

**The Singing Teacher's
Guide to
Transgender Voices**

Second Edition

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A note from the authors regarding language:

Throughout this text, we have chosen to use various iterations of language across trans and queer cultures to describe non-cisgender experiences. The origin of many such terms resides in attempts to understand gender from a cisgender-normative perspective, and subsequent evolution in specificity and differentiation within trans communities to declare and preserve the vast diversity of experiences within them. Preferences for self-description should always be honored for each individual. We use terms like trans, transgender, trans/nonbinary, TGE (trans and gender expansive), TGNC (trans and gender non-conforming), and others as related umbrella language when appropriate to encourage dialogue within our readership about the many implications of labels such as these.

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword by Samson Joy Darling</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Contributor</i>	<i>xxi</i>
<i>Reviewers</i>	<i>xxiii</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xxvii</i>
<i>Singers Who Shared Their Voices</i>	<i>xxix</i>
Chapter 1. Foundations	1
Introduction	1
What Even Is Gender?	2
The Singer and the Singing	4
Gender Euphoria in the Studio	6
List of Terms and Language	7
Trans and Gender Expansive—Identifying Stage Singers, Conductors, and Composers	16
Operatic Singers	16
Musical Theater Singers, Actors	17
Choral, Musical Theater, Opera Directors and Conductors	17
Composers	17
References	18
Chapter 2. Inclusive Communication Practices	21
Introduction	21
The Impact of Gender Bias in Vocal Pedagogy	22
Voice Pedagogy Terminology That Dances Around Gender	23
Biology of Singing: Hormonal Environments and Histories	24
Vocal Function: Range, Tessitura, Registration, Timbre, Style	25
The Human Using the Voice: What Stories Do We Want to Tell?	25
Consent in Gender-Inclusive Voice Study	26
Safeguarding Trans Students and Trans Teachers: U.S. Specific Guidance	28
Student History	30
Conscientious Communication	32
References	33
Chapter 3. Voice and Transition	35
Introduction	35

In Pursuit of Comfort	35
Elements of Transition and Voice	36
Social Transition	37
Legal Transition	41
Medical Transition	43
Masculinizing Hormone Therapy	43
Feminizing Hormone Therapy	44
Honoring and Supporting Students Through Vocal Transitions	47
Interview With Kelly George, LCPC	49
References	56
Chapter 4. Exogenous Testosterone and Singing	59
Introduction	59
The Decision to Start Testosterone Hormone Therapy	60
Challenging Old Narratives	62
Predictable Changes to Expect With Testosterone	62
Laryngeal Changes to Expect With Testosterone	63
Stages of Voice Change	64
Singing Through Testosterone Hormonal Transition:	69
Everything Is New	
No Longer Entrapped	70
Repertoire	72
Selecting Repertoire: A Collaborative Process	72
Preparing the Repertoire and the Singer	74
Change the Key	75
Research Questions Still to Be Addressed	77
Questions of Acoustic Phenomena	77
Questions of Biology and Accompanying Vocal Function	78
Questions of Neurology	78
Questions of Culture	78
Final Thoughts: What Could Go Right?	79
References	79
Chapter 5. Voice Gender Expression and Perception	81
Introduction	81
Gender-Affirming Voice and Communication Therapy	82
Vocal Expression and Perception	82
Deference and Dominance	83
Pitch and Registration in Voice Gender Perception	84
Resonance, Formants, Prosody, and Articulation in Voice Gender Perception	86
Approaches to Aligning Vocal Expression and Influencing Gender Perception	87
Mimicking Biology to Influence Psychology	87

Masculinization of Voice Quality	88
Feminization of Voice Quality	90
Releasing Gendered Expectations in Teaching	93
References	94
Chapter 6. Voice Classification, Repertoire, and Casting	97
Introduction	97
Voice Classification	98
Repertoire	102
Suggested Strategies for Repertoire Selection	103
Choral Considerations	111
Casting	114
Implications for Future Research	116
References	117
Chapter 7. Strategies and Implementation for the Singing	119
Voice Studio	
Introduction	119
What's In a Voice?	120
Natural, Authentic, or Naked	120
Gender Markers in Voice	121
Respiration	121
Instructional Touch	122
The PIRA Scale	124
Pitch and Registration	125
Inflection, Emphasis, Rhythm, and Dynamics	125
Resonance and Articulation	126
Application of the PIRA Scale for Singers	127
Voice Health	131
Vocal Hygiene	132
Hydration During Medical Transition	132
Nutrition	133
Voice Recovery and Cooldowns	133
Potential for Voice Disorders	134
Developing Practice Routines	135
Vocal Exercises	136
Releasing Physical Tension and Increasing Body Awareness	138
Building Stamina and Control in Breathing	143
Balancing Subglottic Pressure, Phonation, and Improving Pitch	147
Exploring and Managing Registration	152
Finding and Strengthening Head Voice	155
Finding and Strengthening Chest Voice	158
Coordinating Mix	161
Activating the Articulators	165

Exploring Forward and Back Vowel Positions	166
References	168
Chapter 8. Building a Career While Trans	171
<i>Jay Marchand Knight, PhD, McGill University</i>	
Introduction	172
Participants	172
Lucas Bouk (he/him)	173
Deonté L. Warren (he/they)	174
Alexandra Enyart (she/her)	175
Devin Dolquist (he/him)	176
Dr. William Sauerland (he/they)	176
Katherine Goforth (she/her)	177
Camille Rogers (they/them)	177
Dr. Cee E. Adamson (she/they)	178
Patricia Yates (she/her)	179
Mike Fan (they/them)/范祖铭/Tanya Smania (she/they)	179
Eve Parker Finley (she/her)	180
Dr. LJ White (he/him)	181
Seeing Is Believing	182
Leaving a Legacy: Trans Singers Make Voice Performance a More Hospitable Place	183
Unresolved Issues in Particular Communities	199
Final Thoughts	207
References	209
Chapter 9. Messages From the Students	215
Introduction	215
Survey Responses	217
References	235
Appendix. Sample Intake Form and Policies for Voice Studios	237
<i>Index</i>	245

FOREWORD

I had the privilege of sitting with Liz as she and Brian wrote this book, body-doubling while completing my own anthropological research about trans people and how they find community online. I worked through a rewarding, challenging writing process while watching Liz do the same, listening to her alternate between giddy excitement about new research on vocal cord changes and technique, and concern that she and Brian are not doing enough to communicate how comprehensive a teacher's understanding of identity and transition must be to hear a student's needs fully. I was also able to listen in on some of Liz's training courses for fellow voice teachers, as she created an atmosphere of respect and compassion for educators with varied levels of experience and engagement with concepts around gender identity, gender roles, and physical and emotional transition—all of which exert powerful influence on vocal performance, and all of which are difficult to talk about in a public setting for fear of “getting it wrong” or being disrespectful of people who come to them for informed and compassionate vocal training.

Before I knew Liz in this capacity as a fellow researcher and writer advocating for trans joy, she was (and still is) my voice teacher. I first learned about Liz through a therapist who had The Voice Lab on a list of trusted gender-affirming care providers. It took me more than a year to send an email. I was always waiting for the right time and telling myself I did not need to spend the money, that my voice was what it was, and I could learn to live with the limitations of my speaking voice, and the pain of no longer being able to control my singing voice after starting hormone replacement therapy. But like a lot of things in transition, something in me knew I needed help before my conscious self could come to terms with it. Eventually, I decided to trust my instinct and take the leap.

This is what I sent to Liz in my inquiry form:

I am looking for voice lessons for both speaking and singing. I've been on testosterone for 2 years, and I've recently regained control of my lower and upper registers, but I'm missing the middle. I used to train my voice in my 20s, but it was too emotionally taxing to sing as a woman and a mezzo-soprano, so I stopped. Now in my 40s, I want to regain the joy I had singing and also use this new lower voice I have now. I prefer to get started as soon as possible, and my schedule is flexible on weekdays between 10 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Now, much later, I see in these words some of the things I was not conscious of. I was trying to be perfect and incredibly (unrealistically) flexible with my time so I had a chance of being scheduled. I made sure to be likable

so I could get my needs met without having to vouch for myself as someone trustworthy and deserving of care. I tried to phrase what I needed quickly and with enough specificity that I would be understood on my own terms—a skill every trans person who has navigated medical transition has acquired through excruciating trial and error. I also attempted to tell the whole story, in just three sentences, of the 20 years of pain and grief at not being able to sing, and the emotional pressure that built up behind my silence. All of this is obvious to me now. Still, at the time, it felt like another deliberate, painstakingly crafted email, trying to get the care I needed without seeming like too much or too needy, but compelled also to exaggerate my experience just to be seen. I see how stilted and controlled I was, and how little of myself and the joy I was seeking comes through in my message. But Liz saw right through my formality to the story behind it and knew, without ever meeting me, where I was coming from.

When we started our first warm-up, Liz tilted her head and listened very intently to me, and I could see her visualizing the shapes I was making in my mouth and throat as she began to map out what I needed to know to start recovering some of my lost vocal range. In our very first lesson, she began helping my brain connect the sounds I knew from my previous classical training with the new shape of my vocal cords. That first day, and in our lessons since then, Liz saw me sing confidently, something that I had not done for 20 years. I left our first lesson elated and emotional, and I remember telling Liz I was going to cry in my car for a while. Since then, I have joined two trans choirs and have rebuilt my confidence to sing in front of others again. I have also found a community of other people, all of whom signed up for vocal training but, like me, were completely unprepared for just how much their own abilities and self-perceptions would change when they were able to participate in their own gender-affirming voice care, on their own terms.

In this book, Liz and Brian share not only the techniques they teach and use to help students navigate vocal transitions and participate in their own care, but also why it is essential to understand not just the physical transformations their students' experiences but also the social and emotional transitions that impact the sounds that come out of our mouths. For many trans people, including myself, rebuilding our connection with our voices is one of the scariest and most vulnerable parts of transition. I hope that anyone who undertakes to share this journey with us is prepared to join us in that vulnerability and intense learning. This book is an invaluable tool for that learning process, and I am grateful to have been able to listen to Liz work through ideas and edits as she and Brian brought this edition into the world.

—Samson Joy Darling

INTRODUCTION

The study and practice of singing developed from and remain wrapped inside stories of gender, sex, and sexuality. Relational experiences like love, lust, protectiveness, and adoration occur almost exclusively within a presupposed heteronormative culture: girls fall in love with boys, boys fall in love with girls; boys fight and conquer to impress girls, girls make themselves sexually desirable to impress boys. Even though much of the classical and musical theater repertoire contains queer themes and characters, queer interpretation of the repertoire is not yet the norm. The voice studio, an off-stage haven, remains both a site of profound personal expression and a battleground where the norms and biases that dictate how we understand, perceive, and teach gendered voice can overpower our students' own priorities and identities as artists. As the world continues to evolve its understanding of gender, singing voice teachers have the unique opportunity—and responsibility—to foster gender inclusion and affirmation in our pedagogy.

WHAT GENDER IS

On one hand, gender is simply a set of adopted behaviors, perspectives, presentations, and expectations for social interaction. Gender is malleable; it changes across time and cultural contexts. Pink used to be for boys, now pink is for girls (Maglaty & Solly, 2011; updated 2025). Gender is reflected in how we dress, speak, move, and think. It is how we see ourselves and how others see us. Gender is learned and reinforced by each social context and environment in which we experience it. We may have learned—implicitly or explicitly—that some preferences and behaviors are feminine and some are masculine; some are acceptable for boys and men, and some are acceptable for girls and women. A strong will, love of children, nail polish, libido, intellect, broad shoulders, dresses, leadership, emotions, and aging are among those human traits and expressions that can be reinforced (or deconstructed) through gendered experiences.

Musicians are already well-equipped to conceptualize gender: Gender is a complex assemblage of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that allows us to communicate the infinite experiences of individuals through approximated groupings of those behaviors. In music, the concept of “pitch” is an appropriate parallel. Pitches, or musical tones, are merely bands of frequencies that are close enough together to be perceived as a single note. Western perceptions of pitch, specifically, emerge from centuries-old classical traditions, including equal temperament tuning and Western diatonicism. Gender is much the same—an infinite expression, sorted into identifiable categories that arose from

and remain under the influence of historical systems of perception and interaction. Whether for voice leading or gender, the rules and observations themselves are only made less arbitrary by virtue of their prolificacy.

Gender piques our curiosity because it is both ubiquitous and mysterious; we seek to understand it so that we can comprehend our place within such a construct. Counterintuitively, however, much of the gender research is swayed by cisgender bias: the assumption that all people are cisgender until proven otherwise; the presupposition that all gender experiences perfectly align with the current, acceptable iterations of gender and that anything else is a deviation or transgression. As we research gender and comprehend our place within it, cisgender bias says that it must be true that individuals' experiences of gender either perfectly align with the expected norms or deviate, transgress, violate, or otherwise undermine it. Cisgender bias leaves room only for "normal" experiences and "other" experiences as a binary distinction that dictates "normal" is good, and "other" is bad.

When we attempt to peer into gender and delineate its segments and boundaries, our view is inevitably skewed by the current context in which we understand gender. In America at the turn of the 20th century, a woman with a strong preference for pants instead of skirts, a short haircut, and a graduate degree could easily have been considered gender transgressive. One hundred years later, and pants, short hair, and an education no longer violate gender norms for women with the same intensity. Attempts to define gender at all cannot be permanent because the nature of human experiences is constantly evolving. In the opening sections of this text, we define some of the key concepts relevant to the discussion and hope to lay foundations that invite readers to search beyond a glossary of terms.

WHAT GENDER IS NOT

Gender is not sex assigned at birth. When infants are born, medical providers assign a sex of male, female, intersex, or simply "X" to the infant, based on primary sex characteristics like genitalia and chromosomal analysis. Newborns with a vulva are assigned the sex female; newborns with a penis and testicles are assigned the sex male, and newborns with ambiguous sex traits are sometimes assigned as intersex (van Zoest et al., 2019). Intersex people may find themselves in the liminal spaces between transgender, cisgender, nonbinary, and queer, not exactly "right" within any of those labels but still desiring to communicate their self-experience and understanding to others. Gender is *not* chromosomes, hormones, or body parts.

Gender is not a fixed internal sense of knowing, and it cannot be measured or quantified in the brain. Brains are plastic (adaptable), and gender emerges as a set of learned associations, feelings, and behaviors within the relational contexts in which the brain itself develops (Rippon, 2020). Likewise, gender cannot exist outside of societal structures because gender is a uniquely human

trait, and humans are uniquely social animals. To assert that other animals like seahorses or lions behave in a gendered way is to assign our human perspective of gender to a scenario where it does not exist. A bird, for example, does not worry about its self-actualization via the systems of gender. When we ascribe qualities like “nurturing” or “courageous” outside of the realms of human experiences, we display the tendency to relate to the world around us in relation to us. Gender is *not* singular or static.

Gender is not inherently liberating, even in the process of questioning and redefining it for ourselves. There are moments of freedom and healing self-discovery that may also come with a deeper understanding of the ways societies interact with gender. Discovering gender can feel like turning on a light in a darkened room and seeing that our perception of the room and its furnishings was incorrect. Where we thought there were lush sofas and beautiful rugs, we instead find broken, ill-designed, worn-out pieces. No wonder the lights were off—the decorator would not have wanted anyone to see. Once that light of deeper self-knowledge is lit, we may be simultaneously grateful and freed in seeing the truth as well as angry and betrayed by its enduring obscurity. We now have the choice to change things and are suddenly aware of how much needs changing. Gender is one thread in an elaborate net used to oppress and strip power away from some while placing power in the hands of others. It is a light switch that remains taped down in the “off” position whenever possible. But it and the room in which that switch resides have always been there. Trans people have always existed, and gender has always been societally adapted throughout history. There is no “good ol’ days” of gender. Any perception that gender has somehow suddenly come into existence in recent decades demonstrates the prevalence and limitations of cisgender bias. Gender is *not* new, and gender is *not* detached from historical and cultural contexts.

WHAT ARE THE STAKES?

Gender is also one of the many ways we define personhood, that amorphous quality of existence that leaves room for autonomy in one’s life (Butler, 2004). In oppressive systems, hierarchies between people groups develop from, and are maintained by, structures whereby some people are *people*, and some people are *not*. Some people can choose the direction and course of their life with relative ease; some have no choice, beholden to those who possess and wield power over them. As of this writing, gender is a precarious medium through which hatred and violence are directed at a small group of the population, very loudly. In this painful moment of societal growth, fear of both losing control of the norm and never having autonomy to redefine it drives the degradation of trans people and the ensuing behaviors of bigoted individuals toward them. Unfounded and inaccurate statements about trans experiences create tangible danger externally and internally. If it seems like the stakes are high, it is because they are.

UPDATES IN THIS EDITION

Since the publication of the first edition, the broader social landscape has shifted in ways that both expand and complicate the conversation. Social movements for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning or queer (LGBTQ+) justice and trans rights have raised awareness across many sectors of society, helping more people understand and affirm transgender experiences. This increase in visibility has fostered advocacy and created new opportunities for connection and representation in the arts. Yet the gains in recognition have also generated significant backlash, as anti-trans rhetoric and hostility remain pervasive. These contrasting realities mean that trans students and professionals are navigating both heightened support and intensified scrutiny, simultaneously. For us as voice teachers to create a secure environment for our students to learn, we need to meet our students with curiosity and courage that matches their own.

In the current political climate in the United States, legislative and policy efforts have sought to limit trans rights, directly impacting access to health care, aspects of education, and public participation in activities like sports. For voice teachers, this combative political terrain underscores the importance of our role: We cannot treat inclusive practices as optional or secondary. Rather, we must recognize that our teaching environments often serve as a critical refuge where trans students can experience safety, affirmation, and belonging despite external pressures.

Within the field of voice pedagogy itself, there has been notable progress since the first edition of this text. A growing number of educators now recognize how gender intersects with vocal training and are more willing to adapt traditional practices to meet the needs of trans and gender-diverse singers. Scholarly writing, research, workshops, and community conversations on this topic have expanded, signaling a positive shift toward inclusivity. The work of trans researchers and practitioners like Soren Austenfeld, Peter Fullerton, Eli Conley, Stephen Davidson, Ari Agha, Tessa Romano, Jay Marchand Knight, Melanie Stapleton, Mari Esabel Valverde, Amilia Zheanna Huff, Renee Yoxon, Claire Burgess, Chris Gallego, Isabella Ferrari, Kevin Dorman, Ruchi Kapila, AC Goldberg, and many others continually expands the knowledge within the field of gender-affirming and inclusive voice. However, these changes remain uneven in pace and scope, and many entrenched practices and assumptions still need to be interrogated in our industry at large. Encouragingly, we have seemingly witnessed the emergence of more visible trans professionals in the fields of voice teaching, performance, and related areas. To sustain this momentum, we must continue to build a pipeline of support—from training to professional opportunities—that ensures visibility translates into long-term and systemic change.

The language and frameworks in the first edition reflected the information we [the authors] had at the time. Since then, we have learned more and evolved in our own understanding of what meaningful support for trans and

gender-diverse singers requires. We invite teachers to join us in this same process of self-examination: to question how inherited pedagogical habits may reinforce bias, to adapt our approaches with intention and care, to understand the urgency, and to embrace the vulnerability of continuous learning.

In this edition, we challenge and deconstruct gendered norms, terminology, and vocal pedagogy in pursuit of cultivating a more nuanced and potent understanding of our role in voice education. We invite our readers to join us on a continuous journey of rediscovering ourselves as teachers, artists, and fundamentally and unconditionally, as people.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION FOR READING THIS TEXT

Like the first, this second edition is written for voice teachers and clinicians who are committed to providing affirming, informed, and effective training for transgender and gender-expansive singers. The readership includes academic studio voice teachers, independent voice teachers, music directors, vocal coaches, choir directors, speech-language pathologists, and other professionals who work with singers across educational, community, and professional settings. Whether you are encountering this topic for the first time or have years of experience guiding transgender singers, our goal is to offer practical, compassionate, and research-informed tools to support your work. Additionally, this second edition delves deeper into concepts and theories of gender, with the hope of illuminating the prevalence of cisgender bias and inviting the reader to discover why gender-affirming singing lessons are so vital.

We also want to name an important context for this text: As of this writing, it is reasonable to assume that most voice teachers—the authors included—in the United States are cisgender. Because of this, the book is written with an awareness of the questions, uncertainties, and learning curves that many cisgender educators may encounter when working with transgender singers. As authors of this text, we have individually spent a great deal of time picking apart our own relationships to gender and singing as a gendered experience and allowed that to fundamentally change our approach to teaching. And this goes beyond changing keys of songs, beyond gender-neutralizing performance attire, beyond gender-bending standard repertoire in opera and musical theater. Gender is infinite, personal, and as malleable as we want it to be. Singers have a unique gift of creating beauty out of breath, and our trans colleagues and students are among the most creative and expansive thinkers in the field. We identify as cisgender, and we arrive at (or in proximity to) that flavor of gendered experiences and expression on the other side of continual questioning and deconstruction. We offer our perspectives in this text with humility, recognizing both the limitations of our own lived experience and the responsibility to engage thoughtfully with the expertise, research, and voices of transgender scholars, singers, and educators. Our aim is not to speak for transgender people

but to help cisgender teachers become more capable, compassionate, and confident in supporting their students.

Although many of the pedagogical principles in this text are broadly applicable, we want to acknowledge that the book is primarily U.S.-centric in its cultural, legal, and educational framing. Likewise, its musical focus leans toward classical technique and musical theater repertoire. While we include discussions related to contemporary commercial music, jazz, and other contemporary styles, these genres receive comparatively less emphasis. We encourage readers to adapt the underlying principles of vocal function and inclusive practice to the stylistic contexts most relevant to their students.

Furthermore, the primary focus of this work is on adult singers. While many of the pedagogical concepts may be useful when working with adolescents, the physiological, developmental, and psychosocial considerations specific to younger singers fall largely outside the purview of this text. As such, readers should understand that references to “students” generally indicate adult learners unless explicitly stated otherwise.

We recognize that readers will come to this material with varying levels of prior knowledge. Some may seek foundational guidance: practical definitions, clear explanations of terminology, and step-by-step frameworks for navigating unfamiliar territory. Others may be looking for more advanced considerations, nuanced discussions of pedagogy, or deeper engagement with emerging research. This edition aims to support all of these entry points; however, the sheer scope and complexity of this topic make it impossible to address every reader’s need or perspective in a single volume. Many scholars, teachers, clinicians, and researchers are doing remarkable, ongoing work in this field, and we encourage readers to view this book as one resource among many—not a catch-all or replacement for the wide range of knowledge, methodologies, and lived experiences available. Where basic concepts are introduced, we aim to present them concisely, and where the material becomes more technical, we strive to offer enough context to support newer readers while avoiding unnecessary oversimplification for experienced practitioners.

Finally, this book is designed to be accessible in its structure. You may choose to read it from beginning to end, building understanding progressively, or you may use it as a reference, consulting individual chapters as specific questions or teaching scenarios arise. Each chapter is written to stand on its own while still contributing to a cohesive, holistic framework for working with transgender singers.

As you move into the chapters that follow, we invite you to engage with this material openly, critically, and with curiosity. The field of transgender voice pedagogy is dynamic and continually expanding, shaped by ongoing research and storytelling, and the evolving needs of singers. Our hope is that the pages ahead will offer useful frameworks, deepen your understanding, and spark new questions that enrich your teaching. We are grateful to share this work with you and to join you in the ongoing, collective effort to support transgender and gender-expansive singers with skill, care, and respect.

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CHAPTER

1

Foundations

INTRODUCTION

Since the first edition of this book, the field has seen meaningful shifts in how inclusion, affirmation, and normalization are discussed within singing spaces. While this discourse continues to evolve, there is now greater room to hold these concepts in productive coexistence rather than in opposition. Gender-inclusive voice work strives to make no assumptions about a singer's relationship to gender; gender-affirming voice work aims to support singers as they deliberately align with, resist, or move beyond gendered expectations; and efforts toward trans normalization in singing spaces seek to cultivate environments in which queer and gender-expansive experiences are understood as ordinary and expected. Discourse on gender and voice continues to expand, making space for deeper understanding of the broader systems that shape vocal training and pedagogy. At the same time, much work remains, and a real and sustainable shift toward full inclusion for all voice students in the voice studio requires continued effort on the part of teachers and practitioners, including ongoing education, consistent self-evaluation, and the active questioning of long-standing industry expectations and traditions.

As singing teachers, we know the depth to which our students reinvent themselves through voice lessons. We have the privilege of facilitating self-discovery, resilience-building, and the creation and growth of artistic identities. Being a gender-competent voice teacher calls for a deep understanding of how to cultivate gender-inclusive learning environments. This

work is not a one-time effort but an ongoing practice of reflection, self-education, and intentional action, fueled by new perspectives on language, assumptions, and teaching strategies.

Within this chapter, we provide foundational elements of working with trans, nonbinary, and gender-expansive students, and offer a refreshed set of terms that will likely come up when working with trans singers, or in and around trans and queer communities. Additionally, an extensive list of artists follows, including classical and musical theater singers, directors and conductors, and composers. These lists, however, are made more meaningful when we first take time for self-reflection. The impact we have on our students' lives is powerful, and we owe it to them to be in the process of discovery together.

WHAT EVEN IS GENDER?

Gender is a universal experience, and the better we understand our own gender through compassionate curiosity, the better equipped we are to support and journey alongside our students through their own gender and voice exploration. At the end of this section, there are questions for self-reflection. These are crucial opportunities to consider our own internalized cisgender bias and the general hetero/cisnormative bias within the voice industry at large. Take the time to sit with these questions and find the words to describe your own experience outside of a cisnormative perspective.

Internal gender experiences are varied and unique. Even if we are not fully tuned into our own gender identities and personal sense of vocal authenticity, the experience is still there. Identity is not an inherent or static set of traits or self-perceptions and often changes and evolves over time. Gender is one of an infinite number of ways that we define our self-perception and the groups in which we feel a sense of belonging, all of which are interdependent and connected. Gender identity intersects with race/racialization, age, socioeconomic status, body shape, ability, geography, religion, language, and so on. These intersections of identities influence the way it *feels* to have a gendered experience and, consequently, how it feels to sing in a gendered voice.

And we *all* sing in a gendered voice; cisgender singers may not have been confronted with that fact directly and might not have considered gender as a core piece of our identity that informs our technique and our pedagogy. But exploring and defining gender identity for ourselves is a crucial part of cultural competency. Our trans students may have been grappling with gender and voice long

before it comes up in the studio or classroom. They likely have spent a great deal of time considering, defining, and redefining their gender identity and the ways they communicate it to ensure that their experience is legible enough to be believed. They must discover or develop language that approximates their individual sense of self as it relates to gender closely enough that others will continue treating them with dignity. Cisgender singers and voice teachers rarely—if ever—must define their gendered experiences with such specificity to maintain their humanity. When gender identity is at the center of our work with students, we have an opportunity to define and communicate our personal gendered voice experiences. We should also consider where our own sense of felt gender aligns with current gender norms or gendered expectations and how that feeling guides us in the ways we teach.

Regardless of the framework or how we talk about our internal sense of gender, we all have a gender (or have many, or maybe used to have one), and we all occupy that crossroads of gender and singing. Gender emerges in singing through every facet from the page to the performance. It could be posited that gendered linguistic patterns have been written into melodies, rhythms, and phrasing throughout every compositional era—this is a question that deserves attention and further research. Beyond gendered musical notation, singing techniques carry gendered associations as well, and we replace biological terms with gendered ones (“men sing like this” instead of “larger larynxes with larger vocal folds tend to behave in this way”). It is from this deep understanding of our own experiences that conscious, intentional, identity-affirming voice teaching can emerge.

The Inner Work: Questions for Self-Reflection

Take some time to consider these questions as the relationships between gender and singing become clearer or more nuanced.

How do I experience and understand my own voice?

What aspects of my voice do I feel a sense of ownership of and love toward?

What elements of my voice have I cultivated *for me*?

How do I understand myself and my voice within the context of gender?

What stories do I want to tell with my voice?

How does my gender experience influence and guide that storytelling?

In what ways does my voice type lend itself to telling stories that resonate with my own lived experiences? When is this not the case?

When do I use my voice for my art in a way that is different from how I speak at home?

When do I use my voice out in the world in a way that is different from how I sing?

THE SINGER AND THE SINGING

The impact of voice lessons has multiple layers. One layer involves creating a space where a student's identity is not tied to the sound of their voice or their singing abilities. Another layer concerns the environment where gender exploration through singing is purposefully shaped through collaboration. And yet another is whether gender-liberated voice pedagogy forms the foundation for all technique-building. When our students have the agency and the language to express their needs in the learning environment, inclusive practices start to become the norm.

In his book, *Queering Vocal Pedagogy*, William Sauerland illustrates the importance of systemic restructuring of our voice teaching environments through the meaning of the word “queer” as not just a description of experience but also as a practice. Sauerland writes, “queering is iterative, beckoning us to reexamine our beliefs, systems, and routines . . . A queer pedagogy for teaching singing is more than merely diversifying repertoire or modifying instructional habits” (Sauerland, 2022, p. 41). Queering starts by examining the systems that are already in place, in every aspect of voice pedagogy, “from the socioecology of the studio to the technical know-how of singing, from teacher and student rapport to repertoire selection” (Sauerland, 2022, p. 41).

To endeavor to implement this kind of fundamental change in the approach to singing teaching, we can consider the context of gender-affirming voice: to build techniques and skills that arise from the singer's personal sense of themselves. In much of the voice pedagogy industry, it seems common to refer to “the voice” as a disembodied instrument. The authors have had countless conversations with other voice teachers that included phrases like, “pedagogy for

trans singers is the same for cis singers. A voice is a voice—teach the voice.” Though noble in its intent to foster equality and consistency, this perspective has the potential to put distance between the singer and the singing and detract from their personal artistic embodiment of singing.

To have a real impact as educators on the lives of trans singers, we may need to move away from the notion of a detached vocal instrument and instead focus on the person using it. Gender-inclusive/affirming voice teaching inherently centers the *identity of the singer*, their priorities, artistic aspirations, and learning process first, without slipping into prescriptive ways of teaching singing. To truly serve the student—the artist who creates beauty and meaning through song—we must internally reconnect the singing voice and the singer. In an identity-centered way of teaching, which includes gender as a significant piece of identity, “the voice” can shift to “my voice,” “the repertoire” can shift to “my repertoire,” and “the technique” can shift to “my technique.” Reclaiming one’s voice, figuratively and literally, has a lasting impact on our students’ artistic and personal growth.

That process of self-reclamation through singing is powerful, as many of us know and have seen for our students and ourselves. When trans singers reclaim their voices and find support within an affirming environment, that healing reaches through not just the singing but also their essential self-perception. Relearning to trust the sounds that come from their bodies and the experiences and sensations that come with singing takes a high level of emotional and psychological fortitude. And it may be that the techniques the singer uses remain the same or parallel, but the internal experience of singing truthfully creates a new iteration of their art.

Being a trans-competent voice teacher calls for ongoing practice of reflection, self and community education, and intentional action. As teachers of trans singers, we have the joyful opportunity to examine and redefine our own identity. Gender is a universal experience that impacts most of our lives, and aside from making us better teachers, taking time to reflect on our own gendered experiences also makes us better humans. When do we, as singers, feel heard and respected? When do our lessons, classes, or rehearsals help foster a space where our students feel the same? What aspects of our identity might create blind spots, where we accidentally exclude our trans students, or unintentionally perpetuate an environment that feels insecure? Who do we ask for guidance or reflection when considering our actions? Do those guides share any of our same blind spots, or can they point out where we may have missed something, successes and missteps alike? These kinds of questions help when creating the learning space with our students. When our students

feel heard and respected, it forms the foundations for meaningful vocal development. Every student deserves to feel both seen and supported in their artistic journey.

GENDER EUPHORIA IN THE STUDIO

Gender euphoria is the “satisfaction of joy caused when one’s gendered experience aligns with their gender identity” (The Trevor Project, 2023). Gender-euphoric experiences sometimes happen in unexpected moments. Euphoria could come in a peripheral glance, walking by a mirror and seeing oneself, truly, for the first time. It shines when a student hears their own recorded voice and recognizes it as both aligned with their goals and still a unique manifestation of their identity. It shows up in a phone call when the HVAC repair technician uses the right gendered honorific, and gender does not play any role in the conversation beyond that.

Euphoria and comfort with a gendered voice also emerge through deliberately queering—exposing, confounding, twisting, making a spectacle of, celebrating, destroying, creating, altering, turning inside out—gendered expectations. Gender euphoria has room to blossom when someone has the agency to both smoothly integrate gender into daily life and flaunt every element of gender like a perfectly curated—or delightfully mismatched—outfit, at their own discretion.

Gender-euphoric experiences can also emerge in the voice studio when a student discovers repertoire that resonates deeply, finds a vocal approach that feels affirming in their body, or achieves a vocal quality that aligns with their identity and artistic goals. As teachers, we can intentionally help facilitate these moments by centering practices that affirm and support students’ lived experiences. A 2023 study by the Trevor Project identified four themes that help foster gender euphoria: affirming communication, inclusivity and belonging, appearance affirmation, and support and respect (The Trevor Project, 2023). These elements offer a useful framework for understanding how gender euphoria may be cultivated in the studio, but they do not suggest that feeling affirmed is a constant or guaranteed outcome.

While we may hope to continually support that kind of euphoria for our students, the reality is that when trans students learn more about singing and start paying attention to their voices in a new way, it might be quite jarring and discouraging. Effective teaching, therefore, requires not only fostering affirmation but also remaining grounded, responsive, and nonprescriptive when euphoria is harder to access. A philosophy of “inform and affirm” appears throughout

this text to remind us that our role is never prescriptive. Our students know themselves better than we ever could. We can simply offer what we see and what information we have access to, and work together to figure out the best ways to support their decisions based on that information.

Given all of this, even when gender euphoria arrives in fleeting or unexpected ways, its impact can be profound and lasting. Moments of alignment, however brief, can expand a student's sense of what is possible in their voice, their artistry, and their relationship to themselves. While the teacher cannot control when or if a student finds gender euphoria in the voice studio, we can commit to practices rooted in affirmation, curiosity, and respect, supporting the student's chances and opportunities to experience joy and authenticity in singing.

LIST OF TERMS AND LANGUAGE

Transgender-specific terms arose and have continued to develop in attempts to make the infinite expressions of gender more understandable to those who would wield power over it. The contexts and definitions of “man” and “woman” can mean the difference between legal protection against discrimination in the best cases or justification for violence against trans bodies in the worst cases (The LGBTQ+ Bar, n.d.). Accuracy of language, while important, should be framed within an understanding that it will always change because the oppressive systems that continue to endanger trans folks will always adapt to remain compelling to those who would do harm. When we allow ideas about gender identity to be malleable and adaptable, there is room to cultivate real belonging among a diverse group of people.

Many features of the standard narrative of transness—including its concept of “gender identity”—emerged from cis people's need for a way to think and talk about trans people that was not too difficult for the established order; one not too inconvenient for its institutions and practices, did not threaten its established power structures, and did not require its “normal” inhabitants to face uncomfortable questions about themselves and their way of life. (Briggs & George, 2023, p. 20)

Following is an updated set of terms relevant to trans singers and teachers and a list of trans composers, conductors, directors, and practitioners. This list is inherently incomplete and will likely be outdated by the time of publication, as language constantly evolves.