

Gender Neutral Voice Pedagogy: It's Not Just for Transgender Singers Anymore!

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Language, like gender is fluid.

Be mindful of language and make gender-inclusive choices.

- *Everyone, people, folks, folx*, etc. instead of ladies and gentlemen or guys
- *Young people, kiddos*, etc. instead of boys and girls
- *Humankind* instead of mankind
- *Parent* instead of mother or father
- *Child* instead of son or daughter
- *Spouse* instead of wife or husband
- *Siblings* instead of brothers or sisters
- *Server* instead of waitress or waiter
- *Firefighter* instead of fireman
- Others?

For Voice Pedagogy

- Our ideas about voice as it relates to gender may have also changed. Yet most of the current vocal pedagogy texts that are used in college classes today still refer to male voices and female voices.
- Are we simply perpetuating this idea for the next generations of voice teachers? I think we can agree that vocal folds do not have genitalia. I think we can also agree that hormones have a profound effect on vocal folds.
- Are we limiting all our students by having gender labels and gender expectations in our pedagogy?

We all need safe-spaces!

- Though most of my writings and presentations have been aimed toward teaching transgender and non-binary singers, I have come to believe that all singers should have teachers who understand the need for creating safe spaces and gender-inclusive learning environments.
- My presentation will offer some ideas to consider about how we need to move toward a more inclusive, gender-neutral voice pedagogy for all singers.

Brief Personal History

- As a child, I had a robust low voice (Mode 1). At some point, I bought into the “fact” that it would be more appropriate for me to use my high voice (Mode 2). So, throughout my high-school years, my voice was described as sounding like a “boy-soprano”.
- I needed a voice teacher who could listen to my whole voice and not allow me to abandon part of it to fit into a light soprano voice ‘role’ just because of my gender.
- I was discouraged from using Mode 1.
- Breath support didn’t fix things! Tone just got louder, and vibrato was almost non-existent.
- How can we move beyond this to consider all voices as individuals, whether they belong to cisgender or transgender folx of any age.
- What vocabulary do we need to adjust to make our teaching truly gender neutral?

What about singers whose voices are gender-atypical?

YouTube examples of voice that are not gender-typical.

- Zélia Duncan - A Deusa da minha rua - <https://youtu.be/iJjw0IWwRdI>
- Stephanie Blythe as Blythely Oratonio - <https://youtu.be/D2V49sSxvc4>
- David Saballa as “Mary Sunshine” - <https://youtu.be/sB6PToTKb8s>

Labeling Voices. Let’s consider the usual terms.

(Taken from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary online.)

Most definitions contain at least one mention of gender. Can this become unnecessary?

What about Voice Pedagogy? Project: Atlas!

- Non-binary first year student (notice this is more inclusive than freshman!)
- Atlas is non-binary and uses they/them pronouns.
- They had work hours assigned to me, so I asked them to take the three primary vocal pedagogy books that I use and find examples of when they were not gender-neutral or gender-inclusive.

What they noted from skimming the texts:

- Not all sopranos use she/her pronouns.
- Not all tenors use he/him pronouns.
- Voice type ≠ gender.
- For someone talking about how singing isn’t binary, the author makes a lot of assumptions about singers fitting into the gender binary.
- “men’s voices” baritone ≠ he/him
- Women ≠ high voice
- Tenor/baritone/bass ≠ male, men
- Soprano/mezzo ≠ female, woman

Selected Resources

- Accetta, Valerie (2022) Estill Voice Training and the Gender Non-binary Singer, *Voice and Speech Review*, 16:2, 200-207, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23268263.2022.2033437>.
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Online resources

- <https://transstudent.org/about/definitions/>
- https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Evaluation_of_Safe_Space_Kit_2012.pdf
- <https://blurringthebinary.com>
- <https://keyoft.com>
- <https://voicefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Transgender-Terms.pdf>
- NATS Workshop, "Teaching Outside the Gender Binary"
- <https://nats.sclivelearningcenter.com/MVSite/MVVideo.aspx?sessionID=235395&presentationID=120396&isFree=true>
- Opera America Webinar, "Building Gender Inclusivity Into Opera"
- <https://youtu.be/ZzbwV0Dm60M>
- Interview with Loraine Sims, "Finding Their Voice" by Elsa Hahne, <https://www.lsu.edu/research/news/2020/0603-lorainesims.php>
- Loraine Sims, Interview with Lucia Lucas <https://youtu.be/YcDsVGXtnl8>
- Loraine Sims, Interview with Holden Madagame <https://youtu.be/uja29wsuq-c>
- Loraine Sims, LSU Science Café - Teaching Lucas—Training Transgender Voices. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1PjdabDCtQ&t=9s>
- Loraine Sims, Trans Voices Festival - Teaching Lucas: A Transgender Singer's Vocal Journey from Soprano to Tenor. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-gDMhI5fel&t=2048s>

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