has found those assertions to be both erroneous and counterproductive to a healthy voice post-puberty. John Cooksey, who studied seven years of record books of boys’ changing voices found in the Royal High School in Edinburgh (1944-51) asserts that it is not the use of the singing voice during puberty that is potentially nefarious to male singers, but the real dilemma is the misuse of the voice during that period, in both speech and singing.<sup>123</sup> Cooksey is an advocate that, softer singing and vocal exercise *should* continue throughout puberty.<sup>124</sup>

During the time of transition for both cisgender males and FtM singers in transition, the two most important safeguards for successful transition are development and use of proper diaphragmatic breathing and the practice of vocalizing singers from the head voice descending into chest/modal voice.<sup>125</sup> And while some similarities do exist between the two processes, conductors and music educators need to educate themselves on the stark differences and make available for themselves pedagogical tools to assist their transgender singers.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>123</sup> Cooksey, 6.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>125</sup> Adler, et al, 166.

## CHAPTER 5

### A BRIEF DISCUSSION OF THE TRANSWOMAN’S SINGING VOICE AND SUGGESTED VOCALISES FOR FTM TRANSGENDER VOICES IN TRANSITION

#### **MtF Transition: Vocal Possibilities**

Trans voices, like all human voices, are unique and require an individualized approach concerning vocal coaching and, in some cases, voice alteration (as in MtF voice feminization of the speaking voice). Unlike most classically-trained singers who began voice lessons at an early age (usually) after puberty, transmen who usually transition after puberty are learning to train a whole new voice during and after hormone therapy. The introduction of testosterone results in breaks or cracks in the voice as well as changes in range and resonance, and the effects of FtM hormone therapy are irreversible. As mentioned earlier, for a majority of transmen the introduction of testosterone to the body results in a lowering of the voice’s speaking and singing pitch. Based on what is known about bio-male puberty, voice pedagogues can successfully put transmen on similar vocal exercise tracks to keep the voice healthy and to coax the voice through the “second puberty.” In contrast, transwomen do not have similar commonalities in their vocal

trajectories. After a biological male<sup>126</sup> experiences puberty, no amount of estrogen (or hormone therapy) can reverse the phenomenon which has occurred in the larynx, especially the vocal folds. “Male-to-female transgender persons experience feminizing effects from taking estrogen, such as breast enlargement and some softening of muscle definition; however, there are no feminizing effects on the vocal folds and thus, pitch level remains at adult male levels.”<sup>127</sup> In some cases, risky surgery can be performed which can shorten the vocal folds, thus raising the speaking and singing pitch to that of what is the stereotypical sound of a biological woman’s vocal production. Ioanna Hershberger warns, “Unfortunately, even after surgical intervention, the male-to-female transgender person may still experience vocal dissatisfaction.”<sup>128</sup>

Transwomen do, however, experience other physiological changes during the transition. Richard Adler et al add, “In the MtF client, conjugated estrogens, intramuscular injections of ethanol estradiol, or transdermal estradiol patches are used alone, or in some combination. Additionally, antiandrogenic compounds are often employed.” Over time, one sees: softening of the skin, redistribution of body fat, breast development, decrease in muscle mass, cessation of male-pattern hair loss, atrophy of the genitals, and reduction of body hair.”<sup>129</sup> The hormones do not cause vocal maladies overall. “MtF clients usually require voice modification, they do not usually have a ‘voice disorder’ per se. Söderpalm, Larsson, and Almquist (2004): stroboscopic

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<sup>126</sup> Which is different than saying “cisgender male”

<sup>127</sup> Ioanna Georgiadou Hershberger, M.A., “The Effects of Singing Exercises and Melodic Intonation Therapy (MIT) on the Male-to-Female Transgender Voice,” Master’s thesis, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, 2005: 22.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Richard Kenneth Adler, Sandy Hirsch, and Michelle Mordaunt. *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Transsexual Client: A Comprehensive Clinical Guide*. 2nd edition. San Diego, CA: Plural Pub., 2012: 105.

examinations of 22 TG individuals between 1991 and 2002 found “no laryngeal pathology except for a minor sulcus<sup>130</sup> on one vocal cord in one patient.”<sup>131</sup>

A variety of possibilities exist for what one could expect of a transwoman’s singing voice. A transwoman may wish to forego any attempt at singing in the alto or soprano range due to: the lack of skill necessary to facilitate singing in falsetto, or the fact that singing in falsetto creates a gender dysphoria which negates the transwoman’s more masculine identity on the gender spectrum.<sup>132</sup> In this case, a transwoman may present herself in every way as a woman; yet continue to sing beautifully as either a tenor, baritone, or bass. A transwoman who possesses the skill necessary to sing as a countertenor, falsettist, or (cisgender) male soprano, may choose to both physically and aurally present as a woman, singing alto or soprano. Lastly, a transwoman may choose to have phonolaryngeal surgery to shorten her vocal cords, thus raising her voice to that of alto or soprano range. One singer in the Translucent Voices survey reported having phonolaryngeal surgery and now can successfully perform up to E6 (See Figure 5.1).

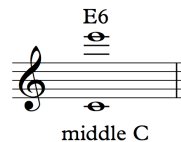


Figure 5.1: Example of Post-Phonolaryngeal Surgery Vocal Range

One cannot assume that phonolaryngeal surgery is an option for the majority of transwomen, as it is both a risky and costly procedure (one in which a serious singer

<sup>130</sup> A sulcus is a deep groove or fissure as seen in the texture on the surface of the brain.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 116

<sup>132</sup> Sandi Hammond, Phone Interview, 8 March 2018.

would thoroughly weigh the consequences of losing their voice before engaging). Some MtF bloggers have reported diplophonia<sup>133</sup> in the upper range after having the surgery. Access to healthcare and access to funding is prohibitive for many transwomen due to insurance not covering those procedures without a medical diagnosis—assuming a trans person has health insurance. One commonality seen in MtF clients who visit speech pathologists is that, for those singers, increasing pitch is a priority. “It is not uncommon for a client to attend therapy with a preconceived image of the type of voice that he or she would like to achieve (usually based on a celebrity’s voice).”<sup>134</sup>

### **Vocal Hurdles and Misleading Information**

Both MtF and FtM singers who are transitioning face the same physiological and psychological vocal hurdles. Physically, some aspect of their voices will change, even if for a relatively brief period in their life. The physical hurdle may be due to the effects of cross-gender hormones, but often hurdles exist because singers have formed bad habits by trying to raise or lower their speaking/singing voice by imitating the unprofessional advice of nontherapists giving advice online in places such as YouTube. Richard Adler adds,

“Many TG/TS clients come to therapy having already attempted some ‘self-therapy’ through the use of videotapes made by nontherapists as well as following some YouTube video presentations. . . it becomes a matter of safety when using techniques that have no evidence base or using therapy ideas without the guidance of professionals. . . it is imperative that clients do not unknowingly or unsuspectingly cause phonotrauma to their vocal folds and larynx without realizing the dangerous after effects.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Diplophonia is a condition whereby the vocal folds produce more than one note simultaneously.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 139.



If trans singers are subject to certain adverse psychological factors, such as fear and stress, the psychological factors will manifest themselves physically in their singing voices. “Psychosocial issues can often play a significant role in causing vocal misuse. Depression, fear, guilt, embarrassment, and anxiety are often etiological culprits when dealing with TG/TS clients.”<sup>136</sup> Physically-rooted hurdles will be discussed first, followed by psychologically induced hurdles.

Jean Abitbol notes, “The most complex hormonal system is found in the human species. If the delicate balance of hormones is disrupted, the resulting damage could be irreversible.”<sup>137</sup> Once the sex hormones estrogen, progesterone, androgen, and testosterone are set in motion and reach the larynx, another hormonal target, they modify the quality of the voice.”<sup>138</sup> While MtF singers (excluding vocal cord surgery volunteers) do not see a raising of pitch during transition, they do have vocal hurdles which can be addressed with vocalises.

Many MtF singers have sought voice feminization through imitating the characteristically female sounds they hear in other speakers/singers. According to speech pathologist Shelagh Davies, one such feminine characteristic is a huskier, “wispy,” sound. In one video blog, she advocates that the MtF client “works toward a real sentence phrase (after starting with neutral syllables such as “mi mi mi”) to develop inflection and variance in higher ranges of speaking.” The client is advised to “Reach for a ‘whispy’ sound.”<sup>139</sup> While this sultry feminine(?) characteristic might be feasible for passing as female over the phone or in social conversation, a husky, breathy, sound is rarely desired

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>137</sup> Jean Abitbol, *Odyssey of the Voice* (San Diego: Plural Publishing, 2006): 207.

<sup>138</sup> Vindhya Khare, “The Influence of Sex Hormones on the Female Singing Voice: A Review of Literature, 1971-2016,” Doctoral thesis, University of Miami, 2016: 7.

<sup>139</sup> Shelagh Davies, “Daily Voice Training,” <https://vimeo.com/channels/310588>.

by singers, as the vocal folds do not approximate (close) all the way to achieve that sound. If a singer is practicing that technique in their speaking voice, muscle memory will carry over into their singing voice, and the breathy tone quality will have to be corrected through a regimen of vocal exercises that help to build cord closure and easy onset of closed vowel.<sup>140</sup> Richard Adler adds, “Initial vowel words are, by definition, produced with voice onset coming at the very beginning of the utterance. . . . In general, for any speaker, voice onset should be ‘easy,’ with smooth and gradual approximation of the vocal cords. For the MtF TG/TS woman, however, it will be even more important to achieve a smooth or easy onset.”<sup>141</sup>

### **Vocalises: Coaxing the Voice Into Healthy Phonation**

Vocalises are part of every healthy choral program. This period of the rehearsal, often referred to as “warm-ups,” is vital not only for the ensemble to come together in one concept of sound and style, but it is vital for the individual singers - - to listen to the voice, to experiment with and challenge the voice. Boys’ changing voice specialist, Terry Barham, adds,

“Vocalises are possibly the most vital part of your rehearsal. They are not a ritual which must be endured but rather a highly important activity in teaching boys [all singers] how to sing properly . . . Specific objectives for each exercise should be written on the chalkboard and verbally directed toward singers so that mindless repetition of a few exercises does not engender casual attitudes about singing.”<sup>142</sup>

In a 2017 University of Washington doctoral dissertation titled “Teaching Transgender Singers,” author Emerald Lessley notes an obvious fact—yet a fact that one might not consider while working with transgender singers. Transgender singers, like cisgender

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<sup>140</sup> The vocal folds are closest together during vibration when speaking/singing on closed vowels. [i] creates the most closure of the vocal folds.

<sup>141</sup> Richard Adler et al, 253.

<sup>142</sup> Terry J. Barham, *Strategies for Teaching Junior High & Middle School Male Singers: Master Teachers Speak*, Santa Barbara, CA: Santa Barbara Music Publishing, 2001: 35.

singers, possess unique instruments and unique vocal abilities and habits. Emerald states, “There are no miraculous exercises that work perfectly on everyone . . . The primary focus should remain on creating exercises that accommodate transitioning singers in the best way possible.”<sup>143</sup>

Like the boy’s changing voice, singers whose voices are changing due to cross-gender hormones are subject to inconsistent performance and unreliability of tone production. The conductor-teacher should work to foster a safe environment during warm-ups where all singers feel safe to explore their voices, even allowing the voices to crack and break without embarrassment.<sup>144</sup>

To address breathy tone (pedagogically referred to as hypofunctional phonation), voice pedagogue James C. McKinney suggests the following types of vocal exercises:

- Humming
- Using more energy by increasing volume\*
- Imitating an opera singer\*
- Establishing good posture and breathing
- Vocalizing on forward vowels
- Vocalizing with nasal consonants
- Imitating a tight sound as a means to an end<sup>145</sup>

Both Terry Braham and Henry Leck, who have worked extensively with the boy’s changing voice, advocate gentle onset and using the voice at softer volume levels at first until the new voice is fully matured. Because MtF singers who are transitioning and

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<sup>143</sup> Emerald Lessley, “Teaching Transgender Singers,” A doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, 2017: 35.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>145</sup> James C. McKinney, *The Diagnosis and Correction of Vocal Faults: A Manual for Teachers of Singing and for Choir Directors*, Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, In., 1994: 86.

choosing to sing in their head voice/falsetto have the potential to be beginning singers learning to use a new voice, I would advocate against both the imitation of opera singers and tight sounds, and trying to sing louder.\* For beginning singers, these techniques have the potential to create a new vocal hurdle: hyperfunction of the voice, where the correction of breathiness leads to strain and tightness. Louder volume in falsetto will take time to develop and should not be pushed into an unhealthy volume level for an early stage in vocal development. I completely agree with vocalises that require forward vowels and nasal consonants, and good utilization of breath is the foundation for any singing voice. Below are three types of vocalises for the MtF singer: range extension, cord closure, and breath control. Based on Constansis' experiences as a trained singer who transitioned, the exercises I designed are not excessively difficult. Constansis says, "However, I cannot stress enough the necessity when following this programme: there is a certain period of time during which only mild exercises should be followed, since vigorous ones during this time risk damaging the developing voice."<sup>146</sup> Both transitioning and non-transitioning singers can perform the exercises below; however, per earlier discussion, conductor-teachers need to begin the exercises in head voice and work downward for transitioning FtM singers.

The first exercise (Figure 5.2) is for range extension. Speech pathologist Shelagh Davies recommends low to high sirens, beginning with tongue trills first (continued rolling of [r]), then moving to forward vowels such as [i].<sup>147</sup> Here is an example that incorporates Davies' ideas with the flexibility to move the siren pattern up and down throughout the exercise so a singer builds up to increasing pitch capability. The exercise

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<sup>146</sup> Alexandros N. Constansis, "The Changing Female-To-Male (FTM) Voice" In *Radical Musicology*, Vol.3 (2008): 32 pars, 17 May 2009.

<sup>147</sup> Shelagh Davies, "Daily Voice Training,," <https://vimeo.com/channels/310588>.

starts in the low-middle voice and proceeds up, Exact pitch is less important than the vocal cords stretching gently to reach new, higher, pitches. Speech pathologist, Richard Adler, also advocates the use of glissandi/sliding as a range-extension and vocal stretching exercise. He suggests working on the vowels [a] and [u] while working up and down, repeated, in middle-level octaves.<sup>148</sup> When experimenting with glissandi/slides,

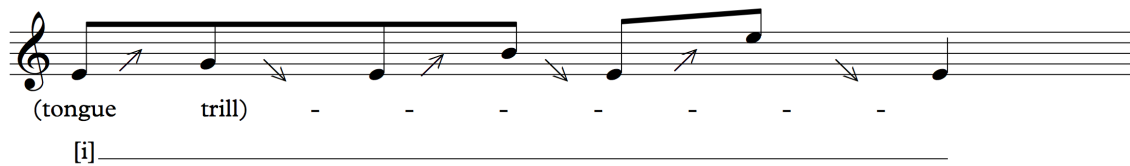


Figure 5.2: Exercise to Increase Vocal Range

literal pitch is less important than clarity and smoothness of tone (and consistency of phonation). Allow singers to be “in the ballpark” of literal pitches which will allow the focus of the exercise to be phonation and range extension, rather than pitch accuracy. To encourage vocal fold approximation, I would suggest using closed vowels, such as [i] and [e].

To correct the breathy sound often found in MtF singers trying to imitate a stereotypically “feminine sound,” McKinney as aforementioned advocates the use of a combination of forward vowels with nasal consonants. The exercise below (Figure 5.3) incorporates both the nasal consonant, [n], and the forward vowel, [i]. Its design is intended to both work the middle-voice upward by descending patterns while gradually increasing the extension of the skill by removing more initial consonants (See Figure

<sup>148</sup> Richard Adler et al, 429.

5.3). Another exercise to effectively coax cord closure is Figure 5.4. The use of [hŋ] not only brings the vocal folds together in a hum, it also raises the soft palate for proper space when opening to a vowel. The exercise begins with a sole [hŋ] so that singer can feel the



Figure 5.3: Vocal Exercise to Create Forward Tone Placement

sensation of complete cord closure throughout the pattern. Once the singer has performed the exercise on [hŋ], the teacher graduates the singer to [hŋi] where the forward vowel, [i], is sustained after initiating cord closure with the hum-inducing [hŋ] (See Figure 5.4).

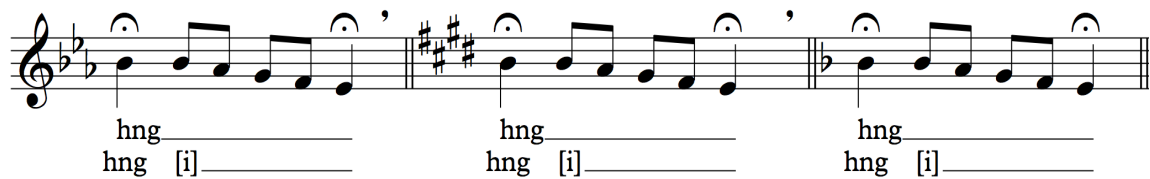


Figure 5.4: Vocal Exercise Designed to Encourage Vocal Fold Closure

Finally, both transitioning MtF and FtM singers should be working to create a stable breath support. Below (Figure 5.6) is a great exercise for building breath capacity and stamina. The exercise begins with short bursts that engage the diaphragm, then slowly build to longer, sustained hissing. The next phase of this exercise would be for the teacher to ask the singer to perform the same exercise on [ts], where more breath will

escape during the exercise, thus demanding more of the singer’s breath control (See Figure 5.6). Emerald Lessley advises a final step which alternates between the use of unvoiced and voiced [fricative] consonant pairs on the exercises in Figure 5.6. This combination encourages the coordination of respiration and phonation. Lessley recommends that, once the unvoiced consonants are successful, the student can progress to the matching voiced consonant (see Figure 5.5). Lessley notes that the teacher should both watch and palpate that the tongue is causing no extra tension under the jaw during the exercises.<sup>149</sup> The above exercises, like any exercise, should become habit. Vocal change is not an overnight phenomenon—not a linear path from transition to successful use of the new voice. Davies adds, “Some of my clients have been using these exercises for four years.

Unvoiced Fricative Pair	Voiced Fricative Pair
[s] “sit”	[z] “zit”
[f] “file”	[v] “vile”
[θ] “them”	[ð] “thin”

Figure 5.5 Unvoiced and Voiced Fricative Consonant Pairs

Changing the voice is not a quick fix.”<sup>150</sup> Richard Adler proposes that, “FtM voices have been known to transition more easily than MtF voices; however, transmale singing ability presents the singer and the singing teacher/practitioner with far greater challenges than its

<sup>149</sup> Emerald Lessley, “Teaching Transgender Singers,” A doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, 2017: 36-37.

<sup>150</sup> Richard Adler et al, 429.

female counterpart.”<sup>151</sup> Transmen, as addressed in the chapter comparing bio-male puberty commonalities, should follow the vocal exercises that mimic successful pedagogy for boys’ changing voices. Both John Cooksey and Henry Leck offer solid foundations for training boys’ changing voices, and likewise transmale singers who are transitioning and taking testosterone.

Both Cooksey and Leck concur that, after building a solid breath support, the ‘high voice (falsetto)’ is the foundation for building the modal voice (or lower register/chest voice). Leck states, the foundation of the changing voice is the ‘high voice.’ One should not avoid the low register, but the high voice is the foundation. Exercises during transition should consist of descending patterns, working from the head voice into the chest voice.

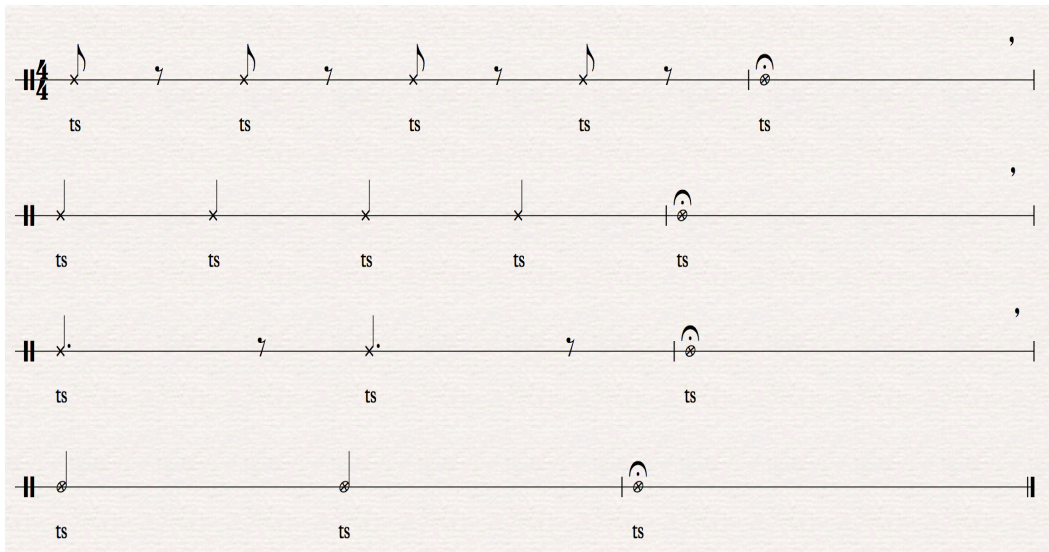


Figure 5.6: Exercise for Building Greater Breath Capacity

<sup>151</sup> Richard Adler et al, 168.



Leck describes the benefits of this approach to vocal training as: beautiful sound, the development of multiple registers, a voice without breaks, and prevention of vocal tension.<sup>152</sup> Cooksey adds that, during the time of transition, teachers should test voices frequently and aim for “beauty of tone, not power (volume).”<sup>153</sup>

Constansis’ research regarding the FtM voice during transition supports Cooksey’s claim that softer singing is more important at first: “The author [Constansis] views soft singing as the first step in successive approximations toward the goal of firmer vocal fold abduction. Occasionally, a TG/TS singer, including well-trained singers, must sing softly for a number of months because the demands of the conditioning process for the new range of the voice.”<sup>154</sup> Softer singing will also ease the ability for the singer to maintain a lower laryngeal position without the potential for extra muscle tension. Both voice teachers and vocal coaches should also have an awareness of the volume at which they play the piano during the exercises. Playing too loudly can result in the singer over-singing during the early stages of transition. The conductor, too, should listen to see if the accompanist is playing at dynamic levels which both encourage softer singing and better listening.<sup>155</sup> Alexandros Constansis, transmale singer and speech pathologist adds his own personal narrative as a professional singer who successfully transitioned:

Even though the FTM speaking voice has been generally acknowledged to transition more convincingly than the MTF voice, male singing transvocality, to anyone who has seriously studied or worked with it, proves to be far more complex than its female counterpart. This is the reason why, whereas we nowadays have many

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<sup>152</sup> Henry Leck, "The Boy's Changing Voice," DVD, Featuring Indianapolis Children's Choir & Youth Chorale. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Hal Leonard Corporation (2001).

<sup>153</sup> John Marion Cooksey, *Working with Adolescent Voices*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1992: 34.

<sup>154</sup> Richard Adler et al, 437.

<sup>155</sup> Alexandros Constansis, “The Female-to-Male (FTM) Singing Voice and its Interaction with Queer Theory: Roles and Interdependency,” In *Transposition: Music and Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, 2013.

examples of good quality MTF singers, there are so few singing transmen possessing voices of a semi-professional, let alone professional, standard. Nonetheless, after four years of my own as well as student-related experience, I can now demonstrate that a loss of singing ability (for FTM singers) is not inevitable at all.<sup>156</sup>

Constansis admonishes the ideas of Davies and others who believe that, in addition to voice lessons, FtM singers do not need speech services. He adds:

As soon as an FTM person starts receiving testosterone treatment, he is always warned about the dramatic effects that it will have on his voice. . . The general consensus even relatively recently has been, as Shelagh Davies and Joshua Mira Goldberg characteristically state, that ‘FTMs don’t need speech services because testosterone will cause pitch to drop.’ This, apart from being unfair to transmen, is also overtly simplistic as the writers admit very soon that ‘testosterone doesn’t always drop pitch low enough for FTMs to be perceived as male.’ . . . the voice change [i.e. speaking] is not always totally unproblematic. A voice assessment and some counselling before the hormone therapy are recommended.<sup>157</sup>

Constansis believes that the reason the transmale voice is highly vulnerable to vocal hurdles is because “abrupt changes are rarely beneficial to the vocal instrument.”<sup>158</sup> For transmen, he advocates the “low start and gradual increase in testosterone intake as a method kinder to the whole instrument. Oral forms of testosterone, in fact, can trigger heartburn and other stomach problems and much of the hormone is lost during the digestive process.”<sup>159</sup> To overcome the vocal hurdles associated with transitioning FtM singers, Adler categorized the most important vocal exercises needed for healthy FtM transition (See Figure 5.7).<sup>160</sup>

Exercise Categories Needed for Healthy FtM Transition
Diaphragmatic Breathing

<sup>156</sup> Alexandros N. Constansis, “The Changing Female-To-Male (FTM) Voice” (2009).

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Richard Adler et al, 175-176.

Exercise Categories Needed for Healthy FtM Transition (cont.)
Easy Onset of Tone/Elimination of Glottal Onset
Jaw/Tongue Tension Release
Overall Body Relaxation/Tension Release

Figure 5.7: Exercise Categories Needed for Healthy FtM Transition

Adler also admonishes against practicing open vowels: “Open exercises—exercises based on open vowels and sung in full voice—can be very demanding and disappointing at this stage, so they should only be employed occasionally, under supervision, in order to test some comfortable areas of the middle register. Instead, a set of exercises mostly based on consonants, in particular fricatives, should be employed.”<sup>161</sup> The exercises presented above will suffice for engaging diaphragmatic breathing and easy onset of phonation. Adler adds, “The most important safeguard for any voice, and in particular, the FtM voice in transition, is the development and use of proper diaphragmatic breathing technique. This is not only recommended for health, since it is the only one that uses full lung capacity, but also has the advantage of better supporting the vocal change to a lower phonational frequency ( $F_0$ ).”<sup>162</sup> Body relaxation can be achieved through various means. A singer may choose to practice Yoga or simply, and carefully, stretch out the body before singing, Deep-breathing exercises are another great way to help any person relax, where the inhalation/exhalation ratio is 1:2, respectively. For further individual study, a singer may wish to take Alexander Technique classes to

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

develop a better sense of total body awareness. Some singers, due to psychological stressors, may need medication to reduce tension related to anxiety.

Below are some exercises that can help FtM singers release tongue and jaw tension. A mirror is helpful for these exercises, as the singer will be able to see when the jaw is clenching or dropping out and downward (jaw tension), or when the tongue is retracting dorsally into the mouth (tongue tension). For jaw tension, a student may practice two simple experiments: massaging the jaw and massaging the jaw while engaging in other vocalises, and practicing a yawn while the head is tilted back. Yawning while tilting the head backward will simulate the sensation needed for successful jaw opening when the head is upright. Teachers should watch to be sure the jaw drops down and backward, not outward then down. The first exercise (Figure 5.8) is designed to keep the jaw from being static while employing the forward vowels. The exercise is graded so that the jaw moves less frequently as the student masters each section of the exercise. Teachers should start this exercise in a low-middle range, and work up to a high-middle range (See Figure 5.8).

1. [je] je je je je je je je je

2. [je] je je je je

3. [je]

Figure 5.8: Vocal Exercise to Reduce Jaw Tension

The exercise designed to reduce tongue tension (Figure 5.8) does not focus on beautiful tone, rather, just the freeing of the tongue from pulling back into the mouth. The singer will sing on the vowel [æ] while imagining their voice as having the NSEW compass points. When a note changes, the singer changes the position of their tongue, starting with North, then South, then East, and finally West. This rotation repeats throughout the exercise (See Figure 5.9).<sup>163</sup>



Figure 5.9: Vocal Exercise Designed to Reduce Tongue Tension

Conductor-teachers should be aware that the vocal hurdles associated with transgender singers are not always directly related to hormone therapy. As with all singers, external influences such as lifestyle choices and mood can also manifest in the voice as vocal maladies. What one does outside the rehearsal has an impact on the instrument [voice] in rehearsal. Adler states, “The human voice is an instrument that can never be put away in its case, so to speak. Whatever we do with our entire body, day and night, has the potential for affecting the voice.”<sup>164</sup>

Finally, when working with voice students, McKinney advocates the use of empathy as a powerful tool for teachers. He suggests, “trying to feel in your own mechanism the actions that are taking place in theirs - to enter so completely into what

<sup>163</sup> This exercise was provided by Janet Hopkins, Professor of Voice at the University of South Carolina.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 417.

they are doing that your own mechanism subconsciously attempts to reproduce their vocal production.” McKinney adds that motor mimicry can be one of the “quickest and most valuable methods of identifying the cause of a fault.”<sup>165</sup>

In summary, transitioning singers need three fundamental exercises to both build their new voices and maintain good vocal health. Diaphragmatic breathing is the first concern for transitioning FtM and MtF singers. Secondly, both FtM and MtF singers should work with forward, closed vowels and humming to encourage full vocal fold approximation. Lastly, for FtM singers, great importance lies in vocalizing from the head voice downward on descending patterns to create a smooth voice without cracking or breaks.

### **Repertoire Aiding in the Success of Transgender Singers’ Choral Experience**

In 2013, Constansis asserted that “No classical or art song compositions have been created with Female-to-Male transvocality in mind.”<sup>166</sup> Since that time, composers of both opera and choral repertoire have written intentionally for the transitioning transgender voice. Two overarching philosophies exist on programming repertoire for choruses in which transgender singers sing. The first is based on the ranges of transitioning voices, and the second is based on normalizing the transgender experience. Founding director of the Butterfly Chorus (the trans chorus of Boston), Sandi Hammond, says that, “hormone therapy in FtM singers can cause those singers’ ranges to be considerably shorter for a while. For some, this could be about an octave.”<sup>167</sup> Even though the process of transitioning is highly personal for each singer, she noted that

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>166</sup> Alexandros Constansis, “The Female-to-Male (FTM) Singing Voice and its Interaction with Queer theory: Roles and Interdependency,” In *Transposition: Music and Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, 2013.

<sup>167</sup> Sandi Hammond, Phone Interview, 8 March 2018.

“most of the singers in the Butterfly Chorus fell into three distinct ranges,” and thus, created three choral voicings:<sup>168</sup>

1. Trans Upper: notes rarely exceed A4 (like an alto II range)
2. Trans Middle: notes rarely go below A3 (alto extended downward into tenor range)
3. Trans Lower: baritone range (usually these singers are not taking testosterone)

In a blended chorus of both cisgender and transgender singers the application of Hammond’s voicings is that the conductor would choose repertoire in which a conservative range existed for the alto, tenor, or baritone parts - in some cases, all three could need assessment (See Appendix B for suggestions on specific choral repertoire).

Daniel Steele is the director of Choirs at Earlham College in Richmond, IN, and a voice teacher who has worked with numerous trans singers. She says that normalizing the transgender experience is important when choosing choral repertoire. She says. “trans singers already feel left out in other parts of their lives, so conductors have the opportunity to program repertoire for their choruses that amplify and elevate trans people and normalize their experiences.”<sup>169</sup> She adds that the easiest two ways to normalize the trans experience is to program music written by transgender composers and to program music that discusses transgender themes (See Appendix E for suggestions on specific choral repertoire).<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Danielle Steele, Phone Interview, 8 March 2018.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

## Other Factors Inhibiting Vocal Success

Some FtM singers, for example, may choose to wear a binder. Binders are garments that constrict and compress the breasts giving the illusion of their absence. The binder may be so restrictive that, the rib cage is not allowed to expand freely during inhalation, thus resulting in a shallower breath and, ultimately, poor overall breath support. While not a physiological hurdle resulting from hormone therapy, conductors should be aware that the use of a binder greatly inhibits the singer's accessibility to low breathing. Emerald Lessley notes,

“Experientially, transgender men [sic] singers who wear chest binders have a tendency to take shallow, high breaths. Although there is not yet research, anecdotal experience and observation leads to the assumption that having constant pressure and kinesthetic awareness of the upper ribs and chest subconsciously has the potential to cause the student to take high, shallow breaths.”<sup>171</sup>

Psychological factors contribute to vocal hurdles for all singers. However, given the previously mentioned statistics about the increased biases and discrimination transgender individuals face, especially those of color, one can expect that members of the trans community are more susceptible to having to fight psychological hurdles than cisgender singers. Mental health influences vocal health. Conductors who foster a more welcoming rehearsal space should aim for their trans singers to have a reprieve from the outside world during that time of music-making. Adler adds, “Psychosocial issues can often play a significant role in causing vocal misuse. Depression, fear, guilt, embarrassment, and anxiety are often etiological culprits when dealing with TG/TS clients.”<sup>172</sup> Adler outlines five prominent psychosocial-associated emotions which contribute to vocal problems in singers: fear, guilt, rage/anger, denial,

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<sup>171</sup> Emerald Lessley, 39.

<sup>172</sup> Richard Adler et al, 141.



depression/anxiety.<sup>173</sup> Adler creates a chart of these emotions paired with possible reasons and plausible vocal disorders resulting from those emotions (See Figure 5.10).

Based on the LGBT Task Force survey of over 6,000 trans persons in the United States, statistics exist to support the fact that a high percentage of drug and alcohol abuse exists in the trans community, thus trans singers may turn to drugs/alcohol in an effort to numb the stressors in their lives. Sadly, drug and alcohol abuse both create vocal problems and intensify preexisting vocal problems.

The primary adverse effect of drugs and alcohol abuse is the drying out of the vocal folds. The vocal folds require lubrication to healthily vibrate. When they are prohibited from doing so, the folds become irritated, creating a “rough-sounding

EMOTION	POSSIBLE CAUSE	POSSIBLE OUTCOME
Fear	Losing job, being outed, losing family/friends	Hysterical aphonia, <sup>174</sup> chronic cough leading to damage to the laryngeal tissues
Guilt	Family strife, rejection by family, religion	Vocal polyps/nodules, spasmodic dysphonia, <sup>175</sup> chronic throat clearing
Rage/Anger	At God/religion, family, “the system,” peers, or self	Severe vocal misuse/abuse, poor singing range, obtrusive yelling/screaming, vocal polyps/nodules
Denial	“I don’t need help.” “My voice always gets this way.”	Poor singing range, excessive throat clearing
Depression/Anxiety	“I’m afraid to sing.” “Nobody will help me.”	Whispering, lack of motivation to speak/sing

Figure 5.10: Psychosocial Issues in TS/TG Transition and Voice Disorders<sup>176</sup>

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Hysterical aphonia is loss of voice for psychogenic reasons.

<sup>175</sup> Spastic dysphonia is confusion of the adductor/abductor muscles controlling the vocal folds caused by a central nervous system disorder.

<sup>176</sup> Based on Adler’s Psychosocial Issue chart: Richard Adler et al, 149.

voice.”<sup>177</sup> Speech pathologist Dr. Ingo Titze<sup>178</sup> says that, singers suffering from drug/alcohol abuse often overcompensate for the less pliable voice which results in hemorrhages (ruptured blood vessels) and vocal polyps.<sup>179</sup> A more severe outcome of drug and alcohol abuse is the loss of muscle sensation concerning the vocal folds. The singer eventually loses the fine muscle sensation and muscle memory connected to the physiology of singing. When a singer is vocalizing without those sensations, they can push the voice to compensate for the numbness in the cords, leading to further damage.<sup>180</sup>

### **Helping the Trans Singer Find a Speech Pathologist**

While the conductor-teacher can create an inclusive environment in their rehearsals to reduce the potential that trans singers are having experiences leading to possible adverse vocal afflictions, the conductor-teacher has little control over the experiences of trans singers outside the classroom. Commonly, singers bring emotional burdens into the choral rehearsal. Given the statistics on the transgender experience, it is not surprising that some trans singers will require a combined approach to successful singing: good vocal pedagogy in the rehearsal, working sessions with a speech pathologist, and the help of a mental health professional. When recommending a student/singer to a speech pathologist, Richard Adler states the need for singers to find a professional who possesses the following traits:

- Knowledge and experience as a singer
- The ability to sing in tune, without the aid of accompaniment
- Can read music, in both treble and bass clef

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<sup>177</sup> Molly Gloss, “Drugs, Alcohol - And Singing,” *Voice Council Magazine Online*, (June 2012).

<sup>178</sup> Dr. Ingo Titze is a vocal scientist and executive director of the National Center for Voice and Speech at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City.

<sup>179</sup> Molly Gloss, “Drugs, Alcohol - And Singing,” *Voice Council Magazine Online*, (June 2012).

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

- Understands the keyboard and music notation system
- Can identify, describe, and demonstrate differences in vocal resonance within their own vocal range
- Understands the concept of passaggio
- Can demonstrate vocal exercises, using easy onset of vowels<sup>181</sup>

Conductor-teachers should also refer trans singers to health care professionals who are either known to be allies of the LGBTQ community or can perform their professional responsibilities to the client without bias or prejudice based on their personal beliefs about transgender persons and the trans community.

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<sup>181</sup> Richard Adler et al, 413-414.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND AREAS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

#### Research Conclusions

As America becomes more educated concerning transgender persons and the role of gender in one's identity, conductor-educators face the challenge of changing old habits and creating new standards for their rehearsals. The chorus construct must be examined through the lens of inclusivity, especially gender identity. Conductors must adapt to new ideas of voicing, pedagogy, and language in rehearsals.

Since 2015, two articles regarding transgender singers have appeared in *The Choral Journal*. Given that this journal is especially targeting choral scholars and educators, the prominence of transgender issues in their publication proves the existence of public interest in knowing more about creating inclusive environments for transgender singers, as well as singers who do not fit into gender stereotypes rooted in older or previous choral traditions, such as a female tenor or baritone.

The first conclusion parallels an adaptation of the Biblical adage, "there is no new thing under the sun."<sup>182</sup> Gender fluidity is seen throughout Western music history, from the aural and visual enigma of the castrati to transgender opera singers of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the gender non-conforming singers in choruses across America. From the Baroque

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<sup>182</sup> Book of Ecclesiastes 1:9 "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun."

Era to the Romantic Era, one finds that, castrati singers were associated with power and wealth, and they were (when successful) praised for their musical prowess. Additionally, female singers often portrayed men via pants roles. Roles such as the warrior “Serse, (Xerxes)” in Handel’s *Serse* or “Maffio Orsini” in Donizetti’s *Lucrezia Borgia* are cherished operatic repertoire, even hundreds of years after their creation. In today’s choral communities, once conductors can respect singers’ gender identity—even those identities that are seemingly hidden under a shell, which does not match the societal expectation for a given gender—the contributions made by transgender singers and gender non-conforming singers can also be cherished aspects of the modern choral construct.

Gender identity is closely tied to voice and language. One’s voice – its pitch, timbre, rate, and inflexion – can be markers of gender identity. Voice as identity has a reciprocity between the voice’s owner and the public who hears it. Gender perception and attribution through voice is highly personal. For the transgender singer, the voice can contribute to gender dysphoria (when the sound the singer hears does not match the gender identity they claim), or it can be a cathartic, proud, metamorphosis—that moment when the singer owns a voice that finally matches the internal gender identity. The public, especially choral conductor-educators, have a responsibility to the singers whom they lead to avoid gender stereotyping based on vocal attributes. Moreover, choral sections must never be assigned a gender label. As much as it is inappropriate for an orchestral conductor to look at the flute section and say, “Ladies, let’s hear that again,” it is equally egregious for a choral conductor to address the soprano and alto sections in the same manner. One cannot assume that all sopranos and alto identify as female, no more

than one can assume that tenors and basses identify as male. Gender and voice type are mutually exclusive constructs.

Conductors must also be aware of assumptions and gender pronouns. Again, a seemingly outward female presentation is not an indicator on an internalized female gender identity. Gender neutral pronouns also exist in addition to the gendered s/he pronouns with which most people are familiar. Remembering all of the pronoun options can be difficult, but one can always be safe by addressing singers by their given name, because, like voice types, names lack gender—they can only be assumed.

Life experiences for persons whose gender identity does not conform to societal expectations of a given gender can be harshly different from cisgender persons. Often, those narratives cast a shadow on the experiences that singer brings to the chorus. As research shows, transgender persons have often experienced both physical and sexual assault, especially within academic institutions. For persons of color, the percentage of these horrible occurrences is higher. Most transgender persons have come from similarly fragile backgrounds. A knowledge of the median transgender experience can help conductors not only make the rehearsal a more welcoming space, but that knowledge also gives the conductor insight to some poor, psychologically-influenced, vocal habits found in transgender singers who have had traumatic experiences.

No standard vocal outcome exists for transgender singers who choose to undergo physical transition. While the pitch trajectory for FtM singers is somewhat predictable in that it *may* closely follow cisgender male puberty, the outcome is more uncertain. For cisgender males, post-puberty vocal pitch usually lowers by one octave. FtM singers undergo synthetic male puberty induced by injections of testosterone. A singer who was

formerly categorized as a soprano or alto could see pitch changes as low as bass range; however, the possibility exists for those singers that even after much testosterone exposure, no change in pitch will occur—only a slightly husky vocal quality.

The work of Alexandros Constansis provides two important proofs: loss of singing voice completely for transgender singers undergoing transition is not inevitable, and that a trajectory of testosterone introduction that most closely matches cisgender male puberty is insurance that FtM singers will incur the least amount of vocal damage. However, FtM singers who choose to take the highest prescribed amounts of testosterone have a higher risk of vocal damage.

Post-puberty MtF singers will see no change in vocal pitch when exposed to estrogen. MtF singers can work with a speech pathologist to coax vocal feminization. Additionally, MtF singers may choose risky surgery to shorten the vocal folds, thus raising the pitch of both the speaking and singing voice. The quality of vocal skill after such surgery is uncertain. MtF singers may either continue singing in their modal voice, or experiment with using falsetto as an option to sing alto or soprano.

The most important vocal exercises for transitioning singers, whether FtM or MtF, are exercises that focus on breath control and bringing the head voice down. Speech pathologists and pedagogues agree that diaphragmatic breathing is the first step in building a successful voice. Vocal exercises that utilize forward vowels and bring the head voice down in to the modal voice are equally important. Diaphragmatic breathing and sustained breath can be achieved by practicing the sustained, relaxed, hissing [s] or [ts]. Next, the teacher should focus on exercises that are not necessarily pitch-specific, such as the tongue trill slides and sirens. Finally, the teacher will build range and vocal

fold strength through the use of descending patterns using forward vowels and nasal consonants, such as [i] and [n].

### **Areas of Further Research**

Two major areas exist for further research: prepubescent physical transition and research concerning intersex persons. Currently, no longitudinal studies exist on transgender singers who transitioned before the onset of natural puberty. That is, cases where transgender persons took puberty-blocking hormones when they were children. What are the trajectories for their vocal health and aural aesthetic? Will such an MtF singer always have a voice which mirrors the sound of a boy soprano, or will the vocal quality darken and deepen with age as is the case with cisgender females? Will such an FtM singer develop vocally like a cisgender tenor or bass, or will that singer always have a slightly higher voice?

While extracting data from the Translucent Voices survey, a few respondents were angry that no research was being done surrounding intersex persons. These respondents resented being lumped into a broader category of “transgender.” The survey itself, did not label intersex persons as transgender; however, intersex persons taking the survey felt marginalized due to the lack of research being done to help intersex singers. While attending the first Trans Singing Voice Conference in America at Earlham College in January of 2017, I met an intersex singer who had to make tough choices. This singer had to choose not only a gender identity, but also a voice classification that would complement their gender choice. Given the continuing struggle for acceptance, recognition, and rights within the transgender community, one can easily imagine how



difficult those same struggles are for intersex persons and other persons who identify gender non-binary.

A final area for further research would be examining higher education choral programs to gain a knowledge of which programs place emphasis on gender-inclusive language during rehearsals. Since most choral conductors replicate the practices modelled by their university choral conductors, logic dictates that conductors who have models of inclusivity will most likely proliferate the practice of inclusive language in their own rehearsals when they graduate and lead choral programs of their own.

Most adult/young adult choruses, by nature, designate the soprano/alto classifications for women, and the tenor/bass classifications for men. This very structure, thus, creates two specific problems for today's choral world in relation to gender identity—for both the singers and the conductors. Conductors can easily wean themselves away from gendering entire sections of singers by simply addressing those sections by their titles: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. While some trans singers may choose to sing in trans choirs, where they can easily find common life experiences while making music, others may choose to affirm their voices as normalized by joining a more traditional SATB, TB, or SA chorus. Regardless of these choices, the gender identities of trans singers—of all singers—should be respected and never assumed based on section placement or physical appearance.

Since the Stonewall riots of 1969, the rights of LGBT people have advanced significantly in social sectors. However, as of 2015, an estimated 41% of transgender people will attempt suicide during their lives. Can the chorus, a social institution that relies on inclusivity to exist, afford to marginalize or ignore its trans members?

Author Alexis Kalivretenos ponders, “What if there was one activity that could benefit every student in every school across the nation? . . . An activity that would allow students to form lasting friendships . . . that would help students become more disciplined and confident? Fortunately, there is such an activity . . . This activity is music.”<sup>183</sup> Trans and gender non-conforming singers shouldn’t have to live in major metropolitan areas to find choral communities in which they can grow musically and form lasting friendships. As awareness and acceptance of LGBTQ persons continues to increase, so must choral conductor-educators continue to educate themselves regarding pedagogical practices that foster appropriate learning environments for all singers.

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<sup>183</sup> Alexis Kalivretenos, “The Importance of Music Education,” Thehumanist.com, 2015.

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## APPENDIX A

### TRANSLUCENT VOICES SURVEY QUESTIONS

The following list of questions was answered by 154 respondents from the United States and Canada regarding the transgender experience in choral rehearsals.

1. What are your preferred pronouns?
2. Where do you live (country)?
3. Where do you live (state)?
4. Where do you live (city)?
5. What is your current voice classification?
6. Have you experienced choral rehearsals where the conductor used offensive or negative language in regards to gender identity?
7. If yes, how often?
8. Have you experienced choral rehearsals where the conductor used positive or affirming language in regards to gender identity?
9. If yes, how often?
10. Have you had experiences during choral rehearsals where you felt threatened, bullied, or uncomfortable because you are a transgender person, or have you witnessed transgender persons having these experiences during choral rehearsals?
11. If yes, please briefly describe.
12. Have there been experiences during choral rehearsals where you (a transgender

- person) felt threatened, bullied, or uncomfortable because of a cisgender singer, or have you (a cisgender person) witnessed transgender persons having these experiences during rehearsals? (If you are a cisgender singer, you may now skip to question 30. Thank you!)
13. If yes, briefly describe.
  14. Have you had an experience where you felt encouraged or welcomed in rehearsal by another transgender person?
  15. If yes, briefly describe.
  16. Have you had an experience where you felt encouraged or welcomed in rehearsal by a cisgender person?
  17. If yes, briefly describe.
  18. Have you had an experience where you felt encouraged or welcomed in rehearsal by the conductor?
  19. If yes or no, please briefly describe.
  20. Are you currently taking hormones, or have completed hormone therapy?
  21. What hormones are you taking/have taken?
  22. What are/were the doses/frequencies?
  23. Prior to hormone therapy, what was your voice classification?
  24. If you have started or are in the middle of hormone therapy, what is your current voice classification?
  25. If you have finished hormone therapy, what is your current classification?
  26. What specific changes have you noticed in your singing voice during hormone therapy? (Check all that apply.)

27. What are the biggest challenges in using your new singing voice?
28. Have you noticed other physical changes (not in the larynx explicitly) that have an impact on your singing voice?
29. If yes, briefly describe.
30. Thank you! You are now finished! If you wish to provide additional comments or feedback below, please use the comment box. If you have no additional feedback or comments, please scroll to the bottom of the page and click "Done."

## APPENDIX B

### CHORAL REPERTOIRE SUGGESTIONS FOR TRANS INCLUSIVITY

#### Repertoire with Trans-Accessible Ranges for Transitioning Singers

Title	Composer	Voicing	Source Access	Other Information
Aegra currit ad medicum	Orlando Lassus	TT	Cpdl.org	Secular madrigal, range for either low alto or high tenor
I have been young	William Byrd	AAB	Cpdl.org	Full anthem, all ranges are low alto/high tenor, transpose as needed
Vorrei baciarti	Claudio Monteverdi	AA/basso continuo	Cpdl.org	Secular madrigal, Both voices are very manageable alto/high tenor ranges
Heiterkeit – KV507	W. A. Mozart	Any voicing	Cpdl.org	Canon, can be transposed to fit range of singers
When Jesus Wept	William Billings	Any voicing	Cpdl.org	Round, all parts are 1 octave only, transpose per singer needs

#### Repertoire written by Transgender Composers or which Contain Transgender Topics

Title	Composer	Date Written	Voicing	Source Access	Other Information
Would You Harbor Me?	Ysaye Barnwell	1994	SSAATTB	The Musical Source: YMB110	All parts sit very low in the voice, most under a 5 <sup>th</sup> in range
Best Wishes	Mari Esabel Valverde	2009	SATB	Marivalverde.com manuscript	Trans composer, use of interchangeable pronouns

Title	Composer	Date Written	Voicing	Source Access	Other Information
When I Was a Boy	Valverde	2014	SSAA/piano	Marivalverde.com manuscript	Trans composer, commissioned by MUSE Choir of Cincinnati
When Thunder Comes	Valverde	2016	SATB/piano/t aiko drums	Marivalverde.com manuscript	Civil rights theme, commissioned by One Voice Mixed Chorus (MN)
Five-Year-Old Jacob	Sandi Hammond	2016	Trans Upper, Middle, Lower & piano	<a href="http://www.butterflymusictranschorus.org/contact/">http://www.butterflymusictranschorus.org/contact/</a>	Commissioned by the Butterfly Chorus of Boston, trans children theme, written specifically for transitioning voices
Crossing	Valverde	2017	TTBB/piano	Marivalverde.com manuscript	Commissioned by Seattle Gay Men's Chorus, text by trans poet (Amir Rabiya)
At the Heart	Gerald Gurss	2017	TTBB/piano & narrator	<a href="mailto:g.gurss@hotmail.com">g.gurss@hotmail.com</a>	Commissioned by the Gay Men's Chorus of Charlotte for the National Trans Day of Remembrance

## APPENDIX C

### SANDI HAMMOND PHONE INTERVIEW: SEPTEMBER 10, 2017

Sandi Hammond<sup>184</sup> is a voice teacher in Boston, Massachusetts, and is the former director of the Butterfly Chorus of Boston, Boston's transgender chorus. The Butterfly Chorus and Sandi's work with them was featured in the May 2016 issue of *The Voice of Chorus America* journal.

What is your name?

Sandra Hammond (Sandi)

What is your age?

49

Do you have a formal educational background in choral conducting or voice pedagogy?

I have an undergraduate degree, a BA from Earlham College, and I'm a Ford Foundation fellow in choral conducting.

How long have you been directing the Butterfly Chorus?

Actually, I stepped down in October 2016, but I started the chorus in November 2014. I was the founding artistic director.

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<sup>184</sup> Sandi Hammond is not transgender.

Why did you start the Butterfly Chorus?

As a teacher, I saw a huge need - - a social and psychological need to counter the stigma of shame. I had a trans male student who stopped singing when on going on T [testosterone]. It was so scary. I wanted to start a chorus, so I put it out on FB, and had over 123 responses. That affirmed to me that this was what the trans community needed.

Do you have a personal connection to the transgender community?

I really don't.

So, you're just doing this out of the kindness of your heart?

It's out of a need to make the playing field equal for civil rights. I had a passion for social justice.

What is the demographic of the Butterfly Chorus?

We had 31 singers ages 17-65 when the group started, comprised of trans, agender, and intersex singers. Cis singers were not allowed; that was established by the group. About 70% of the group was taking hormones. The first year, I promised no public concerts, because not everybody was out. There was an incubation period where everybody had public safety. We didn't even publicize where the rehearsal location was.

How do you handle voice placement?

Initially, we had no repertoire, but it was more of a gathering and a group voice lesson where we explored range and timbre, and we wrote our own music as we went. There was lots of unison, and singers were encouraged to change octaves



whenever they needed. The lowest note was A2, and falsetto took the group up to about A4. We would purchase a TTB score and edit it, or arrange own music.

Did you have traditional chorus section titles, SATB, for example?

I created 3 “paradigms:” trans 1, trans 2, trans 3 (highest to lowest).

Trans 1: A4-G3 (typically trans women)

Trans 2: lots of [gender] non-binary, and non-hormone [singers not engaged in hormone therapy] E3-E4,

Trans 3: A2-A3

In all part assignments, I considered psychology and health paramount over the artistic outcome.

What was the concert attire?

At first, it was a family and friends concert, only by personal invite. Eventually, that evolved into a long-sleeve top in a solid color (any style or color), all black bottom, and anything was acceptable: pants, skirt, etc., and black shoes.

What are some basic differences in working with FtM singers and boys whose voices are changing . . . Cis male singers?

One speech pathologist told me that the adult FtM voice on T feels full, or that the throat feels crowded. The space in a cis male voice box gains about 1.5” during puberty, and the FtM voice does not gain that same resonance. Singers who were excellent sight-readers before had their abilities compromised after – the muscle memory was compromised. Neurologists should partner up with voice teachers and study this.

Are there specific warm-ups that you feel help with transitioning singers, FtM or MtF?

Glissandi - descending and ascending, pick a vowel that feels good to you. Anita Kozan, and Alexander Constansis were the 1st people to publish on the transgender singing voice, and they advocate for trans singers pacing themselves, taking more frequent breaks. Voice rest is OK. Of course, instead of clearing the throat, drink water or I started every rehearsal with a mind-body mindfulness (meditation). That was a self-awareness that was part of a 20-30min. warm-up.

What should conductors know about working with transgender singers

Psychologically - given the rates of suicide, if you meet two trans people, it's likely that one of them has attempted suicide. 63% of the trans population has been sexually assaulted. Trans singers are facing many hurdles including: housing and health care. The trans community carries a lot of trauma - over compensate with gentleness. Gender language has to go out the window.

“Injustice at Every Turn” – every conductor needs to read this.<sup>185</sup>

Pedagogically, mental health is more important than physical, let them [FtM singers] use the lower voice at the risk of pressing the larynx. Read up on speech pathology. Section requests could be gender related, and you can't get in the way of that.

Is there specific repertoire that is inherently healthier/easier for singers during transition?

Conductors should tweak as needed, but TTB arrangements are really helpful.

Is there anything else I should know that is extremely important?

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<sup>185</sup> Grant, Jaime M., Lisa A. Mottet, Justin Tanis, Jack Harrison, Jody L. Herman, and Mara Keisling. *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*. Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011.

I presented at a music ed. conference, we are not therapists or psychologists, but teachers are in the lives of students every day. We have a right to let them know we care. If you saw a student fall and break their arm, you wouldn't say, "I'm not a doctor, I cannot help you." You never walk away from a student in physical pain, so mental suffering deserves the same respect.

## APPENDIX D

### NOAH BELLER IN-PERSON INTERVIEW:

SEPTEMBER 5, 2017, 6:25PM

### UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF CHARLOTTE

Noah Beller is an FtM singer in the One Voice Chorus of Charlotte, NC. One Voice Chorus is a non-auditioned GALA-member chorus and identifies as an LGBTQIA<sup>186</sup> chorus. In the fall of 2015, Noah asked me to assess his voice so he would know what voice part (SATB) would best suit his vocal needs as he went through hormone therapy. It was August and the start of our holiday concert cycle (August to December). At the time, I did not know Noah or his voice, so I voiced him and noticed he had a pleasant alto 1 timbre and range. Noah then proceeded to tell me that he had just started taking testosterone, and planned to have top surgery<sup>187</sup> in the coming months.

At that time in my career as the director of a GALA chorus, I had never had any transgender singers in my chorus who had come out to me as transgender let alone asked me for voice placement advice because of their transition. I felt completely useless as his leader, because I knew nothing about transgender singers' voices going through transition. However, I advised him to learn all the parts from alto 1 down to bass 2, in

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<sup>186</sup> LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual/Agender/Allied)

<sup>187</sup> Part of the transitioning process for some FtM persons is the removal of the female breast structures. This is colloquially known as "top surgery."

case his voice has lowered that much by the holiday concert. At the time of the holiday concert, Noah was singing bass 2. My lack of knowledge surrounding trans voices and the changes that can occur during FtM and MtF transition was the catalyst for my research.

Please state your name.

Noah Beller.

And how old are you?

29

Ok, Noah, at what age did you first know you were a boy?

Oh God. I don't know if it ever really like, hit at a specific point, but during high school probably around 15 or 16. I started like trying out different outfits and cut my hair and stuff, and realized it felt a lot more comfortable. And it wasn't just like, "Hey, I'm a lesbian," because I hated that word, and I never used that word for myself. Umm . . . just sort of how people treat you is different than sexuality. So, when I was doing to change my appearance wasn't changing the way people were treating me you know, how they were perceiving the pronouns that were used. Um . . . That sorta started to click into place, that it was a gender thing, and not that I'm just a "butch lesbian" - - whatever that is. Some people sorta start identifying that way and come out as trans later. But I didn't. I'm just sorta "gender-weird" for a long time, and then I came out.

Is that a technical term?

(laughing) Yea . . . I would sorta go from doing exactly what I wanted to do in terms of appearance and whatever. I would try nicknames or whatever - - usually

on the internet, not with people I knew in real life. And then I'd be like, "Well, this obviously isn't working," because I wasn't getting the validation I needed, I guess, in that presentation. So, I was like, "fuck this," and I would try and go be super girly. For like three months at a time, I would change my entire wardrobe. I spent so much money on all this clothes and crap that I didn't end up keeping because - -

. . . just for self-discovery . . .

Yea, it was like, "Well, maybe I'm really girly," and then everyone would like think that I'm a girl, and it'll be great. And it just never . . . it felt worse, obviously, because I *wasn't* a girl. So, I sorta swung back and forth from ages of 16 to 26, like yearly, in chunks of months, I would be super feminine and try really hard to like push myself out of my own way kind of, and not try and listen to that voice in my head that says "something's wrong," and then to try to go to the extreme and be like, "OK, I'm going to do what I want," but then no one was giving me the external validation to sort of, you know, make me feel good about that. So I'd be like, "What's the point of doing that?" So I'd swing back that other way. So I did this cycle for like 10 years before I finally came out, and I'm like, "I need to do something about this," because clearly, it's not going to change, and it doesn't feel good to do that - - to be someone different for chunks of time. I just wanna be one person.

So, at what age did you finally come out as transgender?

Uh . . . 26, right before my 26th birthday, I think.

Were you in college?

Nah, I was 25 and I was in Asheville, actually.

So, how long have you been singing in choirs?

I mean, I hadn't really sung since middle school. You know, where I went to school . . . In elementary school, you sing. Like, everyone sings. And you can pick up an instrument, and you can also do an instrument for a couple of years. And then middle school, you either are in band or you're in chorus, and I didn't want to play clarinet anymore, so I'm like, "I'm gonna sing." So, I was in their chorus, but by high school, we were allowed to pick any art we wanted to, so I was like, "I'm gonna go draw some stuff, and I kind of left music as like a formal activity behind until joining here (One Voice Chorus) about two years ago.

Ok. Did you have mixed gender feelings in middle school?

I don't *think* so . . . well, middle school was when I came sort of came into the like self-awareness, whereas as a kid you're like you wear whatever you want, you do whatever you want. You don't listen to anybody. My parents weren't very strict about like you need to wear dresses and be pretty or whatever, so it really didn't occur to me until middle school when it was like popularity contest crap where I'm like, "Shit, I'm not gonna have friends if I don't do what I'm supposed to do." So that may have been the beginning of that really extreme feminine side where I tried to get all like the designer clothes I could afford and keep my hair the right way, and the shoes . . .

Well, because kids come out now at like four.

Yea, Well there was never really anything gender-y about my life until sorta like late middle school or high school when it became clear that this is what the boys

do, and this is what the girls do, and I'm like, "Oh, well, where the fuck am I supposed to go, because nothing really . . . fit."

Was it hard when you came out as transgender to separate gender from sexuality?

Not especially . . . well, I came out so late, and it was fairly recently, and I feel like now most of the people who are in the liberal circles that I actually associate with - I don't talk to, you know, people who aren't going to listen to me - know.

Or in the workplace or extended family . . .

Um, I haven't really spoken to extended family. I don't have a huge family. Each of my parents have 2 siblings, and they each have two kids. So, it's not like a huge family, and as far as I know, everyone knows, because I've gotten birthday cards with the right name and stuff, but no one really talks about anything.

What about your employment?

They don't know that I'm trans, as far as I'm aware, um, and I'm not out about it because I don't want to talk about it. I don't want it to be a topic of discussion, because it gets weird. I work in food service. So, we're around each other a lot, and talking a lot, but it's a very queer-friendly environment. So, it's a lot of gay people.

Where do you work?

Panera. Being gay there is totally fine. It's not like an issue at all, and half of the people I work with at both of the locations I've worked at are like super gay. So, it's great, but I feel like trans is something different that people still feel like they have to invade your personal space, and like ask you invasive questions that are



really not appropriate to ask someone - - that even if you know them that well, you shouldn't be asking.

If your choirs ever wore gendered performance wear, did you ever have to wear a dress or a skirt?

No. I didn't have to . . . middle school, they just said, you know, "wear black and whatever."

Right, that's good. So, they didn't make you wear a dress, or pants?

In middle school, it really didn't matter to me. I had like my one dress-up outfit, which was the same dress til I outgrew it.

Have you ever experience choir directors who were not gender-sensitive?

No. Since middle school, there was nothing since you.

Ok, cool . . . Ok, now we will be talking about me, specifically, because this was in reference to any [directors] you've had in the past. So, in what ways have I made you feel comfortable regarding gender, or made the topic of gender comfortable?

I mean, just being consistently vocal about "people can sing wherever they're comfortable singing." And that, it really didn't matter as long as they're able to sing the part - - that they could just be wherever, and the fact that I was able to move so quickly from tenor 1 to tenor 2 in the same day, and then tenor 2 to baritone in the same concert cycle.

What were some of your fears before making the physical leap of transitioning?

That the image and the ideas I had in my head wouldn't come to fruition . . . that the image and ideas I had in my head, no matter what I did, it would never happen. And I think that's a fear that anyone has with any large change in their

life. It's like, "Oh, shit! This is what I want to happen, but how can I make sure that this exactly what happens?" But that's not how life works, clearly. So, I think part of the process of actually getting on testosterone and seeing things change - that fear melts away as things change, even if it wasn't exactly what I was expecting to happen or what I wanted to happen. As it happened, I was like, "This still feels good." I wasn't keen on getting facial hair, but as soon as I started growing some, I liked it.

And you were on testosterone under doctor's supervision, right?

Yes! I did everything by the book.

Because some people don't - - for various reasons. Are you happy with how it's turned out?

Yes. I mean it's still a process. I'm definitely at a place where I feel a lot more settled where it feels less like I'm waiting for the big things to happen, and sort of most of that has happened, and I'm waiting for the little things to trickle along.

Well, you look amazing. In the transgender world, there's this term, "passing," and you totally pass.

I mean, I haven't really had that issue in a really long time, actually. Occasionally, when I have my hair a little longer from behind, I'd get "ma'am-ed." Just because I'm short and petite overall, so people just assume from behind . . .

Did you have any fears about what would happen to your singing voice?

A little bit. At the time, I wasn't singing formally. I'd sing in my room with my guitar or ukulele, or in my car or whatever. And I wasn't as concerned about losing my voice as I was with all the things I did want. I figured whatever was

going to happen is going to happen, and if it was meant to be lost, then so be it; I'll just listen to music and sing horribly instead.

Were there any other physical changes to your body about which you had fears?

Not especially. I was more worried that things weren't going to change, like fat redistribution.

If you can remember, what were the frequencies and doses of your hormones? 10:20

It's always been the same.

Did you do pills or injections?

I do intramuscular injections once a week, 40mg of testosterone cypionate - 2cc.

It's a small amount, because I'm a small person. My body will never make its own testosterone, and there's some stuff that will revert, like fat loss. Some people stop because of adverse effects like hair loss.

Will you have to take testosterone forever?

Yea, I mean, until whatever age is considered past osteoporosis risk.

Have you ever taken anything besides testosterone?

No. there's not really anything you can take. I know there are some people who take like those testosterone booster, but if that doesn't work for cis guys, then it definitely doesn't work for trans guys, because our bodies don't have anything that makes the testosterone that it could be supporting.

What were some changes in your singing voice that you noticed early in your transitioning?

Within the first week you feel different - - like you feel like you have phlegm in your throat. It's not as loose. The resonance in the chest is there immediately –

it's crazy! It thickens the vocal cords. I wasn't expecting it to be so soon, but I don't think the sound that was coming out was all that different for the first like month or two. I think it was about eight weeks before people were like, "Your voice sounds different." And I was like, "Yes, it does." It felt totally different within the first week. It was crazy. And then, I think the biggest changes were at about four-five months. I noticed a big drop. And then maybe about eight months, again, it dropped. I think that would have been right after our concert. I don't know whether or not it was the workout I was getting because you were pushing my voice way higher than it wanted to go, also helped things move along smoother. Around January or February of that cycle, it dropped again, then things were steady for like six months, and now I have a falsetto, which I didn't have. It took like a year and nine months before everything feels smooth. Like when you work out, and things stop feeling rough. So now I have that with my regular singing voice, I was able to sort of explore around it, whereas before, I would go up and it would just cut out, completely. It sounded like a goose.

Were there any other vocal hurdles you noticed during transition, like notes that would disappear or notes you didn't care for?

That's what happened first; I lost high stuff. Then that stuff stayed gone – what it sounded like before is completely gone, clearly, but I can reach those notes again. Then I started gaining lower. The I would sorta together shift down and it stayed there and over time I gained strength there over time, but the top stuff is gone immediately.

What voice type were you before you started testosterone?

Soprano? Beyond that I don't know - - probably soprano 2.

Now after a year and nine months?

Now I'm at two years and three months. But at one year and nine months, I felt like everything was completely settled. I haven't felt any changes,

What part do you sing in the chorus now?

Bass 2. I love those notes!

You can sing lower than I can! That's scary!

I'm sorry!

No, I'm jealous! Have you ever worked with a speech pathologist?

No.

Have you ever had surgery to change the shape of your larynx?

No.

Do you have any advice for choral conductors working with transgender singers?

I mean it would depend on their level of understanding on how the voice works . . .  
. Vocally, socially, or psychosocially . . .?

I mean, socially, like what you do, is just making sure the space feels open and welcoming to anyone no matter what their voice is and how they look based on what their voice sounds like - - just being open to maybe moving that person around if they're having trouble singing a part. Also knowing that trans voices are just as diverse as anyone else's voices. There are guys I know who've been on T<sup>188</sup> for nearly a decade, and their voices have barely dropped. They just sound like extremely gay men!

That's the beautiful thing about being human, is that we're all different.

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<sup>188</sup> "T" is slang in the trans community for testosterone.

Just be open, and open to learning. Don't make assumptions.

Do you have any advice for transgender singers wanting to make the transition - - things you know now that you would've done differently?

I don't think I would've done much differently. I personally liked that I recorded stuff early on, and that I recorded stuff pre-T as well to sorta look back and say, "Wow, my voice changed a lot!"

Does it make you happy when you listen to the difference?

It does! And just don't be afraid to sing during transition.

## APPENDIX E

### MARI ESABEL VALVERDE SKYPE INTERVIEW: OCTOBER 23, 2016

Mari Esabel Valverde is not only a transwoman, but she is also a renowned composer and has sung with many fine choruses in the United States. Her works are published by earthsongs, Santa Barbara Music Publishing, and Walton Music, and her works have been featured at conventions and festivals such as Chorus America, the Oregon Bach Festival, the Association of British Choral Directors, and TMEA (Texas Music Educators Association). In the summer of 2016, I had the honor of directing the SATB GALA Festival chorus in Denver, CO., where I met Mari Valverde for the first time. The participating singers were members of a commissioning consortium which commissioned Valverde to write an SATB work about the trans experience. The result was “Our Phoenix,” a work for SATB chorus, piano, and solo trumpet. The text Valverde selected is by a transgender poet, Amir Raiyah. The second time I met Valverde was in January 2017 at the first Trans Singing Conference hosted by Danielle Steele at Earlham College in Richmond, IN. At that conference, she presented some of her newer choral works.

What’s the hardest part about using and finding your new voice?

I'm in an unwinnable battle with transgender and pedagogy, and it's not about the people (personally), it's about the psychology. Singers have the responsibility of choosing how to respond - - It's about patience and the ability to forgive or accept yourself.

Can you tell me a little bit about MtF transition as it relates to your experience?

MtF is mysterious. My hypothesis: I can sing fuller and darker than male adolescence. The drugs taken thin the skin and nails, so I can't imagine that it doesn't affect the inner tissues (i.e. the vocal chords).

What was your voice like before transition, as far as range?

Before transition. I was a tenor . . . 7<sup>th</sup> grade. In 8<sup>th</sup> grade it changed a little. In 9<sup>th</sup> grade the passaggio developed for tenor, and I was singing tenor 1. I dreamed all through high school of being an alto. I thought when my voice changed, it was forever. I sang tenor all through college to my senior year in the St. Olaf choir. Under the direction of Dr. Anton Armstrong.

When did you come out as transgender?

In college, I "took the reins" and asserted my gender identity. You go from being a spectator, to being the real character - - like in a video game when you control the character. Then you *are* the character. Name socialization, dressing, make-up, started my sophomore year of college. When I came out to my choral director, he looked at me and said, "I'm not blind, dear."

When you transitioned, did you sing a soprano or alto part, or resume singing tenor?



I had a voice teacher at St. Olaf for 4yrs and a fabulous choral director, and I took their lead on not singing alto. What was important was the wonderful sense of community there, feeling like I belonged. That was important.

When did you start singing alto?

I began estrogen summer before my senior year [of college], and I needed to take testosterone blockers. I was put on alto 2 by the director of the International Orange Chorale<sup>189</sup> I started full hormone therapy in January of 2011.

What was the hardest part, vocally, of your transition?


For the longest time, I didn't like singing in front of people.

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<sup>189</sup> The International Orange Chorale in an auditioned chamber choir based in San Francisco, CA, which was founded in 2003.

APPENDIX F

GERALD GURSS DMA CONDUCTING RECITAL PROGRAMS



UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTH CAROLINA**  
School of Music

*presents*

**GERALD GURSS, conductor**  
**in**  
**GRADUATE RECITAL**

**One Voice Chorus and Sotto Voce Ensemble**  
**Adam Ward and Dawn Broom, piano**  
**Liz Burns, cello**

**Sunday, April 3, 2016**  
**Reformation Lutheran Church, Columbia, SC**

Ngana	Stephen Leek (b. 1959)
Titanium	David Guetta (b. 1967)
Jonathan Wesley Oliver Jr.	Lee Lessack (b. 1967) arr. Manceaux
Nothing Left to Say	Jake Narverud (b. 1986)
To My Parents	Joshua Shank (b. 1980)
<i>The Drop that Contained the Sea</i> III. Temen Oblak	Christopher Tin (b. 1976)
Love Never Fails	J.A.C. Redford (b. 1953)
This Marriage	Ed Rex (b. 1987)
Only in Sleep	Eriks Esenvalds (b. 1977)
Glenda and Lauree	Gerald Gurss (b.1977)

*Mr. Gurss is a student of Dr. Larry Wyatt.  
This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the Doctorate of Musical Arts degree in Choral Conducting.*



UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTH CAROLINA**

School of Music

*presents*

**GERALD GURSS, conductor**

**in**

**DOCTORAL RECITAL**

**December 2 & 3 2016, 7:30 PM**

**Unitarian Universalist Church of Charlotte, Charlotte, NC  
One Voice Chorus and Charlotte Pride Band Brass ensemble  
Dr. Adam Ward, *accompanist***

Away in a Manger	Ola Gjeilo (b. 1978)
The King Shall Rejoice, from <i>Coronation Anthems</i> (1727)	G.F. Handel (1685-1759)
The Prayer	Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943)
Not in Our Town	Kevin Robison (b. 1966)
Ukuthula	South African, arr. Markus Schlaf (b. 1972)
Festival First Nowell	Dan Forest (b. 1978)

*Mr. Gurss is a student of Dr. Larry Wyatt.  
This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the Doctor of Musical Arts degree.*





UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTH CAROLINA**

School of Music

*presents*

***Unclouded Day***

*with*

***Sotto Voce ensemble***

**Gerald Gurss, artistic director**

**Dawn Broom, collaborative pianist**

**Monday, March 5, 2017**

**2:00 PM • Sharon Memorial Park Mausoleum**

Sing a Mighty Song	Daniel Gawthrop (b. 1949)
Ecce quomodo moritur justus	Jacob Handl (1550-1591)
“Hymn to the Eternal Flame” from <i>To Be Certain of the Dawn</i>	Stephen Paulus (1949-2014)
Flight Song	Kim Andre Arnesen (b. 1980)
Bogoroditse devo	Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943)
I have been young	Thomas Weelkes (1576-1623)
Unclouded Day	Arr. Shawn Kirchner (b. 1970)
White Horses	Gwyneth Walker (b. 1947)
Os justi meditabitur	Anton Bruckner (1824-1896)
I Love You/What a Wonderful World	Arr. Craig Hella Johnson (b. 1962)
Alone	Arr. Lindsey Cope (b. 1980)
Psalm 150	Ernani Aguiar (b. 1950)
Earth Song	Frank Ticheli (b. 1958)

2 April 2017 - 3pm  
First United Methodist Church - Charlotte, NC

# Codebreaker

Presented By LazrArt

One Voice Chorus

Gerald Gurss - Artistic Director

Adam Ward - Accompanist

Nashville in Harmony

Don Schlosser - Artistic Director

With Special Guests

Dr. Kristen Wunderlich, soprano

Members of the Charlotte Symphony

## Nashville in Harmony

Ella's Song . . . . . Bernice Johnson Reagon  
Ose Shalom (Traditional Hebrew Text) . . . . . John Leavitt  
"No Day but Today," from *Rent* . . . . . Jonathan Larson/arr. Brymer  
Why We Sing . . . . . Greg Gilpin  
Brandon Brown, soloist

## One Voice Chorus

If the World Only Knew . . . . . Scott Evan Davis  
Elizabeth Moll & Robbie Furr, soloists  
"I Am Missing You," from *When We No Longer Touch* . . . . . Kristopher Anthony  
Scarlett Rippy, soprano  
Hallelujah . . . . . Leonard Cohen/arr. Sperry  
Robbie Furr, Jonathan Kersnowski, and Harold Lowry, soloists  
My song shall be always, Z. 31 . . . . . Henry Purcell  
Dr. Kristen Wunderlich, soprano  
Unclouded Day . . . . . arr. Shawn Kirchner  
Sotto Voce

## Intermission

Codebreaker . . . . . James McCarthy (b. 1979)

We Shall Be Happy  
Hyperboloids  
Gordon Brown's Apology  
Sing Me At Morn  
Deep in the Night  
It Is Enough  
Declaration of War  
On the Deck of a Ship  
There Will Come Soft Rains  
Turing's Arrest  
De Profundis  
The Borders of Sleep  
A Mother's Lament  
Perhaps if Death is Kind



UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTH CAROLINA**  
School of Music

*presents*

**GERALD D. GURSS, conductor**

**in**

**DOCTORAL LECTURE-RECITAL**

**with**

**One Voice Chorus (Charlotte, NC)  
Nashville in Harmony (Nashville, TN)  
Charlotte Symphony Orchestra musicians**

**Friday, April 14, 2017  
1:15 PM • Room 215**

*Codebreaker (2014)*  
*selections from the following movements*

James McCarthy  
(b.1979)

- II. Hyperboloids
- IV. Sing Me at Morn
- VIII. On the Deck of a Ship
- IX. There Will Come Soft Rains
- XI. De Profundis
- XIV. Perhaps If Death is Kind

*Mr. Gurss is a student of Dr. Larry Wyatt.  
This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the Doctor of Musical Arts degree.*