

WHAT ABOUT MY VOICE? MUSIC PEDAGOGY AND TRANS IDENTITY

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Abstract

In this thesis, I examine the domain of music education and the experience of trans students, with particular attention to singers. In the past two decades, medical transition has expanded and become accessible to more people, many of whom are musicians and vocalists. Trans health care and vocal pedagogy are slowly catching up to this watershed moment, but there are still challenges ahead in creating truly inclusive environments for all singers.

The strongest and most impactful scholarship examining this moment is entwined with auto-ethnographic reflection, and my work follows this model. While my analysis is informed by scholarly sources as well as through first-hand accounts of trans masculine artists Holden Magadame and Elijah MacCormack, but I also draw on my own experience. Through my own transition and experiences of vocal dysphoria in my musical education, I have gained insights on how to make learning spaces and pedagogy more trans affirming.

List of Abbreviation and Symbols Used

FTM – female to male

MTF – male to female

NB – non-binary

TGE – trans and gender expansive (person)

GD – Gender dysphoria

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“We know, when we think about it, that voices are culturally constructed. Voices are always performances of a relationship negotiated between the individual vocalizer and the vocalizer’s culture.”¹

Because I grew up visibly queer in rural Alberta, gender conformity and gender roles shaped my life before I understood the terms. By twelve I had come to terms with my queer sexual orientation and was lucky to be supported by my accepting family and affirming friends and teachers. I met more resistance with my approach to gender expression, long before even realizing I was non-binary. As an adolescent, my proclivity to a more masculine presentation (both in terms of fashion and hair style) caused anxiety for those around me. Shorter hair and boyish clothing felt more comfortable to me, and in hindsight, I was naïve to the relative/situational/environmental danger that comes from being queer passing or gender non-conforming. There was also cultural praise for performing femininity, something that did not thrill me, though I cyclically obtained it by growing out my hair every five years or so. Gender identity was not talked about in the same way it is today, fifteen years ago, and throughout my youth I identified as a cis woman.

When my egg cracked in 2017 (a colloquial way of expressing when an individual realized they are trans), I was able to reflect on my childhood. Alberta is known for its conservative, cowboy culture and although I was lucky to have liberal minded folks surrounding me for the most part, bigotry and transphobia are deeply steeped into the culture. Grasping that I was transmasculine, in large part thanks to the diverse spectrum of queer people I was able to associate with as I moved to larger urban areas as a young adult, I started to comb through my childhood memories, reframing what was once a lesbian identity. My

¹ Suzanne Cusick, “On Musical Performance of Gender and Sex,” *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity and Music*, ed. Elaine Barkin & Lydia Hamessley, Carciofoli Verlagshaus, Zurich, 1999, 25-49, 29.

grade 3 and 5 school pictures feature a short masculine haircut. I hadn't requested a queer haircut; it was simply an expression of my masculinity. In the conservative cultural context, however, presenting this way was seen as being deliberately deviant and defiant. My childhood photos offer proof that gender expression is often stronger than societal expectations.

Not being particularly athletic or social, piano lessons and band class were where I found solace. At the piano camp I attended during middle school summers, there was a choir component, which was a welcome daily opportunity to stand up and create music away from the piano bench. As the week ended and we took to the stage for a dress rehearsal, a deep seeded panic set in. My parents and grandparents would shortly be filing into the auditorium for the final concert, and I was filled with dread at the idea of, them hearing my voice. "It's so high," I remember thinking. Heaven knows my parents and grandparents knew what my voice sounded like, so the crawling out of my skin feeling I had standing on the stage imagining them in the audience wasn't just stage fright. Having taken part in choirs through elementary school I rationalize now that I was coming to terms with the fact that puberty had left me with a voice on the higher pitch range when some of my peers were experiencing a deeper range. The discomfort at the sound my voice being perceived alluded to my trans identity, long before I knew of anything other than cis dom. It wasn't until adulthood that I was able to realize that the emotion I had once labelled as performance anxiety in this situation was vocal dysphoria.

Towards the end of my undergraduate degree, I started using they/them pronouns for myself, and slowly invited people in my life to do the same. My hair was cut short and stayed that way, though I look back at the pictures from its last real grow-out in 2017 with fondness. I remember seeing a picture with the long blond hair style I wore during my feminine periods before the final chop, thinking "that looks like someone in drag," years before realizing I was

trans. It is almost humorous to reflect on these memories now, they certainly were funny thoughts for a *cis* person to be having. I also had a passion for watching FTM transition videos on YouTube, where the content creator sliced together montage footage of their speaking voice saying, “this is my voice one day on T,” then “one month on T” and eventually “three years on T,” as their voice deepened and changed in timbre with time and hormone treatment. As my academic continued to be centred in music, I had not only to consider though what would happen to my speaking voice, but my singing voice as well.

This thesis grew out of an original plan to explore masculinity in country artists who were not pursuing hormone therapy, or medical transition. I sifted through the academic scholarship available on queerness and country music but found my attention once again pulled towards stories of transition, in particularly the emerging field of trans musicology. Dr. Moynan King introduced Tristan Whiston in the Queer Theatre class she taught remotely at Dalhousie in 2020 and this was the turning point for my research. King and Whiston created a multimedia piece in 2012 that told the story of Whiston’s transition, from his early career as a classically trained soprano, to how his voice changed and evolved during his transition. This work is titled *Trace* and features recordings of Whiston’s voice through different stages at his transition, layered in 12-part harmony, harmonizing with himself.² In Chapter 3 I provide an analysis of his work in further detail.

Before delving deeper into my research, I would like to clarify a few terms that will be found throughout my work. In some of the older literature the term transsexual is used; this term is now outdated and has been replaced with trans man or trans woman. Non-binary is another term that comes up frequently, this refers to someone who identifies outside of the gender binary, neither man nor woman and usually using they/them pronouns. Non-binary

² Moynan King and Tristan Whiston, “Trace,” YouTube video, November 3, 2020, 9:06, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VL1EHmxQ_ak&ab_channel=UTPJournals.

falls under “trans” as an umbrella term. David Azul addresses this evolution of terms in his research on trans masculine voice. He describes how voice researchers and clinicians started this research in the mid-1970s, at a time when “transsexualism” was classified as “a form of ‘mental and behavioral disorder.’”³ In the late 1990s, researchers were challenged by transgender activism and gender studies scholars to conceptualize the term “transgender” and see it as an interchangeable identity, (i.e. gender fluid). Azul uses “transgender” as a “overarching term to refer to all people who do not recognize themselves in the sex or gender category attributed to them at birth.,” and I will follow his lead by using that term exclusively in my research.⁴

With the 2012 edition of the ‘Standards of care for the health of transsexual, transgender, and gender-nonconforming people,’ there was a recommendation to ‘de-psychopathologize gender nonconformity’ that pushed for an understanding that transgender care should not be limited to ‘male’ or ‘female.’⁵ Gender transitioning is highly variable, and Azul writes that

some transgender people may not feel the need to feminize or masculinize their body. For others, changes in gender role and expression are sufficient to alleviate gender dysphoria. Some patients may need hormones, a possible change in gender role, but not surgery; others may need a change in gender role alone with surgery but not hormones.⁶

The variability of experience of transgender people is paralleled by the variability of human voices. Voices have always been fluid, even the most staunchly cis man has a voice that evolves throughout his life, from childhood to deeper post-puberty adult voice. Indeed, the change of voice at puberty is colloquially understood as the defining moment when a boy

³ David Azul, “Transmasculine People’s Vocal Situations: a Critical Review of Gender-Related Discourses and Empirical Data,” *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders* 50, no. 1 (2015): 31. Total page numbers?

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

becomes a man. As testosterone floods the growing male body, the larynx enlarges, often producing an “Adam’s apple” that is visible in the throat, and vocal cords and folds thicken and elongate. Thus, a boy’s voice may shift dramatically from high and light to low and deep, and this alteration in voice often changes his (and others’) sense of himself. The female voice also undergoes change in response to hormones at puberty, but the impact is less dramatic; indeed, research has only recently understood that the female larynx grows at all.⁷

Because the human voice is so profoundly intimate and individual, it sometimes represents a person’s truest and most authentic self; while the transition of puberty is socially accepted as a natural revealing of a man’s “real” voice, vocal transition for transgender people is more fraught. In Chapter Two I explore the process of medical transition, what it often entails for a trans man and the nuance of using some of these technologies for non-binary identities as well. For those who wish to masculinize their voice, testosterone therapy offers patients varying results. Although testosterone has a greater impact on the voice than estrogen does in terms of pitch and range, the results are not uniform or guaranteed. Some of the more challenging results of testosterone use include “restriction of phonation frequency, voice quality and vocal power.”⁸ In other words testosterone treatment is often a gamble for patients, with other aspects voice and communication such as “articulation, resonance, vocabulary choices and nonverbal behavior,” having a significant impact on the perceived gender of a voice.⁹ Azul uses the term “vocal situation” to describe the diversity and complexity of factors that shape gender-related aspects of transmasculine people’s voices and how they are received and experienced first-hand.¹⁰

⁷ Lynn Gackle, “The Adolescent Female Voice: Characteristics of Change and Stages of Development,” *Choral Journal* 31/8, 1991.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 32

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

In Chapter Three I examine the life and career of two professional singers who transitioned: Holden Madagame who started his medical transition in 2017, and Elijah McCormick, a *male soprano*. Both vocalists embody different aspects of trans identity and demonstrate that transition of any kind is not always linear. Madagame writes that he although he was initially leery of hormone treatment, after finishing his undergraduate degree he was, “too depressed and dysphoric to sing anyway.”¹¹ Lastly Adrian Angelico is analysed, as one of the first trans men performing in the opera world as a mezzo soprano.

Finally, in Chapter Four I delve into trans pedagogy, with an analysis of the current political climate that surrounds trans rights in schools. With trans rights and protections in question or limbo across North America, I demonstrate the positive impact music programs and educators can have trans student experiences. Pronouns and name protection has been recently disputed in New Brunswick and Saskatchewan educational policies, making it the right time to advocate for equality and safe spaces for trans and queer students. Queer Chorus groups, a trend with a history traceable back to the 1970s, demonstrate the positive impact singing and community building has on the LGBT community.

In “Transgender Passing Guides and the Vocal Performance of Gender and Sexuality,” Stephan Pennington explains that gender essentialism rooted in vocal theory is quite subjective and open to interpretation.¹² For example, “Men tend to speak at a single pitch while women tend to make frequent pitch changes to their speech to the point they

¹¹ Madagame, Holden. “Holden Madagame: The Trans Opera Singer Who Went from Mezzo Soprano to Tenor.” *London: Independent Digital News & Media*, 2017. <https://ezproxy.library.dal.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/other-sources/holden-madagame-trans-opera-singer-who-went-mezzo/docview/1972103711/se-2>.

¹² Stephan Pennington, “Transgender Passing Guides and the Vocal Performance of Gender and Sexuality,” *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Queerness* (2018). 3 add total pages

almost seem to be singing.”¹³ Before even getting to the musical expressiveness of singing, the speaking voice has characteristics that link to gender, which leads trans people wishing to pass as a different gender than the one assigned at birth must think about expression just as much as pitch. “Indeed, Melanie Anne’s passing guide goes even further, stating “that in every group of several words a woman will string together in a sentence, usually no two are spoken at the same pitch. This is what makes women’s voices sound so ‘sing song.’ In fact, they ARE singing!” Pennington writes.¹⁴ However, it is not just that women are expected to speak more musically than men that connects passing guides and musicology, but also the way singers themselves are often trained.”¹⁵ Pennington points to how tangible identity is, how voices reflect that, and how in actuality gender is much more complex than simply male and female. “Societal imagination that men and women have completely different voices and are profoundly different from each other.”¹⁶

Masculine transition is sometimes referred to as a second puberty, with similarities to first puberty in terms of acne and moodiness. A change in voice is also part of it. What modern advancements have allowed for, and I find to be of particular interest, is how the voice change differs in patients pre and post puberty. Transitioning at a younger age means the patient often has a more flexible laryngeal structure.¹⁷ Currently, there is little published scholarship on adolescent transition and certainly none on voice in particular, but this is an area of research that will surely explode in the coming years. In the early months of testosterone treatment there is a misconception that singing is altogether out of the equation.

¹³ Stephan Pennington, “Transgender Passing Guides and the Vocal Performance of Gender and Sexuality,” *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Queerness* (2018). 3. Can use Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

What Constansis found in his own experience was that gentle vocal exercises allowed for him to use his voice throughout these months.¹⁸

Lucas Silveira, now in his early 40s, made history as the first out transgender man signed to a major record label in 2006.¹⁹ Fearful of the uncertain effects testosterone would have on his voice, Silveira “began his hormone therapy slowly, incrementally increasing his dosage and doing regular vocal exercises to minimize damage to his changing vocal cords.”²⁰ Taking a four-year hiatus from his band the Clinks, Silveira spent three years retraining his voice explaining, “It was a really scary time. For a good year and a half to two years, I had a really tough time just finding my voice and knowing exactly where it was going to end up.”²¹

The idea of transition as second puberty is somewhat fictitious since testosterone is slowly secreted by the body during first puberty and does not suddenly commence at the highest level. Due to accumulated collagen in adults, the folds thickening and elongation become permanent, the voice acquires a masculine fundamental frequency at a more rapid pace. Even with a lower and slower dose of testosterone there is a period where the voice is rendered uncontrollable and of limited use for a certain period, which can be progressed more quickly with vocal therapy. Constansis also reports that many trans men have a higher range in their falsetto than before transitioning, another variable patient undergoing treatment must consider.²² Generally a vocalist’s range increases a fifth and a ninth. Another area of interest on this topic is vocal power. It has been said that “most trans men do not possess bodies capable of supporting a masculine voice of operatic dimensions.” However, Constansis

¹⁸ Alexanros Constansis, “The Changing Female-to-Male (FTM) Voice,” *Radical Musicology*, 2008 <http://www.radical-musicology.org.uk/2008/Constansis>.

¹⁹ Sunnive Brydum, “Finding His Voice,” *Advocate.com*, Nov. 17, 2015. <https://www.advocate.com/print-issue/current-issue/2013/04/16/finding-his-voice>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*,

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Pennington, 10.

illuminates the impact vocal exercises and techniques can have on this issue, with a large cross over with asthmatic breathing exercises.²³

Nonbinary voices and identities are catalysts for a watershed moment. The initial fear around hormone therapy is evolving with doctors who are gaining experience treating trans patients, as well as a growing population of people who have transitioned, to refer to. Even the rhetoric around transition, once plagued with negative connotations, with descriptors such as of trans male voices including “squeaky tonalities of a pubescent boy,” the work Gen X did is benefiting millennials and Gen Z. Literature around transition from the past two decades often contains language shrouded in fear, for example, discussion of “damage to his changing vocal cords,” has been repositioned in a more affirming and less fear mongering way.²⁴ Agender approaches usurps the hierarchy, repositioning everyone as equal, for just as trans people use audio effects and behaviors techniques to portray their gender, so too do cis people; even more prevalently. Pennington notes that

As so many trans people use music to gain insight into crafting a gendered voice, and considering that speech and voice form a continuum rather than a binary, it makes sense to reverse the process and ask what passing guides can tell scholars about musical performances, especially as these passing guides give insight into not only speech, but also vocabulary and gesture, which can be used when looking at lyrics as well as the singer’s performing body.²⁵

One of the greatest weaknesses with gender essentialism is that it excludes anyone that falls outside of the scope of man or woman. Pennington’s passing guide provides an excellent definition of the terms and practices used in the music industry as well as a step-by-step guide for educators and musicians alike to challenge the restrictive traditions.²⁶ What the system refers to here is what Pennington is also addressing in terms of gender. Nonbinary and gender

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Brydum.

²⁵ Pennington, 10.

²⁶ Ibid.

non-conforming artists today indicate that the gender essentialism found in much of musical curriculum is already dated.

I want to note that while I have reproduced the division of these elements into male- and female-coded binary categories, I do not subscribe to the notion that sex or gender is binary. I recognize the flexibility and messiness of the reality of vocal gender production, and gender in general, and how ‘people acquire (and sometimes reject) the vocal habits and characteristics of the family, culture, peer group, region and environment from which they emerge.’²⁷

Pennington makes a poignant point here, that voices are bound by labels of the culture in which they exist. This excludes intersex people and those on hormone treatment. Christopher Cayari writes in his article “Demystifying trans voice education: The Transgender Singing Conference,” that, “While music educators’ attitudes towards working with trans students are generally positive, many educators are not sure how to teach trans singers.”²⁸ The response or reaction to gender essentialism is an evolution past the heteronormative masculine-feminine binary.²⁹

Thinking outside the box of male and female voices, musicians and music consumers are invited to avoid male/female binary sonic spaces. Although fashion and dance are other exciting areas in which gender and queer identities unfold onstage, music remains one of the stronger mediums for demonstrating the oneness of the once binaried genders.³⁰ Pennington points out that, “The average difference in pitch between male and female speakers is greater than the physiological difference between vocal cords and larynx...clearly the difference in pitch between English-speaking males and females cannot be attributed to biology alone.”³¹

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Christopher Cayari, “Demystifying Trans+ Voice Education: The Transgender Singing Voice Conference,” *International Journal of Music Education* 37, no. 1, 2019: 118.

²⁹ Pennington, 24.

³⁰ Binaried (joke).

³¹ Pennington.

Similarly, many people who pursue hormone treatment find out that their hormone levels are already naturally leaning in the way they wish to expedite.

Transitioning goals vary by person. For some, hormone therapy is sufficient in alleviating their dysphoria. Others pursue surgeries. I feel that music education would benefit from including trans vocalists, and in Chapter 2 I explain key terms in queer discourse. Voice and identity intersect in many ways therefore transition redefines both facets of a person. Masculinization through testosterone therapy offers patients changes, though as medical transition is still in its relative infancy, these changes are often hard to predict. Depending on a number of factors such as genetics and dosing, a voice may change in timbre and range or both.

Chapter 2: Trans Voices, Medical Transition and Masculinization

Most people take for granted their own gender as congruent but cannot tell you how or why it feels in harmony. Imagine your life has been lived out of tune and post hormone treatment, you suddenly have perfect pitch to play the instrument of your body.³²

This chapter outlines the research that has been done on trans musicology, an overview of medical transition and the impact it has on a vocalist's performance.

Transmasculine people and trans men are often overlooked. Susan Stryker explains in her book *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution*, that,

Transgender men tend to disappear into the woodwork of mainstream society and tend not to participate in groups and organizations. One reason for this difference lay in the fact that it was often easier for a mature female to pass as a young man than it was for a mature male to pass as a woman (with or without the use of hormones and surgery). Because visually perceiving someone to be transgender is one of the main triggers for antitransgender discrimination and violence.³³

Dysphoria

Dysphoria/Gender dysphoria (GD) is a technical term first “used to describe individuals who experience sufficient discomfort with their biological sex to form the wish for reassignment.”³⁴ Trans people who experience dysphoria may take action to change aspects of their appearance.

There are many other terms, such as gender variant, gender nonconforming, gender queer, gender fluid, bigender, gender neutral, agender, and nonbinary, along with “trans*,” transsexual, and transgender. And, cross-culturally, there are many terms used to label individuals whose behavior and subjective identity fall under the rubric of a “third gender.”³⁵

³² Langer, 314.

³³ Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution*, Second edition, New York, NY: Seal Press, 2017, 101.

³⁴ Kenneth J Zucker, Anne A Lawrence, and P.C Kreukels Baudewijntje. “Gender Dysphoria in Adults.” *Annual review of clinical psychology* 12, no. 1 (2016): 217–247, 218.

³⁵ Ibid.

Much of medical transition and masculinization through testosterone is bringing the body to a place of congruence, matching how the individual feels on the inside with how they present on the outside, both physically and sonically. “Our bodies’ manifestation of sexuality is essential to our being,” meaning that just as cis identity is held in high importance to a person’s identity, so to must trans identity.³⁶ I bear constant bear witness to straight and cis people lamenting about how queer people make their sexuality or gender identity their whole personality, insisting that they mention it too much or too often. There must be an insistence by marginalized identities to reiterate their existence, and is often the case, publicly tell people so they are not perceived as straight or cis which is the default assumption.

“The process of knowing the body is a nuanced and rambling path,” Langer continues, pointing to the fact that identity is fluid and often changes overtime. This idea is of relevance to transition, a trans man’s voice is going to undergo a number of changes both in range and in tone. “The way to direct treatment related to gender diversity (dysphoria) is by working toward creating attunement within the body,” which is a process that takes time.³⁷ Similar to puberty, testosterone treatment reminds singers that the voice is understood as malleable and changing. In the next chapter I highlight two artists who were employed as professional musicians through their transition, as taking a year or two off is not an option for many vocalists, depending where they are in their career.

What access to other trans people and media offered me was a language to reconceptualize my identity, something Langer describes as “creating a new body through language.”³⁸ Transition is a remedy to dysphoria, in some ways. There is often an improvement in mental health after starting hormone treatment, as the dissonance between

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ S.J. Langer, “Trans Bodies and the Failure of Mirrors.” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 17, no. 4 (2016): 306–316.

³⁸ Langer, Our Body Project, Ibid.

what is seen in the mirror or heard starts to be in line with their identity.³⁹ “I feel like more me,” expressed one of the patients Langer interviewed.⁴⁰ Langer also stresses that,

the difference between a private and public body when considering transition and treatment. Individuals’ needs and fears are so unique that the public and private domains should be fully explored in treatment. The compromises cisgendered and gender nonconforming individuals alike need to make around the imperfections of being in human bodies should be discerned from the need for gender congruence—from the recognition that transition is not only about aesthetics but about identity. What we are all searching for is realistic expectations and the ability to live with ourselves. It is necessary for one to be in connection with one's own body in order to fully know what is right for oneself.⁴¹

What this quote brings to mind is how gender is performed, both in private and in public. A closeted transgender person may express their gender identity at home or in private but feel the social pressure to present differently in public. As a child, school is often the first time where gender expression can be expanded upon, where at home, parents can be more rigid in upholding assigned gender at birth (AGAB) expectations. The idea of public and private can also be applied to music and transition: in particular when the voice is changing, there might be more of a tendency to only use the new voice at home, where there is safety and privacy.

Cusick/Identity/McClary

I will draw on Cusick’s article “On A Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight,” conceiving of a parallel concept, in this case, “A Serious Effort Not to Think Cis.”⁴² Cusick begins the article, originally written for the Feminist Theory and Music Conference in 1990, with a confession of her fear to publicize her sexual identity and connect it to musicology. I have experienced a very similar hesitation, doubting at times that I

³⁹ Ibid., 313.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 312.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Suzanne Cusick, “On A Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight” in Brett Philip Elizabeth Wood and Gary C Thomas ed., *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2006, 67-83.

am the right person to connect transness to musicology. Luckily, I am not the first to do so, and I have an array of material to call upon. I applaud the courage it took for Cusick to “say the word ‘lesbian’ in a musicological crowd.”⁴³ By rejecting the homogenous “straight” approach to musicology in the 1990s Cusick pushed the field of musicology forward, and the scholars I refer to in the coming paragraphs are doing similar work for trans identities and vocality in 2024. And although there is temptation to hide behind an assumed cis identity, it would contribute to the concept of *l’essere finta* or “faked being” that Cusick describes, similar to the approach her work took (initially omitting any mention of lesbianhood).⁴⁴ Cusick addresses the disservice to her cause that omitting discussion of her sexuality would create. She acknowledges that writing a book proposal on feminism without including lesbian recognition, would in many ways perpetuate heteronormative society’s erasure of queerness . What I hope to do with this research is connect the theory of marginalization that gay and lesbian folks such as Cusick have paved the way for, and extend it to trans folks. Cusick mentions a “unified theory of lesbian musicality” and that is the conversation I hope to extend.

Cusick’s connection between self-identity and music is corroborated by Susan McClary, who writes in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* that music “contributes heavily (if surreptitiously) to the shaping of individual identities.”⁴⁵ With music teaching us how to “experience our own emotions, our own desires, and even our own bodies,” as McClary writes, what the exploration of trans music and vocality is doing is allowing a spotlight to be shone on this marginalized group that has been forgotten or overlooked historically.⁴⁶ I will be elaborating on in Chapter 3 with a discussion of pedagogy,

⁴³ Ibid., 68.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁵ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings Music, Gender, and Sexuality*

⁴⁶ Ibid., 53.

I can foreshadow: “Our academic music disciplines tend, however, to voice questions of signification altogether, to deny the presence even of expressive (let alone erotic) components in music.”⁴⁷ In Chapter 2 I will be highlighting some of the vocal artists of today who are navigating their careers in classical music, and how gender roles are imbedded into current practices. To this point McClary wrote in 2002 that,

classical music presents a wide range of competing images and models of sexuality, some of which seem to reinscribe faithfully the often patriarchal and homophobic norms of the cultures in which they originated, and some of which resist or call those norms to questions. If musicology took its subject matter as seriously as many pop critics take theirs, a central task would be explaining how mere pitches can be made to “represent” gender or to manipulate desire—as well as ascertaining just whose versions of gender or desire thereby get reproduced and transmitted.⁴⁸

Like Cusick’s musing on how her lesbian identity is connected to her work as a musicologist, the quote above from McClary demonstrates the impact trans musicology can and will have on the field with more development currently in motion. The evolution of feminist scholarship and inclusion in the classroom set a precedent for trans equality as well. “Feminist scholarship in every discipline is beginning to demonstrate, the tendency to deny the body and to identity with pure mind underlies virtually every aspect of Western culture,” McClary explains, and I believe being cognizant of this will help push trans issues into the forefront where they belong and can be dealt with.⁴⁹ Similar to so many courses that start with the professor explaining that their classroom is a safe space, where the value of feminism and equality are upheld, perhaps soon their preface will include a mention of trans equality, such as emphasizing the importance of pronouns and respecting gender identity.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Passing

Passing as outlined by Erving Goffman is defined as “the management of undisclosed discrediting information about self,” and was first used in racial discourse.⁵⁰ The evolution of homosexuality from at one point being considered a legal offence, to more acceptance in modern time. Valli Kalei’s article “The Social Process of ‘Passing’ to Manage Stigma: Acts of Internalized Oppression or Acts of Resistance?” examines the impact stigma had on homosexual subjects. All the gay men in their study “recounted attempts at a very young age to appear more masculine and hence more heterosexually male, and less gay.”⁵¹ Which reiterates Goffman’s theory, that the

stigmatized individual tends to hold the same belief about identity that we do, this is a pivotal fact. Yet he may perceive, usually quite correctly, that whatever others profess, they do not really ‘accept’ him and are not ready to make contact with him on ‘equal grounds.’⁵²

Which paints the trans experience in a realistic way, emphasizing that each interaction or venture into the public sphere brings with it a sense of anxiety.

Passing is performed and achieved in a multitude of ways. Jazz musician Billy Tipton, for example, lived his entire life as a stealth trans man: only at the time of his death in 1989 was his identity revealed. “Presumably because his chosen profession was not open to women but lived his personal life as a man as well, concealing the fact of his female sex even from his three adopted sons,” Goffman explains.⁵³ Similarly, I once encountered a man who, after medical transition, was passing in public. He explained to me that he was a straight man and didn’t consider himself a part of the queer community. Although I could not imagine

⁵⁰ Erving Goffman, *Stigma : Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, 1st Touchstone ed. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵² Goffman, 7.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3.

removing myself from the community the interaction left me considering visibility and how truly important queer community is. Goffman writes that “Traditionally, the question of passing has raised the issue of ‘visibility’ of a particular stigma, that is, how well or how badly the stigma is adapted to provide means of communicating that the individual possesses it,” gesturing to the historic meaning of passing in term of race.⁵⁴ Tipton is an incredible example of the choice trans people make in some cases, to be visibly out or not.

Given these several possibilities that fall between the extremes of complete secrecy on one hand and complete information on the other, it would seem that the problems people face who make a concerted and well-organized effort to pass are problems that wide ranges of persons face at some time or other. Because of the great rewards in being considered normal, almost all persons who are in a position to pass will do so on some occasion by intent.⁵⁵

Racial prejudices and homophobia make passing a goal for some. Non-binary identities further muddy the waters here, and I wonder: in terms of visibility and out-ness, what does it mean to be out or “pass” as nonbinary? Currently passing as nonbinary is hard, or it’s hard to have people read and recognize one correctly as a nonbinary person. Can we pin down “the way” that nonbinary people express gender? The answer is no because NB people express gender in many ways. Coming out as trans and seeking external legitimacy as a different gender than one was assigned involves profound gains. It can also carry, as explained in trans psychoanalyst Griffin Hansbury’s 2005 theoretical writings as well as in my personal experience, “a lingering sense of mourning, even if the lost parts of the self are ‘gladly’ and effortfully discarded.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Goffman, 48.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁶ Teddy G. Goetz, “Self(ie)-Recognition: Authenticity, Passing, and Trans Embodied Imaginaries,” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 23:4, 2022, 256-278, DOI: 10.1080/15240657.2022.2133525.

Transitioning voices are starting to be talked about more and more as individuals share their experiences. Tipton’s ability to pass without hormone therapy is an incredible feat; presumably he lowered his voice through vocal techniques, considering his manner of speaking as well. Medical transition allows for trans patients to work towards a congruence with their identity and how they look and sound.

The understanding of how one’s body and face should look and feel lives intrinsically in one’s fantasies; it is not fabricated with intention. The discordance between expected self and reality is the aforementioned source of mourning and one definition for “dysphoria.”⁵⁷

Voice change is often a priority for trans men, with one study suggesting 88% of participants list it as one of their main goals.⁵⁸ In one case a patient is described as having, “bravely placed the beautiful instrument of his singing voice on the altar of truth — ready to sacrifice it for being who he really was: a young man.”⁵⁹

The concept of transition and change is one that does not happen overnight, with many of testosterone’s effects taking months to be fully realized. In the next chapter vocalist Tristan R. Whiston is introduced, and I analyze his production *Trace*, which features recordings of his new and old voice.

Trans persons who discard elements of their prior identity and life cannot remake their whole selves from scratch. There can be no unambiguous fresh start, as their history, traces of their former selves, and physical and emotional scars join them as they navigate living and moving in a world that was not designed for transgressive selves.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Nova Hancock, Adrienne B., Kayla D. Childs, and Michael S. Irwig. “Trans Male Voice in the First Year of Testosterone Therapy: Make No Assumptions.” *Journal of speech, language, and hearing research* 60, no. 9 (2017): 2472–2482.

⁵⁹ Pamela Post, “Passiagio: A Story of Transition, Identity and Love,” CBC News, Dec. 21, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/passaggio-a-story-of-transition-identity-and-love-1.6292482>

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Whiston includes recordings of his transition voice, or in progress, which connects to passing in that identity and voice are not “always permanent; it may be brief, situational, or intermittent.”⁶¹

Pennington writes that “humans are weakly sexually dimorphic and to compensate for this we “organize learned characteristics such as posture, gesture, facial expression – and, we would add, speech, to enhance sexual dimorphism.”⁶² He also writes that

Gender, even when recognized as a pattern of culturally constructed behaviors discursively produced, has been assumed linked to biological features that distinguish the binary set male / female. Cultural associations of the physical body with both race and gender, and the putative visibility of these two identity categories, thus make race and gender passing seem more problematic than other instances of passing.”⁶³

The next chapter spotlights several classically trained vocalists who, as trans artists, were forced to navigate the shaky constraints of dimorphism. Sexual dimorphism is enhanced vocally include, for American men, pushing the voice down into a chest resonance that may not be a natural vocal placement for their individual instrument. For American women it can mean tightening the vocal apparatus to acquire a higher, lighter resonance and tone.”⁶⁴ The operatic history of castrati and pants roles shows music scholars that gender itself is a performance, similar to how even cis singers are constantly performing gender. Pennington writes that “To perform socially recognized female coding in resonance, women are encouraged to speak higher in their tessitura, focus on head resonance,” indicating that a woman’s “natural” voice or way of speaking is also curated to ascribe to the gender of woman.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Pennington, 9.

⁶³ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 11.

In *The Singing Teacher's Guide to Transgender Voices* outline five elements to be considered consciously uncoupling vocal instruction

resonance (pertaining to timbre or vocal colour), pitch (how high or low the voice is), and prosody and inflection (melodic contour)—all mainly sound-based. The fourth element, articulation (emphasis and word choice), is based in sound, behaviour, linguistics, and culture. The fifth factor, non-verbal cues (body language), is visual.⁶⁶

Classical singing ranges have at least a two-octave overlap (F3-F5) and Pennington explains that “within this overlap is a pitch zone perceived as gender neutral most generously defined between 155Hz (D#3) and 180Hz (F#3).⁶⁷ In this zone, absent other gender markers, listeners have a difficult time gendering the voices they hear, something exploited by those trying to purposefully achieve an androgynous or genderqueer vocal representation.⁶⁸ I find it so interesting how loosely gender is truly tied to pitch range, and in particular how curated cis structures of voice are. “Women are encouraged to speak higher in their tessitura with a focus on head resonance,” describing the socialization process that takes place in adolescence.⁶⁹ I remember in particular as a child imitating my mother’s voice on the phone and in social situations, seeing the impact or social success she was able to achieve in throwing her voice up higher in public than was heard at home. Pennington describes this process and practice as “at one point consciously chosen by the individual, becomes ingrained to the point of non-awareness; habit replaces choice.”⁷⁰ Where the true issue with the term “passing” comes from is the historical perspective that passing as a different gender implies “narratives of deception.”⁷¹

John Money

⁶⁶ Jackson Hearn, Liz, and Brian Kremer. *The Singing Teacher's Guide to Transgender Voices*. San Diego, California: Plural Publishing Inc., 2018.

⁶⁷ Pennington., 9.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁷¹ Ibid.

The medical field's checkered past on dealing with intersex people also comes into play here. For many decades, children born intersex were operated on at a very young age with the intention of essentially masking one of the genders. In many cases, surgery -- primarily cosmetic surgery -- was offered to parents by doctors with varying degrees of efficiency, often tailored to the parents' preferred sex for their baby. This kind of surgical alternation contributed to many people experiencing puberty differently than much of the population. Crass handling of intersex cases by doctors hoping to erase this section of the population resulted in a lack of resources later in life for individuals who did not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.⁷² John Money is a name often found in scholarship on gender and human sexual behavior.⁷³ Money has faced heavy criticism since the 1990s for his handling of many medical cases involving gender reassignment surgery. It would be remiss to glaze over the negative impact he had on many people's lives. It is worth mentioning, though, that his research did have some positive impacts on the evolution of queer theory and practice. For instance, his approach towards gender essentialism was progressive, in that he believed the differences between the sexes was too often exaggerated. "Thus, on the criterion of sex, today's stereotypic roles for males and females are biased towards insufficient attention to the similarities between the sexes and exaggeration of the differences."⁷⁴

Money was monumental in the fight for equality for the transgender community. He was the first medical professional to emphasize a third gender, stating that, "today's

⁷² Alex S. Keuroghlian, Jennifer Potter, and Sari L. Reisner, eds. *Transgender and Gender Diverse Health Care : the Fenway Guide*, New York: McGraw Hill, 2022, Chapter 25.

⁷³ John Money, *Gendermaps: Social Constructionism, Feminism and Sexosophical History*, Bloomsbury Academic Collections, Gender Studies. London: Bloomsbury Academic. <https://search-ebscohostcom.ezproxy.library.dal.ca./login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=1342825&site=ehost-live>.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

stereotypic roles for males and females are biased towards insufficient attention to the similarities between the sexes and exaggeration of the differences.”⁷⁵ His work was inspired largely by patients who, reacting to gender dysphoria, would take matters into their own hands, often with an element of violence towards removing their secondary sex characteristics.⁷⁶ The medical transition available today, and becoming more accessible to the general public is thanks to Money’s concept of *idee fixe*, a novel concept that moves transgender and gender nonconforming issues away from a pathology and more of an issue that can be treated.⁷⁷ Although it is difficult to read of some of Money’s missteps over his career, he does need to be acknowledged as one of the first practitioners who believed patients when they expressed discomfort with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Money supported doing away with gender essentialism, expressing that “Biologically humans are weakly sexually dimorphic, and to compensate for this we organize learned characteristics, such as posture, gesture, facial expression - and, we would add, speech, to enhance sexual dimorphism.”⁷⁸ As much of my research has indicated, that the majority of binary gender thought limits gender expression, Money agreed. His work is a catalyst for the discourse on gender identity, gender role, sexual orientation and freedom of sexual expression that is still evolving today.⁷⁹ “Money Protocol” was a term used to indicate treatment of a patient, in essence treating the patient how they wished to be treated in respect to their gender identity. “From the turn of the millennium, [his work] has been more criticized than praised, but it remains the first major statement of what Money believed sex and gender were and

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁷⁶ Paul R. Abramson, “For the Sake of Money: A Pre-Birthday Greeting to John Money,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 28, no. 1 (1991): 1–1. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3812946>.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Pennington.

⁷⁹ Goldie.

what they could be.”⁸⁰ “Because Money was often operating at society’s edges, he was very concerned with how medical assessments could be made when the general populace might be uncomfortable with the issues at hand.”⁸¹

FTM Transition (Medical)

With the 2012 edition of the ‘Standards of care for the health of transexual, transgender, and gender-nonconforming people,’ there was a recommendation to ‘de-psychopathologize gender nonconformity’ that pushed for an understanding that transgender care should not be limited to ‘male’ or ‘female.’⁸² Gender transitioning is highly variable, and Azul writes that,

some transgender people may not feel the need to feminize or masculinize their body. For others, changes in gender role and expression are sufficient to alleviate gender dysphoria. Some patients may need hormones, a possible change in gender role, but not surgery; others may need a change in gender role alone with surgery but not hormones.⁸³

For those who wish to masculinize their voice, testosterone therapy offers patients varying results. Although testosterone has a greater impact of the voice than estrogen does in terms of pitch and range, the results are not uniform or guaranteed. Some of the more challenging results of testosterone use include “restriction of phonation frequency, voice quality and vocal power.”⁸⁴ In other words testosterone treatment is often a gamble for patients, with other aspects voice and communication such as “articulation, resonance, vocabulary choices and nonverbal behavior,” having a large impact on what gender a voice is perceived as.⁸⁵ Azul uses the term ‘vocal situation’ to describe the diversity and complexity of

⁸⁰ Abramson, 89.

⁸¹ Ibid., 93.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 32

⁸⁵ Ibid.

factors that shape gender-related aspects of transmasculine people's voices and how they are received and experienced first-hand.⁸⁶

In Chapter 3 I will elaborate on the use of technology, primarily photo editing and voice editing technology as a way for transgender individuals to explore their gender identity. In both of these cases the user is able to change elements of their body appearance or sonic quality of their voice to closer resemble their gender identity.

Alexandros Constansis writes in his article, "The Changing Female-to-Male (FTM) voice," female to male transition methods have already evolved in the last 20 years, through a series of interviews and personal reflection.⁸⁷ In the early 2000s the starting dose for patients seeking testosterone (often called simply "T") was 250 mg injected every two weeks. For context today the standard dosage is between 10 and 50 mg weekly depending on the person's starting levels. The massive dose of 250 mg created voices in patients by permanent hoarseness, lack of control and colour, as well as limited power. These characteristics are what Constansis calls an "Entrapped FTM voice" and refers to a "disturbed analogy between growing vocal folds and *the encasing* of them in an established laryngeal structure."⁸⁸ In more simple and binary terms, this method of transition is like trying to grow male vocal cords in a female structure. He writes that during his undergraduate music studies, a vocal osteopath described a medically transitioned larynx as slightly greater in size than the average soprano but less supple to the touch.⁸⁹ It was also noted that the size of some patient's vocal folds did not change in size at all after being on T. While 250 mg was once seen as the ideal dosage to maximize masculinization, a more gradual approach with a lower dose allows for the larynx

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Constansis, 3.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 6.

structure to adapt.⁹⁰ Vocal therapy in conjunction with hormone treatment was a more standard practice for trans feminine patients, though many scholars now support this approach for trans masculine patients as well.

Thinking outside the box of male and female voices, musicians and music consumers are invited to avoid male/female binary sonic spaces. Although fashion and dance are other exciting areas in which gender and queer identities unfold onstage, music remains one of the stronger mediums for demonstrating the oneness of the once binaried genders.⁹¹ Pennington points out that, “The average difference in pitch between male and female speakers is greater than the physiological difference between vocal cords and larynx...clearly the difference in pitch between English-speaking males and females cannot be attributed to biology alone.”⁹² Similarly, many people who pursue hormone treatment find out that their hormone levels are already naturally leaning in the way they wish to expedite.

Music education evolving brings new terms, for example *chiaroscuro*, a term meaning light and dark; literally, clear, and obscured is a useful descriptor for nonbinary and trans voices, that decenters the gender binary.⁹³

Singing/Voices

Indeed men’s larynxes and vocal chords are proportionally larger than women’s” 9

Hancock et al.’s paper “Trans Male Voice in the First Year of Testosterone Therapy: Make No Assumptions,” reiterates the unpredictable nature of testosterone therapy.⁹⁴ “Mean fundamental frequency (MF0) during reading decreased, although to variable extents and

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Binaried (joke)

⁹² Pennington.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Nova Hancock, Adrienne B., Kayla D. Childs, and Michael S. Irwig, “Trans Male Voice in the First Year of Testosterone Therapy: Make No Assumptions,” *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* 60, no. 9, 2017: 2472–2482.

rates. Phonation frequency range shifted down the scale, although it increased in some participants and decreased in others.”⁹⁵ They contend that in the first year of treatment the voice deepens in three patterns, “significant change during first 6 months only, change during months 3–9 only, and steady change over 12 months.”⁹⁶ With voice being such a pivotal aspect of identity, for vocalists or not, abnormal vocal quality after transition, such as breathiness or roughness may cause distress.⁹⁷ Which leads to the question, Does gender have a timbre? Knight writes that voices are not teathered to gender identity, explaining that voices can be described as “light/dark, thick/thin, rich, bright, strident, or deep, but none of these qualities necessarily occur in the body of any assigned sex. High voices are not found exclusively in AFAB bodies.”⁹⁸ Mentioning Prince, Maxwell, Robert Plant, and Russell Crowe as exemplified. And in the case of low voices not always being associated with bodies assigned male at birth (AMAB); Big Mama Thornton, Cherie Currie, and Ivete Sangalo

Vocal range and timbre play a large part in vocal associations with gender, though they do not always tell the full story. Resonance for example is often discussed in vocal therapy, due to the challenging nature to control it. The sound made when laughing or sneezing is called automatics, and are considered when trying to pass or alter one’s presentation.⁹⁹ With voice being associated with one’s most true self, the manipulation and medical interventions available highlight just how malleable and every changing one can be.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 2473.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 2475.

⁹⁸ Knight, 7.

⁹⁹ Knight, 6.

Chapter 3 Classically Trained Trans Voices

“The process of knowing the body is a nuanced and rambling path,”¹⁰⁰

Tristan Whiston is a multi-disciplinary Canadian artist whose production titled *Trace* addresses the effect testosterone has on a professional singer. Whiston trained for many years in classical music and performed as a soprano. Transitioning later in life, Whiston’s voice changed both in range and in character. *Trace* is an audio/visual and interactive production “which chronicles the transition of the creator and performer.”¹⁰¹ Co-produced by Moynan King, *Trace* was conceived as an art installation in 2012, later being developed into a full theatrical production in 2023.¹⁰²

All the voices which are heard throughout the performance are Tristan’s from various points in his life. The harmonies Whiston creates with their voice are beautiful, layer upon layer of haunting, beautiful sound. Accompanied by projections of both archival video footage and images reflecting the sound itself, the experience becomes fully immersive.¹⁰³

Bilingual in its content *Trace* was introduced to me in A Queer Theatre course offered at Dalhousie. I was taken with the nature of the work “*Trace* excavates the experience of one transgender voice as metaphor.”¹⁰⁴

Holden Madagame’s experience has some similarities, in particular the gravity and weight that deciding to medically transition causes trans vocalists. Before starting his transition, Holden explains that he was,

Too depressed and dysphoric to sing anyway, and the way I was living wasn't viable, I decided to come out and start testosterone, notwithstanding the un-researched effects it

¹⁰⁰ Langer, 68.

¹⁰¹ Tristan Whiston and Moynan King, “Trace,” Youtube Video, Nov. 3, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VL1EHmxQ_ak&ab_channel=UTPJournals

¹⁰² Tristan Whiston, “ReDefine Arts and Theatre Passe Muraille’s Trace,” *A View From The Box*. April 29, 2023 <https://aviewfromthebox.net/2023/04/29/-arts-and-theatre-passe-murailles-trace>.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Whiston.

would have on my voice. Many colleagues and teachers tried to dissuade me - or at the very least gave me their unsolicited opinions about my decision.¹⁰⁵

“A couple of my singer friends were sort of like, you’re ruining your career, you’re ruining your life, the voice is everything,” to which he replied “I would rather enjoy my life, and pursue singing if it happens. I didn’t know if I was going to be able to.”¹⁰⁶ “Many colleagues and teachers tried to dissuade me - or at the very least gave me their unsolicited opinions about my decision,” Holden explains, with one of his professors predicting it might take his lyric coloratura mezzo range to that of a tenor.¹⁰⁷ Holden continues that at the time of his decision, he didn’t know any trans-masculine singers. Visibility and diversity within the classical world is expanding and becoming acquainted with the sound of trans voices should be exciting. “The timbre of his voice – its overall colour and resonance – began to change. ‘At first, it’s not the actual pitches that are dropping,’ he said, describing the first few months of his transition.¹⁰⁸

Holden reflects on the changes his voice underwent in many aspects, not only pitch. “My voice wasn’t light and flexible anymore,” he explains, “and high notes were excruciating at first because of how absolutely wretched it sounded. I was constantly breaking and cracking, and I had to start rebuilding my technique from the ground up, and it was difficult not only practically, but emotionally.¹⁰⁹ He remarks that with time the embarrassment he felt by the sound of his changing voice evaporated as his voice settled into its new range, it needed to “stretch and acclimate itself to my new body and new vocal folds – it’s not always possible to

¹⁰⁵ Holden Madagame. *Holden Madagame: The Trans Opera Singer Who Went from Mezzo Soprano to Tenor*. London: Independent Digital News & Media, 2017.

¹⁰⁶ Cooper, Michael. “Transgender Opera Singers Find Their Voices.” *New York Times (Online)*. New York: New York Times Company, 2019.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

explain that.”¹¹⁰ The time it takes for the voice to change has a large impact on vocalist, who are often using their voice to support themselves.

Holden took advantage of a program offered through the Glyndebourne Academy in England that retrains vocalists who have gone through hormone treatment. “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,” Holden writes, explaining the unique situation trans vocalists are faced with.¹¹¹ The Glyndebourne Academy is:

for those young classical singers (16- 26) who have missed out on the chance to develop their vocal talent through lack of access to specialist knowledge, funds, or who have faced some other barrier which has prevented them reaching their full potential. Glyndebourne was creating a safe space for singers to accept their flaws or inadequacies, and to work on them without judgement, and to give them a real chance to make up for lost time due to finances, illness, disability - or in my [Holden's] case, the two years lost while taking testosterone.¹¹²

The program offers coaching and lessons towards the goal of mixing head and chest voice, and establishing a new foundational vocal technique. Holden reports that the through counselling offered in tandem with vocal training participants were given, “simple tools to combat strong emotions like embarrassment, shame, and more,” which was essential in battling “the ways that anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems might affect us, and how it can hinder our abilities to do our jobs.”¹¹³

I see the idea of passing like qualitative terms in neurodivergence, high vs low functioning, passing or not, good vs bad. Pennington writes that “humans are weakly sexually dimorphic and to compensate for this we “organize learned characteristics such as posture,

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

gesture, facial expression – and, we would add, speech, to enhance sexual dimorphism.”¹¹⁴ This chapter spotlights several classically trained vocalists who as trans artists forced to navigate the shaky constraints of dimorphism. “Sexual dimorphism is enhanced vocally include, for American men, “pushing the voice down into a chest resonance that may not be a natural vocal placement for their individual instrument. For American women it can mean tightening the vocal apparatus to acquire a higher, lighter resonance and tone.”¹¹⁵ The operatic history of castrati and pants roles shows music scholars that gender itself is a performance, like how even cis singers are constantly performing gender. Pennington writes that “To perform socially recognized female coding in resonance, women are encouraged to speak higher in their tessitura, focus on head resonance,” indicating that a woman’s “natural” voice or way of speaking is also curated to ascribe to the gender of woman.¹¹⁶

Which brings me back to the question, “Does gender have a timbre?” In the article *Them and the Timbre of Gender* Adrian Angelico is introduced. Angelico (he/him) is a Norwegian transmasculine opera singer who embodies a similar space to Holden.¹¹⁷ Angelico specializes in ‘pants roles’ which are typically teenage boys portrayed by cisgender women in drag. In interview he expressed that he is willing to play any gender on stage, “hand me some fake boobs and a wig and I’ll ‘drag’ for you, no worries.”¹¹⁸ Adrian Angelico has been described as, “A real mezzoprano with an extraordinary range including roundness and fullness.”¹¹⁹

As Marchand and Knight conclude in their article, in thousands of operas they conducted analysis on, only thirty contain “overt 2SLGBTQIA+” content. Of which an even

¹¹⁴ Pennington, 9.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 11.

¹¹⁷ <https://stellispolaris.com/news/adrian-angelico-mezzo-soprano>

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

smaller percentage contain trans and non-binary content. In response to their findings, they began writing *Them*, loosely based Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, genderqueer surrealist artists and Nazi resisters. As they crafted the work questions emerged such as “Does gender have a timbre? What is the semiotics of gender that are implicitly (or explicitly) embedded in operatic composition by the librettist or composer, and how can they be used or dismantle this work?”¹²⁰

What *Them* highlights is that “As gender identities are individual, perception is in the *ear* of the beholder, aesthetics is personal, and semiotics are learned (therefore may be *unlearned*) – they would we impose gendered voices on music and voice?”¹²¹ Holden and Angelico are navigating the foreground of Marchand’s question “Trans singers exist, but what would we *do* with them?”¹²² This is a question at the essence of my research. As a trans musician who was happy to hide behind the keyboard, and in first hearing about a hesitancy to medically transition from Rae Spoon in their documentary *My Prairie Home*, I stated to wonder what would have to change or evolve in music pedagogy to answer the above question. Besides deconstructing the rigid SATB structure what else can be done to expand the musical field to be welcoming and a place of affirmation for all gender expressions.

Resisting a deep dive into operatic history, it would be remiss to completely omit the impact this genre’s legacy of gender play has on trans music today. “Though queerness on stage is implied and rarely spelled out, opera once provided a sphere to be and see queer,” Marchand explains. Opera’s long-standing tradition of women in pants roles (also called “trouser,” “breeches,” “*travesti*” roles). Marchand highlights how today these roles are often assumed by women wherein the “queer-factor is preserved by transposing male

¹²⁰ Ibid. 42

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Knight.

homoeroticism to lesbianism. This interpretation safeguards lesbian voyeurism, excluding men from singing these roles.”¹²³

Elijah McCormack is a *male soprano* who holds a Master of Music from Indiana University’s Historical Performance Institute.¹²⁴ As a transgender man who specializes in Bach and Baroque performance, hormone therapy was a decision McCormack did not take lightly,

I considered taking testosterone, and I chose not to. I’ve made peace with the fact that I’m not necessarily going to pass as male all or even most of the time. It’s the same things with vocal production: I just made my peace by validating myself.¹²⁵

Navigating operatic roles as a vocalist who sings countertenor, soprano and pants roles has certain advantages. The flexibility of McCormack’s identity on stage extended to castrato opera repertoire, finding Handel’s music idiom “fit his gender identity *and* voice: light, bright, and straight-toned, thanks to his years of English-Style choral training.”¹²⁶

In the vein of voice and identity, another concept to consider is mutational falsetto or puberphonia, which is described as,

A functional voice disorder being persistence of patients’ adolescent voice characteristics after puberty. The higher pitched voice or voice register shifts are the main symptoms of mutational falsetto that persists beyond puberty. Patients’ voice is weak, thin, breathy, hoarse, effeminate, and immature which is too high continuously and in the long term.¹²⁷

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Elijah McCormack, “Elijah McCormack, Male Soprano,” <https://www.elijahmccormacksoprano.com/>.

¹²⁵ Hannah Edgar, “New Artist of the Month: Male Soprano Elijah McCormack,” [musicalamerica.com worldwide](https://www.musicalamerica.com/news/newsstory.cfm?storyid=53012&categoryid=2&archived=0), June 1, 2023. <https://www.musicalamerica.com/news/newsstory.cfm?storyid=53012&categoryid=2&archived=0>.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Çağıl Gökdoğan,, Ozan Gökdoğan, Hakan Tutar, Utku Aydil, and Metin Yılmaz. “Speech Range Profile (SRP) Findings Before and After Mutational Falsetto (Puberphonia).” *Journal of Voice* 30, no. 4 (2016): 448–451

Puberty, the time in which this phenomenon takes place is when the larynx descends and the length of the vocal cords increases, and generally, “sound frequency in men falls about 1 octave.”¹²⁸ Dr. Jaqueline Warwick examines puberphonia in the context of Micheal Jackson, suggesting that Jackson’s voice was due in part at least to a rejection of manhood, a result of abuse, or both.¹²⁹ During puberty, mutations due to age are seen both in girls and boys. However, this change is more apparent in boys compared with girls. Boy’s voices falls about 1 octave. Therefore, girls’ and boys’ voices which show similarities before the puberty period separate significantly to create gender differences, and the voice quality in specific low frequencies in males is created. “For mutational falsetto, intervention was applied by modifying voice therapy techniques, such as larynx manipulation, larynx-depressing exercise, and producing a vegetative voice,” which is in a similar vein to vocal therapy prescribed to trans people.

In *Trace* co-producer Moynan King narrates over the footage of Whiston on stage. There is polyphonal layering of “can you hear me.”¹³⁰ The Scottish folk song “The Water is Wide” opens the video available on YouTube. The phrase “can you hear me” is repeated, asking the audience in some manner if they are able to hear Tristan’s pretransition voice and his post transition voice. “Trace excavates the experience of one transgender voice as a metaphor, a metaphor for the idea that stasis is counter to life and that we are always becoming.”¹³¹ As the music is constant throughout, audience members can hear both versions

¹²⁸ Ibid., 448.

¹²⁹ Jacqueline Warwick, “‘You can’t win, child, but you can’t get out of the game’: Michael Jackson’s transition from child star to superstar”, in Gary E. McPherson (ed.), *Musical Prodigies: Interpretations from Psychology, Education, Musicology, and Ethnomusicology* (Oxford, 2016; online edn, Oxford Academic, 19 Jan. 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199685851.003.0033>, accessed 27 Mar. 2024.

¹³⁰ Whiston.

¹³¹ Ibid.

of Whiston's voice, in harmony with each other. In the promotional poster Whiston is positioned sitting on a beach in masculine attire, looking at his younger more feminine self in a swimming costume closer to the water. This entire piece of performance art can be summarized in this visual, Whiston reflecting on the place from which he started or came from, in the state he is in today. I feel strongly that *Trace* in its entirety is to come to terms with or a reckoning on Whiston as an artist pretransition and how is he able to conceptualize himself post transition.

King's voice narrates the opening of this video and the performance piece itself. When Whiston does speak he opens with a reflection on trans voices,

I think as far as I understand, voices change, like the strings on a violin there are some that are thinner and some that are thicker but each of the strings has range, you'll see the other hand kind of moving up and down the frets and as the string gets shorter the pitch goes higher. What I understand is happening to my vocal cords is that they are getting longer and thicker.¹³²

Aesthetically Whiston's choice of beach attire matches the cabana theme, flowy fabrics with a striped white and blue motif. Whiston ambles around the stage with a microphone, harmonizing with his recorded voice in moments, narrative and pushing forward the plot at other times. King's narration continues,

The audio component of *trace* consists of original compositions made exclusively from recordings of Tristan's voice at different stages of his gender transition. During the show, Tristan works with a library of sound files in a custom software program that has ten channels. Each channel corresponds to one of ten speakers that are arranged throughout the performance space. In *trace*, vocal fragments from across different times are splices, sampled, repeated, and rearranged to create new compositions. Some of these compositions are created from the unexpected, non-narrative, extra-musical noises in Tristan's breaths, pauses, and chance expletives - the kind of sounds we make when we are gathering our thoughts, or trying to think of what to say. A source of dissonance, both literally and figuratively, trans voices emphasize the clashing tensions that so easily trouble normative gender performativity.¹³³

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

Trace as evident from the promotional poster and performance video available is a reckoning of identity, something every trans personal will encounter at point, how to contextualize the changes that happen physically during transition, as well as the changes that must be made to identity. In Chapter 4 I will elaborate on the trends in trans inclusive pedagogy, but I bring this up here because I believe *Trace* is an exceptional example of the trans experience. The compilation of Whiston's singing and speaking voice were recorded at different stages of his life, "child, teenager, female adult, male adult, and transitional year."¹³⁴ King's narration pushes the piece forward in asking,

How do we reconcile all that we have been with who we are now and who we have yet to become? How do we show the show of our past, which is always with and around us, that tugs at our subjectivity and inflects our identity? First, we must embrace a state of always becoming. And further we must collaborate with our own ever-changing identifications and desires with the past and with the jagged grooves of the always in motion present because in order to find harmony, one has to be simultaneously moving forward and forever resonating with and beyond. In order to find harmony, one had to listen."¹³⁵

Hearing the changes in Whiston's voice over time, the audience is left to consider,

Identity is a cultural process; it is about how we construct and express our sense of self. It is a being and a doing. In order to really do this own being, Tristan had to change his performance; in order to perform his identity, he had to change his body; in order to change himself, he had to change his voice. In *trace* the voice is used to create a representation that conjoins time and space by using performance as a way of keeping time, as a way of containing multiple concurrent times to scramble the notion of linearity. These sonic traces are like the grooves in a phonographic record, invisibly jagged, resonating around and out to extend and progress simultaneously.¹³⁶

Whiston's work can be contextualized through Goetz's article on digital technology entitled "Self(ie)-Recognition: Authenticity, Passing and Trans Embodied Imaginaries, Studies in Gender and Sexuality," where Goetz examines trans identity from a Freudian

¹³⁴ King & Whiston, "Trace Promo Kit," pdf, https://www.artstno.com/sites/nwtarts/files/trace-promokit_email-1_0.pdf

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

perspective. He summarizes that “Coming out as trans and seeking external legibility as a different gender than one was assigned involves profound gains, but can carry, in trans psychoanalyst Griffin Hansbury 2005 theoretical writings, as well as in my personal experience – a lingering sense of mourning, even if the lost parts of the self are ‘gladly’ and effortfully discarded.”¹³⁷ Leaning secondly on Butler to contextualize Freud, Goetz contends that “it may be that only by risking the incoherence of identity that connection is possible,” Bulter 1995. *Trace* supports the idea that “a trans person may forsake name, wardrobe, breasts, voice, hair, family, friends, shame and aspects of identity itself,” continuing that “even when celebratory, their removal unravels and destabilizes internal and external life narratives, exposing – perhaps unexpectedly – ambivalence.”¹³⁸

Whiston, Madagame and Angelico are trailblazers in the classical world, as some of the first artists to transition mid-career. The process of retraining a voice is as arduous the decision to transition can be. For a vocalist the stakes are higher, as many depend on their voice to make a living.

¹³⁷ Teddy G. Goetz, “Self(ie)-Recognition: Authenticity, Passing, and Trans Embodied Imaginaries,” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 23:4, 2022, 256-278, DOI: 10.1080/15240657.2022.2133525

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

Chapter 4 Trans Pedagogy: Affirming Education Practices as Resistance

There is an emerging field of scholarship playing catch up to the needs of trans students in classrooms of all levels. Lee Airton's book *Gender: Your Guide: A Gender Friendly Primer on What to Know, What to Say and What to Do in the New Gender Culture* is an excellent source in modernizing classrooms to accommodate gender expansive students.¹³⁹ Airton describes being the first nonbinary person in many people's lives and found that the task of educating cis straight people fell on their shoulders. This is often a burden that trans and gender non-conforming people carry, and in this chapter, I hope to educate cis readers on how to treat trans people with respect. With an analysis of a legal case out of Indiana that saw a music teacher pursue legal action against a school for insisting he respect student's pronouns as well as an examination of recent music pedagogy, I conclude that music educators have a great opportunity to have a positive impact on trans students.

Music is able to contribute heavily (if surreptitiously) to the shaping of individual identities: along with other influential media such as film, music teaches us how to experience our own emotions, our own desires, and even our own bodies. For better or for worse, it socializes us.¹⁴⁰

Organizations such as the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus, Halifax Gay Men's Chorus and The London Trans Choir are examples of how trans and queer voices can be not only incorporated but celebrated.

Airton is nonbinary themselves and explains that this identity falls under trans as an umbrella term but that it is different from trans man or trans woman.¹⁴¹ This is not a wholly new concept but one that has gained popularity in recent years. "Many people are coming out and openly living their lives as transgender men or women. And many transgender people are

¹³⁹ Airton.

¹⁴⁰ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2002, 53.

¹⁴¹ Airton.

coming out as *neither* men *nor* women in the traditional sense,” what Airton is getting at here is that identities are constantly evolving, while much of music education remains rooted in the gender binary.¹⁴² In light of the educational policy changed enacted by New Brunswick and Saskatchewan around gender identity in schools, there is no better time than now to focus on making the classroom a safe and affirming place for students of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Often associated with nonbinary identity is the gender neutral honorific Mx (pronounced ‘mix’) which Airton explains the Merriam-Webster dictionary incorporated in 2017,

Although the dictionary’s blog says the term first appeared in print in 1977 interestingly enough Merriam-Webster notes the Ms. had an eighty-five-year gap between being coined in 1901 and being adopted in 1986 by *The New York Times*, whereas Mx was added to the dictionary only forty years after being coined. Things appear to be speeding up!¹⁴³

Provincial Policy Changes

As Covid 19 forced classes to be streamed and taught from home, Conservative provincial legislative powers in New Brunswick and Saskatchewan moved forward with gender policies surrounding pronouns and preferred names in school.¹⁴⁴ Under the new legislation students under the age of 16 would not be able to request their preferred name or pronouns be used in school, and even more horrifying, parents would be notified by the school of any change. This policy is so archaic in nature, and came as a surprise to most, even if it can be conceptualized as an election tactic. Saskatchewan has historically not been particularly progressive in their policy around LGBT students, a study from 2013 found.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Ibid., 19.

¹⁴³ Airton, 147.

¹⁴⁴ Natalie Stechyon, “As New Brunswick Changes its LGBT Policy in Schools, Advocate Worry It’s Just the Beginning,” CBC News, June 28, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick-trans-lgbtq-higgs-1.6889957>.

¹⁴⁵ Melanie A. Morrison, Lisa Jewell, Jessica McCutcheon, and Donald B. Cochrane. “In the Face of Anti-LGBQ Behaviour: Saskatchewan High School Students’ Perceptions of School

Anti-bullying policies were found to be not well developed, with 73% of students at the time reporting frequent exposure to “homonegative speech,” at school.¹⁴⁶

Canada legalized same sex marriage in 2003, and in hindsight the 2000-2010 era can be conceptualized as a time of progress in many countries for LGBTQIA+ rights. In the United States, Obama’s presidency had “significant consequences for transgender social justice movements,” Susan Stryker explains in her book *Transgender History: The Roots of Today’s Revolution*.¹⁴⁷ While the DSM-V officially removing the diagnostic category of Gender Identity Disorder in 2013, Trump’s presidency spanning 2017-2021 halted and undid much of the progress Obama had been able to achieve. “Less than two hours after Trump and his virulently anti-LGBTQ+ activist Vice President Mike Pence were sworn into office, all mentions of LGBTQ+ issues were removed from the official White House Webpage,” is the first entry on the Human Rights Campaign’s website, the catalyst of what they call “Trump’s Timeline of Hate.”¹⁴⁸ What the next four years brought to The United States and Canada by association was the breeding ground for the anti-trans legislation we see seeping into schools today.

I see it as incredibly unlikely that the public discourse would be as dire as it is today, were it not for Trump’s impact on the American public. Perhaps also reactionary to same-sex marriage being legalized in 2015, Trump’s personal practice of hate and bullying infected the American psyche. Wherein most people would not have had the confidence to speak out publicly against queer folks, with a president saying anything and everything (seemingly) that

Climate and Consequential Impact.” *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue Canadienne de l’éducation* 37, no. 2 (2014): 1–29, 8. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/canajeducrevucan.37.2.10>.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴⁷ Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today’s Revolution*, Second edition, Berkeley: Seal Press, 2017, p. 194.

¹⁴⁸ “Trump’s Timeline of Hate” Human Rights Campaign Website, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/trumps-timeline-of-hate>

popped into his mind, why couldn't they. I rehash this begrudgingly, only due to the connection it has with Canadian politics today, with New Brunswick, Saskatchewan and Alberta all actively working to implement policies that would remove protections for trans students at schools around bathroom access and pronouns/names being respected. "Teachers and school staff are facing a conundrum: the minister of education says it's now forbidden to respect a child under 16's chosen name and pronoun, even informally or verbally, without parental consent," writes Hadeel Ibrahim in 2021, reporting on the disjunct between policy and practical application.¹⁴⁹

Committing to consistent use of chosen names is an important way for cis people to make a space trans affirming. "Choosing a name is a deeply personal aspect of transition, as are all parts of transition. If a student asks to be called by a new preferred name, respect and do so without debate or resistance."¹⁵⁰ In 2020 a lawsuit made headlines in the US, involving a music teacher at a public school in Indiana who, due to his religious beliefs, "refused to address transgender students by their preferred names and pronouns."¹⁵¹ John Kluge, the teacher in question, identifies as Christian and initially worked with school administrators to establish a practice of calling transgender students by their last name instead of their first name.¹⁵² Kluge explained that he believed it was "sinful to promote transgender behavior," which he rationalized he would be doing in using student's preferred name and pronouns.¹⁵³ An incredible labor to avoid respecting transgender student's names! The school district

¹⁴⁹ Ibrahim, Hadeel, "New LGBT School Policy Does Not Ban Informal Pronoun Changes, Experts Say," CBC News, June 14, 2021.

¹⁵⁰ Jackson Hearn, Liz, and Brian Kremer. *The Singing Teacher's Guide to Transgender Voices*. San Diego, California: Plural Publishing Inc., 2018.

¹⁵¹ Suzanne E. Eckes. "Pronouns and Preferred Names: When Public School Teachers' Religious Beliefs Conflict With School Directives." *Educational Researcher* 50, no. 1, 2021: 65–68.

¹⁵² Eckes, 65.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

argued that referring to students by the name and gender listed in the school’s database constituted a purely administrative duty and did not require the teacher to express approval for the reasons underlying any name change, resulting in Kluge resigning, and suing the school.

Suzanne E. Eckes writes that “this 2020 case is particularly significant because it is the first K-12 decision that directly analyzes when a teacher refuses to use preferred names in school.”¹⁵⁴ This approach caused tension throughout the school and made several students uncomfortable. The case essentially revolves around “whose rights take precedence when a school mandate clashes with teachers’ personal or religious beliefs.”¹⁵⁵ Which begs the question, “Do transgender students have the right to attend school in a safe environment where they are treated with dignity?”¹⁵⁶ The music teacher outed the trans student in question, because when other students asked him why the teacher refused to use his first name, the student felt forced to reveal their gender identity.

Thankfully Kluge did not win in court and his various attempts to gain sympathy, including citing freedom of speech, proved futile.¹⁵⁷ Kluge was very hung up on the semantics around pronouns and *chosen* names, stressing that the school’s policy was “celebrating gender dysphoria,” an incredibly bigoted and hyperbolic statement.¹⁵⁸ Continuing on that trend Kluge said in court that he believes gender dysphoria is a type/manifestation of effeminacy, which is sinful.¹⁵⁹ He said he also believes calling students by their preferred names would be “encouraging them in sin.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 66.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 67.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ <https://www.theindianalawyer.com/articles/former-brownsburg-music-teacher-seeks-summary-judgment-in-federal-court-in-religious-freedom-case>

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

Particularly painful in this case is the fact that Kluge was teaching music and orchestra.¹⁶¹ Music class offers a vital opportunity for children to explore their creativity and express themselves in unconventional ways, and it can be particularly vital for children who don't conform to rigid gender roles. Garrett and Palkki explain that through music education, "Celebrating our differences through communal and collaborative musical experiences is fundamental to the future of music education, and there is an opportunity in the present day to make this an even more welcoming environment for trans musicians."¹⁶² As a music teacher, Kluge had the opportunity to make his classroom a welcoming space for students, but instead he doubled down on his bigoted perspectives in expressing that "gender dysphoria a type of manifestation of effeminacy, which is sinful."¹⁶³ Perhaps due to a severe lack of understand around what gender dysphoria truly is, or that Kluge's misogyny runs as deep as his transphobia, the aforementioned quote indicates his lack of ability to teach young musicians in a safe environment.

In this painful case, Kluge's transgender students were passing as cis, and he singled them out by using their last names. Quite apart from this deliberate and pointed practice, Kluge communicated his disgust for these children in tone of voice, gesture, and more. This brings me to a significant dynamic that needs to be addressed in schools and classrooms: visual participation of gender and a consideration of gesture. As Langer notes,

¹⁶¹ Christopher Wiggins, "Court: Teacher's Religious Rights Not Infringed Upon by Trans Students' Names, Pronouns," *Advocate*, May 26, 2023, <https://www.advocate.com/law/indiana-pronoun-religious-freedom#:~:text=In%202014%2C%20Kluge%20began%20teaching,High%20School%2C%20northwest%20of%20Indianapolis>.

¹⁶² Matthew L. Garrett and Joshua Palkki, *Honoring Trans and Gender-Expansive Students in Music Education*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021, 3.

¹⁶³ Alexa Shrake, "Former Brownsburg Music Teacher Seeks Summary Judgment in Federal Court in Religious Freedom Case," *The Indiana Lawyer*, Nov. 7, 2023, <https://www.theindianalawyer.com/articles/former-brownsburg-music-teacher-seeks-summary-judgment-in-federal-court-in-religious-freedom-case>.

Gesture springs from body schema; it is an unconscious action. It is also the first communication of gender nonconformity. The looks given by adults and other children penetrate with disapproval to disgust when a gesture or walk is embodied in the “wrong” gender. Here lies tacit shame and the commencement of body modification based on mortification, such as trying to walk, talk, gesture in a manner conforming to the gender assigned at birth. This modification takes shape as the child hiding who he or she is and how they behave in front of others.¹⁶⁴

Airton encourages educators to frame diverse gender identity as a shared responsibility, where ideally teachers and students work together.¹⁶⁵ In introducing gender neutrality and acceptance, it is worth noting that gender is everywhere and requires our visual participation. One of the tenets of this approach is to not make assumptions: trans and GNC people may not always be outwardly visible, which is a compelling reason “to change gendered language and practices even if there are no (out) transgender people around.”¹⁶⁶

School can and should be a space where students are able to exist without harassment, a reprieve or oasis from the scrutiny that accompanies being trans. Langer writes,

Children quickly learn that their awareness of their gender in private is at odds with how vigilant their social self-awareness needs to be in terms of gender. This is an incomprehensible and unarticulated process for most trans children. These children begin to consciously or unconsciously manipulate their behavior away from their body schema and to a body image (and expression) that matches others’ expectation.¹⁶⁷

Deconstructing the rigid gender categories is an ongoing project for educators and there is value in having patience and being forgiving when oral slip ups happen. That said, one of my favourite parts of Airton’s work is the deliberate omission of “ally” language. “Ally has a connotation of being apart or separate from a phenomenon that is causing harm to other.”¹⁶⁸ Langer seems to suggest that in celebrating ally ship the focus is moved away from those people who should be at the centre of the discussion. Langer also suggests that the concept of

¹⁶⁴ Langer, 310.

¹⁶⁵ Airton, 52.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁶⁷ Langer, “Trans Bodies and the Failure of Mirrors,” 306.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

allyship also absolves straight and cis people from working to understand and equalize conditions for queer people.

Another aspect of these proposed changes in schools are when a student discloses their new name or pronouns, “They now have to be ‘directed’ to a school psychologist or social worker who would work with them to create a plan to inform their parents.”¹⁶⁹ Immediate referral to a school psychologist or social worker is passed off in much of the writing about this issue as a good thing, to offer aid for children that are questioning their gender identity. Unfortunately, there is much stronger connection to the historical practice of conversion therapy and other non-consensual medical treatment by queer people in the past. Dr. John Money, the doctor discussed in Chapter Two who was infamous for his procedures on intersex children, established the practice of reparative therapy “administered to gender non-conforming children with the goal of socializing them as the gender *associated* with their birth/assigned sex.”¹⁷⁰ Choosing a gender for an intersex child before they can consent or contribute to the conversation is, of course, fraught with issues. Many of Money’s patients, most famously and tragically David Reimer, suffered because of this practice and ultimately died by suicide in 2004. Positioned in 2020, To see legislation that leans on similar policies being passed in Canada in 2020 was difficult for the queer community and allies alike.

One of the tenets of Airton’s advice for teachers of queer and straight students is not to assume gender, but rather to make the classroom a safe place for gender diversity and to uphold these standards. In 2011 a study of Ontario schools found that 20% of the student population identified as “both male and female, neither, or some fluid position between the two,” which, as a nonbinary person myself, I find an astoundingly high proportion. My

¹⁶⁹ Ibrahim, Hadeel, “New LGBT School Policy Does Not Ban Informal Pronoun Changes, Experts Say,” CBC News, June 14, 2021.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 33.

experience has not involved many gender non-conforming people in my academic or work circles, though it does appear that Gen Z is turning the tables on these issues. Airton suggests that classroom settings not assume pronouns.¹⁷¹ This can easily be achieved by “signposting,” which includes actions such as incorporating pronouns into emails, sharing pronouns in introductions, and paying attention to the pronouns people are using for themselves.¹⁷²

I have found myself in many situations with a group of cis people where, when my turn to introduce myself approaches, I debate if I am going to be the one to initiate the inclusion of pronouns. Being “out” for a number of years now, it has become easier for me to take on this task, but it is such a relief if a cis gendered person is the one to signpost or include their pronouns with their introduction. If pronouns are not included in the general discussion, the burden falls on the gender non-conforming person to essentially out themselves which can lead to a feeling of ‘otherness.’ Perhaps my surprise at the statistic of 20% of the population being GNC comes since many people are not comfortable disclosing their gender identity.

Airton also remarks that there is no obligation for a GNC person to reveal their gender identity or pronouns. At a social gathering not that long ago hosted by a dear friend, introductions were being made as we sat in a circle. Typical academics, each person introduced their name and what their research was on. Outnumbered by straight/cis people, when my turn arrived, I included my pronouns and those who went after me followed suit. The host of the party, a friend who has consistently demonstrated allyship, approached me after and said, “Thank you for including your pronouns, I didn’t know how to handle *that*.” What is *that*? I wondered: everyone has pronouns, and this was an instance where I was made to feel very much like the other, simply for using they/them pronouns.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 123

¹⁷² Ibid., 128

Garrett and Palkki write in “Honouring Trans and Gender-Expansive Students in Music Education,” that

The gender binary is reinforced by presenting gender identity and expression as *either/or* phenomena: namely, an individual is either male/masculine or female/feminine, as agreed upon by societal norms. Considering positions between and among two or more points allows for *both/and* possibilities.¹⁷³

What becomes problematic in New Brunswick’s “recent changes to the policy mean it’s no longer mandatory for teachers to use the preferred pronouns or names of transgender or non-binary students under the age of 16.”¹⁷⁴ Premier Blaine Higgs “has said that the changes reflect the government’s desire to ensure parents play a role in the ‘formative years’ of their children.”¹⁷⁵ “Nationally, people are saying, ‘Why wouldn’t parents play a role?’” he said, pandering to the most conservative and close-minded Canadian population. Similarly in Alberta, Premier Jason Kenney of the United Conservative Party “passed a controversial education bill that rolled back previous protections for children who join Gay-Straight Alliances in schools.” These examples demonstrate that the political climate in Canada is sadly swinging back to a more conservative mindset. The protests that took place in the fall of 2023 were extremely unpleasant - essentially anti-LGBTQ gatherings - the likes of which Canada hasn’t seen in years. I was forced to rationalize that this is backlash or a pendulum swing due to the progress that has been made in recent years. Same-sex marriage was legalized in 2005 when I was a child, and although there has been exposure to anti-queer protests from the United States and other countries, Canada had seemed to be more steadfast and progressive in their liberal stance. Recent anti-trans policies in schools indicate a retreat from these inclusive values.

¹⁷³Garrett & Palkki.

¹⁷⁴ Stechyson.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

At the university level there is still a lot of work to be done to make a welcoming and affirming environment for trans students. I started this degree with a different name than I use now, and the process to get that changed across the board was nothing less than tedious. It took more than ten emails and over two months to finally have the change made across all platforms, email, Teams, student ID, Dalplex membership, and my official student record. Dalhousie has a LGBT Advisor who was hired only last year: in speaking with her, she revealed how much of her job is spent helping students process name and pronoun changes. The entire process was arduous for me, and there were a few times that my name was updated on my end but still showing my former name(or dead name) to my professors and fellow students. The number of hoops I had to jump through is much more complicated than it needed be, and I feel for younger undergraduate students who may not have the capacity or strength to see this to the end. That said, Dalhousie is progressive in their diploma policy, with an easy option when approaching graduation for one's "preferred name" to be the one placed on their diploma. These might seem like small things, but the statistics indicate there is a good chunk of the student body that require these services.

Returning to the importance of music as site for inclusion and safety for gender non-conforming people, I want also to celebrate the recent proliferation of queer and trans specific singing groups, such as the London Trans Choir and The San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus.¹⁷⁶ The Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses or "GALA Choruses" was founded in 1982 as an international association of LGBT choruses.¹⁷⁷ Pronounced "gay-la," GALA Choruses is an umbrella organization that represents choruses world wide that "identity themselves as part of a gay and lesbian choral movement."¹⁷⁸ Besides offering a safe space for queer people to

¹⁷⁶ <https://londontranschoir.com/about/>

¹⁷⁷ MacLachlan, Heather. "Sincerity and Irony in the 'Gay' Music of GALA Choruses." *Journal of American culture (Malden, Mass.)* 38, no. 2 (2015): 85–101.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

practice and perform together, GALA choruses set themselves apart from other choral groups by incorporating queer composers into their repertoire. “The message, broadly conceived, is an affirmation of the equality and beauty of LGBT people and their artistic contributions, and a call for a more just society which includes and celebrates all forms of diversity.”¹⁷⁹ The communities in which these organizations operate are enriched by the presence of queer choral groups. Social media is able to extend this benefit on a global scale.

The San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus was the first of its kind and was formed, “against all odds, during a highly charged time of overt discrimination” in 1978. This was the year of the assassination of Harvey Milk, the first out gay man to hold public office in California: the choir recruited 115 members in its first year.¹⁸⁰ Including the word “gay” in its name brought with it a number of challenges for the group in the early years, from discrimination and issues of discretion disputed by members, to issues securing funding.¹⁸¹ “The image that the general public has of us as sexual predator ... all those very negative images, and this is something that’s very positive to say to a loved, ‘There are great things happening in our community, too.’”¹⁸² Gay choruses from the 1970s until now have been a place of community for queer individuals to find like-minded people and build support systems. In more recent years, the inclusion of trans voices has been monumental for the trans community, with one member expressing, “My social outlet was the chorus; my political statement was the chorus.”¹⁸³ The London Trans Choir is directed by Canadian Stephen Davidson, who has structured the choir as “non-auditioned and open to all.”¹⁸⁴ Davidson

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 91.

¹⁸⁰ Hilliard, Russell E. “A Social and Historical Perspective of the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus.” *Journal of Homosexuality* 54, no. 4 (2008): 345–361, 346.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 347.

¹⁸² Ibid., 351.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 353.

¹⁸⁴ <https://londontranschoir.com/about/>

studied voice with Alexandros Constansis and holds a BMus (Performance) from the University of British Columbia and Mmus from McGill.

I see the emergence of these choirs and choruses as an incredible source of hope. A large majority of my musical experience as a child and teenager was rooted in European tradition with a Christian undertone. Singing opportunities are somewhat limited to academic or worship institutions, and GALA offers an alternative. Heather MacLachlan describes in her article, “Sincerity and Iron in the “Gay” Music of Gala Choruses,” that choruses across North America and Europe are constantly contending with what a definition of “Gay Music” is as they chose their repertoire.¹⁸⁵

While some deny a distinction between “gay” and “straight” music, I find the ways GALA choruses engage with the idea to be quite progressive. Initially gay music was defined as music composed by gay artists, though in recent years there has been a push to include music with particular significance to the gay community, such as songs from musicals.¹⁸⁶ “Music carries, in part, the identity of the performers, and depending on context, a song might become gay,” MacLachlan writes, alluding to the different meanings that can be ascertained from hearing songs performed by a gay chorus as opposed to an assumably heterosexual one.¹⁸⁷ Another way of “making straight music gay,” is by changing pronouns found in a song’s lyrics to reflect same-sex attraction.¹⁸⁸

I want to close this chapter with an emphasis on what music education can be for trans students. “We don’t teach music, *we teach people through music*,” Garret and Palkki write, continuing that “there is no music without people, and there is no music-making without

¹⁸⁵ MacLachlan

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

safety.”¹⁸⁹ In their book they use the term “Gender-Expansive” which was new to me in this context, though I find it quite lovely. Gender Non-Conforming, although still politically correct implies a level of otherness, and ‘non-conforming’ is quite close to deviant, a concept the queer community is happy to move away from. Gender-Expansive is warm and inclusive, a wonderful evolution from the pathological terms of the past, I have co-opted their abbreviation of TGE.

What Airton, Garrett and Palkki provide in their respective books are prescriptive texts, offering cis readers and educators a resource for strategies in progressing classrooms from being accepting of all gender expressions, to being a gender affirming experience for students. With much of the music curriculum being non-verbal, band and other music classes are one of the few opportunities to build connection with verbal contact. This alleviates any vocal dysphoria students may have and provides a period of peace in an otherwise stressful world. I am grateful for my supervisor Dr. Jacqueline Warwick for allowing the ethno-autobiographical approach I have incorporated into my research. Although many of the personal anecdotes I have shared are somewhat painful to relive, reading the experience of other trans people in the field of music has helped me immensely, and I feel it is somewhat of a duty to add to that lexicon. There is great value in “celebrating and honouring TGE persons, in *their own voice*,” and this is where modern scholarship is still scrambling to catch up.¹⁹⁰

Music teachers often seek to introduce students to a particular music instrument, historical genre, or to convey different styles of music via exposure to, and interaction with, professional musicians. Integrating the GAM teachers might ensure that these musicians reinforce ideas of gender equity, potentially disrupting unfortunate stereotypes (only men play

¹⁸⁹ Garrett, 2.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

trumpet etc.¹⁹¹ Garrett and Palkki emphasize that the gender binary is manifest in school music programs, not a simple feat to approach reversing, but not impossible either.¹⁹²

The field of trans academia is in a stage of exponential growth. Although historically the intersecting elements of trans lives are disproportionately affected by poverty and oppression, more and more writing is trickling into universities. The University of Arizona held a “faculty cluster hire” in 2013, with the intention of offering the first trans studies graduate minor in the world.¹⁹³ Stryker was the catalyst behind the initiative, explaining that after she finished her PhD in 1992, “the majority of [her] earnings came from outside of academia,” and that the cluster hire was to help others in similarly precarious situations.¹⁹⁴ Of the two hundred applicants, fewer than twenty identified as trans women, indicating the “disproportionate barriers and challenges trans people face at the every step along the educational pipeline.”¹⁹⁵

I hope that the progress in recent years can be an inspiration to continue this work and that trans affirming practice gains support. Choral singing impacts queer communities and individuals in a multitude of ways. With some governments working to return policies to the discriminatory past, a wider spread campaign for trans inclusion and celebration is going to be the strongest form of resistance.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 58.

¹⁹² Ibid., 53.

¹⁹³ Stryker, 216.

¹⁹⁴ Susan Stryker, “Institutionalizing Trans Studies at the University of Arizona,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 3, 2020: 354–366, 355.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 358.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

As I near the end of this degree I look back on my music education in different ways. Music was a steadfast comfort to me and still remains so, but there are ways in which my existence as a trans person defies musical tradition. Choir ensembles and the SATB format both have opportunities to evolve and better serve their members. As a child, my voice did not always match up with my identity, and through this research I have realized how nuanced and ever varying voice and gender truly are. Gender essentialism and the SATB organisation of most choral music rely on outdated models of gender theory, a field that has evolved exponentially in the past years. Music education and understanding of the voice are two areas where there is exciting growth, and the possibility of transforming the experience of trans students growing up. As Stryker points out, “Students take math. Students enroll in science class. But students *become members* of the choir, they *join* the band, they are *in* the orchestra,” and the capacity of music ensembles to foster respectful community and inclusion is indeed immense.¹⁹⁶

In Chapter Two I provided an overview of what masculinization and transition can mean. I chose an ethnographic approach to my research, connecting personal narrative to theory. Queer musicology since the 1990s has been blessed with scholars such as Cusick and McClary who have created a foundation trans theory can be built on. Personal narrative is an important aspect of trans theory, patching together a framework between theory and lived experience.

Chapter Three delved into this idea farther and examined three artists, Madagame, Whiston, and Angelico. These men are among the first vocalists to share their stories, of transitioning as a vocalist. As performers themselves they understand the isolating predicament medical transition can be for trans artists, and are motivated to tell their story in hopes it will build community while being a source of reference for future generations.

Trans people face challenges that many cis people never have to consider. In Chapter Four I explain how as public visibility and the fight for equality progress, so too has an opposition arisen. Discrimination against trans people is a large issue that schools must combat. The violence that makes headlines is can be reduced through progress in social

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 273.

understand of trans people. Educators have the opportunity to create safe and affirming environments for queer and trans students. The case studies I analysed, “make palpable and comprehensible the pain and cruelty of isolation inflicted trans people,” and there is a responsibility for teachers and administrators to provoke educational reform.¹⁹⁷

Trans voices representation is emerging on the classical music scene. As medical treatment options are improving, more people and vocalists alike can access hormone therapy. With the history of violence against trans people as a foundation for this research, I implore cis educators to incorporate affirming practices. Pronoun usage can be normalized easily when it is incorporated in a classroom or department setting. These are the first steps, in a long process to make music education more trans affirming.

¹⁹⁷ Nichols, Jeananne. “Rie’s Story, Ryan’s Journey: Music in the Life of a Transgender Student.” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 61, no. 3 (2013): 262–279, 272.

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