

Opera *Fächer* or Voice Types: Social Implications for Teaching and Performing in the World of Opera

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Until the second third of the nineteenth century, there were really only three voice types: Soprano, Tenore, and Basso. With the advent of larger and more colourful orchestras in opera as well as new and more complex characters, new voice types sprang into being. People felt a need to classify these voices because humans, it seems, are most comfortable when they can put things into neat categories. This can easily be seen by observing the way scientists classify living things by kingdom, branch, grade, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species. In addition to these categories, intermediate categories may be inserted between any two main categories, such as subgenus, or superclass (Wiesz, 1966, p. 153). In much the same way, human voice types have been broken into categories. In choral singing there are four voice types: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. These categories are sometimes split into first and second soprano, first and second alto, first and second tenor, and first and second bass. These voice types are roughly equivalent to the operatic divisions of voices in the following way:

<u>Operatic Voice Division</u>	<u>Choral Voice Divisions</u>
soprano	first soprano
mezzo soprano	second soprano, first alto
contralto	second alto
tenor	first tenor
baritone	second tenor, first bass
bass	second bass

However, these large divisions are insufficient to describe all operatic voices and the roles they sing. Each of these six large divisions is further divided into smaller and more specialized categories. These specialized categories are called *fächer*. Each *fach* (singular of *fächer*) describes a voice type and the operatic roles sung by that voice. In *Towards a Career in Europe*, a *fach* is described as a "'type', 'specialty', or 'category'" that "refers not only to the voice, but to the singer's appearance, personality, and acting ability as well (Owens, 1983, p. 11)." Owens lists 22 *fächer* with definitions. Other sources list different numbers of categories and subcategories. In his book *Auditions Training Manual for the American Institute of Music Studies*, King (2000) lists 24 *fächer*,

many of which are the same as Owens'. King does not give definitions, but does list roles that fall into a particular *fach*. By further subdividing these categories, Boldrey (1994) lists 27 *fächer* in *Operatic Roles and Arias*. It is the contention of this researcher that this system of narrow categorization has had a profound impact on the way singers are taught and on the repertoire singers choose to present in opera auditions.

Rationale for the Research

There have been countless books written about vocal pedagogy, but only a few written about specific pedagogies for specific voice types. Among his many books on pedagogy, Miller has written two books, *Training Tenor Voices* (1993) and *Training Soprano Voices* (2000), which deal with the specific pedagogical challenges of specific voice types. Frisell has written three books called *The Tenor Voice* (1964), *The Soprano Voice* (1971a), and *The Baritone Voice* (1971b). All of these publications deal with the technical aspects of training these various voice types, but none deal with the social implications of possessing these voice types.

Almost everyone who has sung in a choir has heard the phrase, "the men and the tenors," used jokingly at some time or another in a rehearsal. Possessing a particular voice type has definite repercussions in a choral setting. In opera the repercussions are intensified, though different. This study attempts for the first time to understand and define the social implications of possessing a particular voice type in the world of opera. These implications include preconceptions about age, body size, and shape, as well as vocal colour and literature. Among the questions this research addressed are these:

1. Are voices being categorized too soon or too narrowly? How does this impact the vocal health of singers?
2. Are there reasons apart from the physical limitations of the vocal instrument to restrict the repertoire sung by a particular singer? In other words, is there a good vocal and pedagogical reason to maintain such a system, or is it primarily a means of commercial convenience?
3. Is it necessary to categorize one's voice in a fairly narrow way in order to get work in opera? If so, how does that affect the way teachers encourage students to present themselves?

First, are voices being categorized too soon or too narrowly? There are many books and articles by well-known and respected pedagogues that could be cited encouraging

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voice teachers to be careful with the young voice and to respect the maturation process. Doscher's *Functional Unity of the Singing Voice* (1994) is one such source. Trying to rush vocal maturity inevitably leads to vocal problems (p. 43). Therefore, it would seem unwise to restrict a young singer to a very specific type of repertoire. As the voice matures, comfort levels and capabilities change, and these physical changes create new requirements for the repertoire sung by the voice. Tessitura and vocal timbre change in very individual ways, becoming sometimes higher, sometimes lower, sometimes heavier, sometimes lighter. It is imperative to stay within the comfort zone of the voice to allow for healthy maturation and longevity of the vocal instrument (Collins, 1993, p. 141). These principals seem to be widely accepted among vocal pedagogues. However, the question of categorizing the voice of a mature singer too narrowly seems to have been largely ignored. If a mature singer who is comfortable in a number of styles and with a number of composers restricts himself/herself to a narrow repertoire, how is the health and longevity of the voice affected? If a singer restricts himself/herself to a specific repertoire, does one repertoire affect the health of the voice differently than another? Does this restriction affect different voices differently?

Second, are there reasons, apart from the physical limitation of the vocal instrument, to restrict the repertoire sung by a particular singer? At the turn of the twentieth century, Italian singers in particular sang almost anything that was vocally comfortable: Enrico Caruso (1983) and Luisa Tetrazzini (1997) are only two examples. In 1990, Moore, then president of the National Association of Teachers of Singing, wrote in the *Journal of Singing*:

Will the 'heavy' craze never end? Would Alva or Tagliavini be hired by major opera houses today? During my lifetime I have seen opera casting move more and more to the side of the heavy voice. Can opera orchestras simply not play as softly as they did formerly? Has the presence which we can experience in our living rooms with our compact disc players taught us to expect vocal sounds in the opera house which are only possible for the heaviest voices in every *fach*? ...Is such an attitude encouraging our young singers to move into higher vocal ranges at the cost of vocal longevity? ...Do we too often forget the ancient adage that 'it must look and sound easy?' ...Is there any chance that we can in any way, crude or subtle, influence the thinking of those who really decide the futures of our most promising talents? (p. 3).

Singers often encounter the idea that "bigger is better." How does each singer react in the face of this idea? Does he or she, as Moore wonders, move into a higher vocal range? Will this cost him or her vocal longevity? Is it more desirable to belong in one *fach* than another? How do voice teachers react to this idea? Do they treat certain voices differently than others? Do they encourage marketability, or vocal health? Are those two things different? How do general managers, conductors, directors, and agents really feel about voices? Is bigger really better? What do these people who "decide the futures of our most promising talents" really believe?

Finally, if the reason for the narrow categorization of voices is primarily commercial, then it becomes necessary for the singer to present a package that narrowly defines the voice in order to get work in opera. How does the singer choose the package he/she will present? Are the reasons vocal or commercial? If a singer is capable of singing more than one type of repertoire but must choose only one, what factors inform his/her choice? How is he/she advised by his/her teacher? Does the training of the voice differ if the expectations for the colour and weight of the voice differ from one type of repertoire to another? It was the aim of this study to begin, at least in part, to answer some of these questions.

Research Methodology

This research was conducted in two ways. The first phase of the research was conducted by a survey posted on a website. The research instrument by which this phase of the research was conducted began as a series of categories about which information was to be sought. These categories were then broken down into more specific questions. The result was a list of 64 questions in 14 different categories.

Consultation with a statistician and a psychologist led to the conclusion that asking 64 questions would very likely lead to respondent fatigue. "Respondent fatigue" is a term used by some researchers, which indicates a research instrument is either too long or too complicated for respondents. As a result it yields a low response rate, inattention to questions, or both. Therefore, a method had to be selected to narrow the number of questions. It was decided that 25 was a fair number of questions, enough to gather important data in the various categories outlined above as well as data about the respondents themselves. Seven questions were allocated to collecting these demographic data, including contact information, which was not required but supplied on a voluntary basis. That left 18 questions to comprise the rest of the questionnaire. Deciding which questions to ask was difficult. Because each question seemed of roughly

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equal value for collecting meaningful data, it seemed a random selection process would be the best way to decide. It is axiomatic that it is impossible for human beings to choose anything at random. Therefore, a random number table (Minium, 1978, p. 547) was used in conjunction with a die used in board games to eliminate bias in choosing the questions.

The resulting questionnaire was posted on the internet in English, German, Spanish, and French. Questions were presented in a *Likert* scale style, which means that except for the questions dealing with demographics, each question is actually a statement with which one can choose a degree of agreement or disagreement. Each degree on the scale is then assigned a numeric value for the purpose of quantifying the data (Dodge, Fullerton, & Rink, 1982, p. 225), much as one might quantify a grade point average. In this study:

Strongly disagree	= -2
Disagree	= -1
Not sure	= 0
Agree	= 1
Strongly agree	= 2

In this way it was possible to arrive at a mean score, or an overall answer to any Likert scale. It was also possible to determine how one group's answers may have differed from another's.

Potential respondents were then sought through the websites of opera companies around the world, as well as through the websites of universities and conservatories. In total, 500 email invitations to participate in the study were sent, each in the language of the recipient. These emails included a link to the questionnaire website in the appropriate language. Survey results were collected via email and studied using statistical software.

The second means of collecting data was through interviews. Most of these interviews were conducted face-to-face with participants (mostly faculty) in the American Institute of Musical Studies (AIMS) in Graz, Austria. At AIMS there was a dense concentration of singers, vocal pedagogues, opera conductors, general managers of opera companies, stage directors, and knowledgeable laymen. The purpose of this phase of the research was to collect qualitative data in order to gain a deeper understanding of the quantitative data collected through the questionnaire. Toward this

end, the interview consisted of open-ended questions, which varied slightly from person to person.

It was hoped that through this research a better understanding of the role of the perception of voice type as it relates to singing and pedagogy in opera could be gained. This would help to improve preparation for a career in opera and would create realistic expectations for those embarking on the audition circuit.

Demographics

From the 500 invitations to participate in the study there were 111 respondents. Of those respondents, 36 were singers, 21 were vocal pedagogues, 10 were stage directors, nine were general managers, eight were pianist/vocal coaches, five were conductors, one was an agent, and 21 were opera-goers. Just over half the respondents (51.3%) were singers or voice teachers, which would seem to indicate that non-singers and non-teachers had an almost equally strong voice in the study so that results were not skewed too heavily to one point of view.

Ninety-five respondents were from the United States and 16 were from other countries. Among the other countries represented were Australia, Austria, Chile, England, Germany, Ireland, Switzerland, and Japan. This means that 86.5% of the respondents were from the US, which skews the study heavily to the US point of view. Nevertheless, it was often interesting to note similarities between answers from the US and the other countries represented here.

There were 61 male respondents and 50 female respondents. There were more men than women, but in large part, there were no significant differences between the answers of men and women.

There were 86 respondents who had some sort of vocal education and 25 who did not. A lack of vocal training should not be construed as a lack of expertise in the field of opera, however. Note how vocal training is distributed among the occupations of the respondents. 100 percent of voice teachers and singers have had vocal training, of course, but of the nine general managers who responded, only six (66.6%) had vocal training. Of the 10 stage directors, seven (70%) had vocal training. Only half of the eight pianists/vocal coaches had vocal training. Of the five conductors, four (80%) had vocal training and seven of 21 opera goers (33.3%) had vocal training. This became particularly interesting when answers to questions differed according to whether or not the respondents had vocal training. Many of the respondents who were professionals in opera had no vocal training.

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There were 20 respondents who had been associated with opera between 1-5 years, and 18 who had been associated with opera between 5-10 years. There were 16 who had been associated with opera between 10 to 15 years, and 57 who had been associated with opera for more than 15 years. There was no person who said they had been involved with opera for less than one year.

It was interesting to see how the years in opera broke down by occupation of the respondents. Just over half the respondents had been involved with opera more than 15 years, while just under half had been involved for less than 15 years. Singers were largely involved with opera for less than 15 years, with only four of 36 having more than 15 years involvement. Thirteen of 21 (61%) of opera goers, 16 of 21 (76%) voice teachers, eight of 10 (80%) stage directors, seven of nine (77.7%) general managers, five of eight (62.5%) pianists/vocal coaches, and three of five (60%) conductors had more than 15 years involvement with opera. Only one agent responded to the study and that agent had over 15 years involvement in opera. It can be noted that the sample size for individual occupations was often small, so in the context of this study it is impossible to find definitive answers to these questions when broken down by profession.

Responses

For in-depth analysis of the responses to the research instrument, see Koehler, *The Effects of the Perception of Voice Type on the Practice and Pedagogy of Singing Opera* (2003). For the purposes of this paper, a question by question analysis will not be undertaken, but rather a list of the questions and a summary of the results is provided. It is important to remember that the questions are really statements to which the respondent reacts with some degree of agreement or disagreement. The list of question follows:

1. Voice teachers advise students to sing the operatic repertoire that is most comfortable in the voice.
2. Singers choose the fach they will present based on which voice type they believe is most in demand.
3. Voice teachers encourage students to limit the repertoire they offer in auditions in order to be cast in operas.
4. Voices should not be categorized until tensions and problems are cleared up.
5. On the whole, a singer who specializes in Wagnerian repertoire has a longer career than one who specializes in *bel canto* (Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti) repertoire.

6. It is best not to categorize a voice too early (i.e., before the voice is mature, or before vocal problems are largely solved) because this can often lead to vocal problems.
7. A singer who sings outside his/her vocal category is jeopardizing his/her vocal health.
8. In general, singers who sing a variety of operatic repertoire have more longevity than singers who make a career of one composer or style, or one small group of composers or styles.
9. Lyric voices are damaged by singing heavy repertoire.
10. A singer should be able to sing anything which falls easily inside his/her abilities, whether or not it fits into a specific vocal category.
11. It is difficult to get cast in an opera if one's résumé reflects more than one or two closely related vocal categories.
12. Singers choose to sing the operatic repertoire most vocally comfortable for them.
13. Dramatic voices are damaged by singing light repertoire.
14. Physical type is of equal importance with vocal type in casting an operatic role.
15. It isn't necessary to teach dramatic voices techniques for singing *fioratura* passages.
16. Audiences will not buy tickets to hear a lyric voice in a traditionally dramatic role.
17. Audiences expect to hear certain vocal colours in certain roles.
18. There is a much stricter system of categorizing voice types in Germany and Austria than in Italy.

The conclusions that were reached from this portion of this study were varied and most easily listed in the following manner:

- There was a clear belief that voices should not be categorized until vocal problems are worked out and technique is firmly in place.
- Opinion was strongly divided on whether or not it is necessary to limit the repertoire, and thereby the vocal category, presented in an audition.
- It was clear that respondents perceive that singers choose to sing repertoire that is comfortable for them, both vocally and artistically, and that they are aided in this by their teachers. Based on this conclusion, it would be reasonable to expect respondents to believe that singers market their voices in such a way as to enable them to sing comfortable repertoire, rather than trying to get work by

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singing what is most in demand. Opinion on this, however, was divided and further study is needed.

- There was a strong perception that specializing in heavy repertoire, like Wagner, would lead to less vocal longevity than specializing in lighter repertoire, like Bellini, Rossini, or Donizetti.
- There was a perception as well that singing outside one's vocal category would lead to vocal problems, yet respondents disagreed with the idea that dramatic voices would suffer from singing lyric repertoire. This would seem to be a contradiction.
- There was a perception that physical type is of equal importance with voice type in getting cast in opera.
- There was a belief that audiences expect to hear certain vocal colours in certain roles, regardless of the fact that there is a perception that audiences will buy tickets to hear lyric voices in dramatic roles.
- Respondents seem to believe that all voices should be taught the same basic pedagogical principles; at least where learning *fioratura* singing is concerned.
- Respondents were unsure, but mostly in agreement with the idea that voices are more stringently categorized in Germany and Austria than they are in Italy.

It is the belief of this researcher that the operatic community and especially those singers embarking on a career would benefit from further study of these questions.

Synopsis of the Interviews

Among the interviewees were locally and nationally known singers, as well as an internationally famous baritone. There were also voice teachers, the stage director for a nationally acknowledged regional opera program, the general manager of a nationally recognized opera house, the general manager of a small regional opera house, a student of voice, the director of a musical studies program in Graz, Austria, and a very knowledgeable opera lover. Some of the respondents fall into more than one category, being both singers and teachers, for example. Not every interviewee answered every question that was asked. (For a full record of each interview, see Koehler, 2003). The interviews tended to take on lives of their own as the conversations progressed, not always adhering to a particular form. In this section, questions that were addressed by most of the interviewees will be considered, and a synthesis of the answers will be given.

Are young singers in a hurry to categorize their voices?

Opinion was divided on this issue, and not surprisingly it seemed to divide along occupational lines. It would seem that there was a feeling among teachers in the United States that singers are in a hurry to categorize their voices and find their *fach*. Julian Patrick, nationally known baritone and voice teacher, said in answer to this question, "Too much so (personal communication, October 16, 2002)." Sherrill Milnes, internationally known American baritone said, "Oh, no question about it. Too much of a hurry (personal communication, October 28, 2001)." However, teachers who are more closely associated with the very strict system of categorization in Germany and Austria feel that early categorization can be beneficial and that students need to decide sooner what their voices can do. Dr. Thomas King, voice pedagogue at the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria said, "I don't think they're in any hurry. I think young singers are pretty naive about all that (personal communication, August 11, 2001)." Nora Sands, director of the American Institute of Musical Studies said, "The sooner you can get some idea, the better (personal communication, August 14, 2001)." She also intimated that voice teachers, especially in the United States, are too protective of their young singers and need to let them, in a sense, grow up faster. The general managers who took part in these interviews seemed to feel that singers were not in a hurry to categorize their voices. Leon Natke, General Manager of the San Diego Opera said, "I think too many of them are in too slow a track. They're in this mindset, 'Oh, you have time, you have time.' They don't have time (personal communication, August 11, 2001)." Michael Ehrman, stage director at Central City Opera, also disagreed that singers are in a hurry to get into a niche, but felt that confusion often arises about voice type due to the academic environment. "Take, for example, the young singer who is cast in a role that isn't really right for the voice because there is no one else in the school who can sing it (personal communication, October 11, 2002)." In short, it seems that those who teach, at least in the United States, want young singers to take their time, while those who are on the business side of opera want singers to make a decision and sing. It is not surprising then that young singers are often getting disparate messages from those who are advising them.

Does early categorization of the voice have an effect on vocal health and longevity?

Interestingly, everyone who answered this question believed that early categorization of the voice could or did have an effect on vocal health and longevity.

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Milnes said, "It can. It can. It's not automatic that it always does." Patrick said, "If they haven't got a technique going for them, I think it can." Not everyone agreed, however, what that effect might be. King said, "Yes, it has a very positive effect, definitely, especially on the longevity of the voice." A.T. Simpson, Chair of the Vocal Area at the Kentucky Governor's School for the Arts said, "I think it's bad for them (personal communication, March 15, 2002)." Across the board, however, everyone who addressed this issue felt that if a singer was singing literature that was too heavy, it would be harmful. A few of the interviewees addressed the issue of singers with dramatic voices who try to sing literature that is too light. Ehrman said, "That can work against them, too." Natke said that many people with bigger voices have stories to tell about teachers trying to get them to "sing light" and how damaging it was. This is in direct contrast with the answers to question 13 in the questionnaire, which indicated that dramatic voices were not harmed by singing light literature. It seems that on this issue, too, mixed messages are being sent. There is a perception, at least, that all singers can and should sing light repertoire. Not all singers have light voices, however, so perhaps not all singers should sing light repertoire.

How important is it for a singer to choose one fach and present that in an audition?

There was a range of opinion on this topic and again respondents were divided along occupational lines. Teachers and singers seemed to feel that it was important to present material that represents a fairly narrow spectrum of the literature. King said, "Sometimes people get confused if you offer too many things." Patrick said, "When you audition, you're sometimes singing for people who, unfortunately, hear only one way, so you have to sing that which you know is going to be listened to." Some say that a young singer must present himself in a particular niche until he is well-known. After he is established in a career he can branch out into other roles. Milnes said that all really famous singers are known for singing particular things and that if a singer sings too many things, he is never the first casting choice for any of them. Simpson, in talking about the *fach* system, said that if you present too many things you become less useful to a repertory house. Repertory houses need people to sing specific things so that they have different people who can sing different shows on consecutive nights. Alternately, general managers and stage directors seemed to feel that variety was a plus. Speight Jenkins, General Manager of the Seattle Opera said, "Don't specialize! Show what you've got (personal communication, October 30, 2002)." Ehrman said, "...let the auditors decide [what you are best at.]" Natke was sceptical about a person who offered

too many different kinds of things, but said, "If you say you can do all those things, you'd better be able to back it up." Once again, the messages to the young singer are mixed. However, even the people who felt that variety was a good thing said that if one offer lots of different things, one had better be good at all of them. It would seem to make sense for a young singer to choose one kind of material with which she/he feels very comfortable and present that.

How much do auditors depend on what they hear and see in an audition, and how much do they rely on a singer's résumé?

On this question there was an almost uniform opinion that what happens on any given day in an audition outweighs any information on the résumé. Milnes put it this way, "Obviously, a résumé sets a framework, but I think it's still what comes out of the singer's mouth [that matters most.]" Jenkins said, "I hope they don't depend on the résumé at all." He said that the proper use for a résumé was to assess the experience of the singer so that one would know how best to utilize that singer's talents. It was not something he would use to help him evaluate the talent of the singer. There was also widespread agreement, however, that this way of looking at things varied from place to place and from auditor to auditor. The general consensus was that the importance of the résumé decreased as the confidence level of the auditor increased. In other words, the more confident the auditor in his ability to hear talent, the less he depended on the résumé.

Should all voices be taught with the same pedagogical principles?

All the respondents believed that in general it was important for all voices to be able to sing a *legato* line and most said that the basis for this was good basic singing technique. September Pandolfo, a student at the American institute for Musical Studies was unsure about whether every voice should be able to sing *fioratura* passages, stating that she did not know if it was an acquired skill or something born into the voice (personal communication, August 13, 2001). All the other respondents felt that it was important for every voice to be able to sing *fioratura* at some level. Milnes said, "...all voices have to be able to do some of all of that, and especially *legato* line. Beauty and *legato*—that's what we sell, primarily." Almost everyone who was interviewed felt that both *legato* and *fioratura* were essential to maintaining a healthy vocal instrument. They also said, however, that more dramatic, darker voices tend on the whole to be less

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capable of singing quick running lines. They did not feel that these voices should not sing fioratura because as Sands put it, "...think of the *spinto* who sings Norma. That voice has to move. One can't sing *Casta diva* if the voice doesn't move." By the same token, they felt in general that heavier voices would not make their living singing *fioratura*, so it would not be advisable to present it in an audition.

How important is body type when it comes to being cast in an opera?

On this subject Milnes said, "Well, it's certainly more important in these years than in the past." Most of the interviewees whose jobs involved casting said that they were more interested in the voice than the look, but the look was still an issue. For example, Michael Philip Davis, tenor, coach, stage director, and son of Regina Resnik said, "...I'm interested in the voice. On the other hand, if you're singing Carmen, I'll want you to look the part of the temptress (personal communication, August 15, 2001)." Jenkins said, "What I tell people is this: I'm not making a movie...Having said that however, I will also say that if I hear 25 lyric sopranos singing for the role of Susanna, and they all sing equally well, why wouldn't I choose the one who most looks the part?" It was really interesting, though, to see that people believed that the importance of body type related in a direct way to voice type. In other words, the rarer the voice type, the less important body type became. It became clear during the course of these interviews that because dramatic voices are rarer than lyric voices, they can get away with having less attractive bodies. Indeed, people are more willing to suspend disbelief for the sake of a dramatic voice than for a lyric voice.

How late is too late to start a career in opera?

Ehrman gave a very concise synopsis of the answers of almost all the interviewees when he said, "It depends on your voice, what you look like, and what you sound like." This seemed to be the opinion right across the board. It was the general consensus that lyric voices should start early, by 24 or 25, and that dramatic voices could start quite late. Sometimes dramatic voices start careers in their late 40s, because as Jenkins put it, "[Dramatic voices] take a long time to mature." He believed that one of the reasons that dramatic voices are hard to find is that people get tired of waiting for their voices to mature. They quit singing to have families and steady incomes. Like body type, it seems that the question of how old is too old varies with voice type.

Conclusions from the Interviews

All in all, these interviews confirmed the suspicion of this researcher that there are as many different opinions as there are people. However, they also cleared up some of the confusion about some of the topics. In particular, they made it clear that in many ways, the *rules* of auditioning and having a career in opera vary from voice type to voice type. They also made it clear that point of view is very important in opera. Often teachers have one point of view while those who are casting operas have another. In an optimal situation, a teacher would be able to look at casting from the point of view of the people who are actually doing the casting. Perhaps this research will begin to clear up some of the gaps in perception between these two groups.

General Conclusions

This study has attempted to begin to define some of the *unspoken rules* in preparing for and pursuing a career in opera. Among the questions addressed were the following: Are voices being categorized too soon or too narrowly? How does this impact the vocal health of singers? Are there reasons apart from the physical limitations of the vocal instrument to restrict the repertoire sung by a particular singer? In other words, is there a good vocal and pedagogical reason to maintain such a system of categorization, or is it primarily a means of commercial convenience? Is it necessary to categorize one's voice in a fairly narrow way in order to get work in opera? If so, how does that affect the way teachers encourage students to present themselves?

From the survey it was clear that respondents felt that categorizing a voice before the problems and tensions were cleared up could be bad for the singer. Further information about how people feel on this issue was gained through the interviews. It was found that voice teachers, at least those in the United States, often do feel that voices are being categorized too early and that this is often due to the fact that students are in a hurry to find their *fach* and embark on a career in opera. According to these teachers, this can have a very negative effect on the vocal health and longevity of the singer. On the other side of the coin, people who were in the business end of opera, for example, stage directors and general managers, felt that voices are often not categorized soon enough. They felt that waiting too long could be disastrous to a career. It was often their belief that singers should be singing while their voices are maturing and that waiting for the finished product is at best an over cautious move and at worst a career quashing one. It seems that mixed messages are being sent to young singers from different sides of the

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operatic world: Teachers say, "Don't rush," and opera companies say, "Hurry!" It often seems that it is necessary to have the vocal maturity of a 35-year old while one still has the body of a 23-year old. Is it really any wonder that young singers feel rushed to get into a career? Interestingly, this rush seemed to be confined to lyric voice types.

According to the interviewees, dramatic voices are allowed to be older because there is a general consensus that dramatic voices take longer to mature. In this respect, one can see a preconception about age directly linked to voice type. Apparently one of the social consequences of having a lyric voice is that one needs to start a career early or there may not be one. If one is a lyric and takes too long to work out the technical issues in the voice, there may be cataclysmic career implications.

In addressing the question of whether categorizing voices is necessary for vocal health or whether it is primarily a commercial convenience, respondents to the questionnaire seemed to feel that some categorization of voices was a necessity for vocal health. They felt very strongly that it would be damaging for light voices to sing heavy repertoire. They also felt that, in general, singing outside one's vocal category was damaging to vocal health. Alternately, they had the idea that all voices, heavy or light, should be able to sing light repertoire without suffering any ill effects. This begs the question, if a person should not sing outside his/her vocal category and has a heavy voice, how can he/she not be damaged by singing light repertory? Perhaps this is one of the social implications of having a more dramatic voice. Perhaps many people expect that dramatic voices should be able to sing light repertoire as well as dramatic repertoire. In conversations with the interviewees, this researcher became convinced that this idea is not true and that singing light repertoire can, in fact, be damaging to dramatic voices. If over-singing is damaging, under-singing is just as damaging if not more so. Perhaps the operatic community, and particularly those who teach voice, need to take a closer look at this preconception.

In the survey, respondents were divided in their opinions about whether or not a singer should restrict the repertoire he/she presents in an audition to one or two closely related vocal categories. They also were divided in their opinions about whether or not voice teachers encourage this sort of restriction of repertoire in auditions. The interviewees were also divided. Singers and teachers felt that it was unwise to present too many different kinds of things because it could confuse the auditor and cause him to dismiss the singer out of hand. The people on the business side of opera, though, said to show as much variety as you can handle. They also pointed out, however, that if a singer made a claim of being able to sing many different styles and weights of music, he/she would be tested and had better be able to back up his/her claim. These comments

lead this researcher to feel that it is much better to present one *fach* and present it well, than it is to present three or four, even if one can sing them very well. The assertion at the beginning of this document that people are most comfortable when they can put things in neat categories is just as true of those who cast operas as it is of anyone else.

This brings up the issue of how a young singer chooses the repertoire he/she will present in auditions. It seemed that the vast majority of people believed that singers choose to sing repertoire that fits them vocally and with which they have an emotional connection. Very few people believed that singers chose repertoire based on how they thought they could make the most money. This was refreshing and altogether encouraging.

One of the other issues addressed in this research, and especially in the interview portion, was the importance of body type in being cast in an opera. There was a consensus that body type is more important now than it has been in the past. There is also a concession that the importance of body type is directly tied to voice type. If a singer is a light, lyric voice, he/she needs to look the part of a young, svelte character. If a person has a dramatic voice, looks matter very little. This is yet another social repercussion of voice type.

The different parts of the operatic community must begin to communicate better with one another about what is expected of singers and about what is best for singers. Without singing there can be no opera, no matter how many thousands of dollars go into production and advertising. It is imperative that all sides of the business, both the artistic and the commercial, have uppermost in their minds the preservation of the art of singing and the voices of those who sing.

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