

**HOW DID WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART ADJUST HIS
COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUE WHEN WRITING FOR A MEZZO-
SOPRANO *EN TRAVESTI*?**

A comparison between the roles of Cherubino and Sesto.

Ané Sophia Pretorius

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Supervisor: Dr. Rebekka Sandmeier

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ABSTRACT

Heroic male operatic roles were not always limited to what is today mainly known as male voices (tenor or baritone/bass). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries prepubescent boys were often castrated in order to keep their voices within the treble range. Some of these boys were extremely musical and after many years of vigorous training, went on to become renowned singers. The singing *castrati* were famous for their ethereal vocal abilities as well as ‘angelic’ vocal timbre. During the *castrati*’s reign, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote what is speculated to be the first operatic prepubescent boy role to be sung by a female *en travesti*, which set in motion a new opera tradition. Between 1790 and 1825 the convention of castration purely for the sake of voice preservation began to lose strength until the complete demise of these celebrated singers in 1922. From then on theatres began to substitute female singers, falsettists and countertenors into these heroic male roles. The repertoire of mezzo-sopranos today consists mainly of these prepubescent boy and adult heroic male roles. Based on the various physiological differences between the *castrato* and female body and larynx, this study focused mainly on proving how Mozart wrote idiomatically differently for the *castrato* and the female voice. The secondary aim was to determine the influence of socio-political climate on the perception of these roles by past and present audiences, as well as to uncover the various difficulties facing contemporary mezzo-sopranos. Recommendations aimed at mezzo-sopranos were formed from a mezzo-soprano’s perspective.

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The music illustrations were all created from the *Bärenreiter* operatic scores of *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *La Clemenza di Tito* (Mozart et al. 2010, 2001).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

In the twenty-first century the performance of standard repertoire operas from all periods, by composers such as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Giacomo Meyerbeer, Richard Strauss etc., containing one or more trouser roles¹ have become fairly frequent. It has become the norm to see an operatic production containing one or more trouser roles or ‘*en travesti*’ roles². This makes it easy to forget that, even though some of these roles (females dressed up as adult males) were often sung by women, they were not originally written for them³, but rather for the singing *castrati*⁴. The phenomenon of *castrati* as flamboyant singers appeared coincidentally at the same time as the music genre, opera. Operatic composers and audiences of the seventeenth and eighteenth century treasured these voices for their agility, strength and sparkling tone colour (Heriot 1960, 12).

Once the horrors of castration purely for the sake of keeping the pre-pubescent male voice in the same register throughout his lifespan became public knowledge from around the early-1800s, the popularity of *castrato* singers decreased considerably. It finally ceased with the death of the last *castrato*, Alessandro Moreschi, in 1922. After the disappearance of the *castrati*, theatres began substituting female singers (now known as mezzo sopranos) into the operatic roles previously intended for the singing *castrati* (Oberlin 1990, 23).

However, within the last ten to fifteen years a new tradition emerged, namely that of casting adult male sopranos or contraltos in these male roles (Crowe 2017; Eberstadt 2010; Burton-Hill 2016). This has had significant implications for the opera scenario due to the inevitable discarding of the female mezzo-soprano *en travesti* tradition. I could only guess that this is done in an attempt to make opera seem ‘more realistic’, which in turn might heighten its accessibility to the non-operagoer and add to the durability of opera as a genre. It could also merely be due to the fact that the singing technique of these male singers has developed and that they (the singers) have now, like the *castrati* in earlier years, become more easily acquirable.

In 1786 Mozart composed *Le Nozze di Figaro*, based on Beaumarchais’s play *Le Mariage de Figaro*. In this opera he added what is speculated to be the first of many to come: pre-pubescent boy trouser

¹ A woman singing a young male role in an opera, usually a contralto or a mezzo soprano (“Trouser Role” n.d.).

² A theatrical/operatic role performed by the opposite sex (“En Travesti” n.d.).

³ Many of Handel’s male roles were originally written for women, but often premiered by singing castrati due to their great public draw (Dean 1970, 14–15; Dean and Knapp 1987, 501–503, 505, 509). These roles are exceptions to the ones that I will be discussing.

⁴ Pre-pubescent male singers who were castrated in order to preserve their high vocal range (Grout, Burkholder, and Palisca 2010, A4).

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roles. He created the role of Cherubino as an operatic male role written intentionally for a female (Smart 2000, 68). Mozart did this while he still had ample opportunity to use a *castrato* singer.

This study sets out to find and interpret some of the different ways in which Mozart treated singing *castrato* roles and trouser roles from a compositional perspective. By comparing these differences, I will shed some light on the difficulties that mezzo-sopranos face today when singing these roles ‘*en travesti*’ as they were originally intended for *castrati*. The information gained from this comparative study will also be used to make valuable recommendations for mezzo-sopranos or singing teachers on how to overcome these difficulties.

The result of the study will most likely also unearth a bulk of questions about the sustainability of these roles in contemporary society. I will attempt to briefly brush over the ‘questions’, but will not be able to discuss them in full detail. The revelations discovered and confirmed or demolished through this study will lead to complex discussions which should be further researched in other new studies.

1.1.1 Aims and Objectives

The aim of this project is to compare the compositional differences between male operatic roles composed for *castrati*, and trouser roles composed for mezzo-sopranos, as can be seen in the operas of Mozart.

The secondary aim of the project is to look at how mezzo-sopranos have to adjust their approach in order to be able to sing the roles originally intended for *castrati*.

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate the musical content of two roles written by Mozart for *castrato* and mezzo-soprano e.g. Sesto from *La Clemenza di Tito* – originally for *castrato* – and Cherubino from *Le Nozze di Figaro* – originally for mezzo-soprano – by consulting research done on the topic and comparing the findings with the music itself.
2. To determine what the musical similarities and differences between these roles are and how specific compositional characteristics could be linked to the idiomatic needs of the intended voice type.
3. To uncover how mezzo-sopranos have to adjust their approach in order to be able to successfully portray roles originally intended for males, as females ‘*en travesti*’⁵.

⁵ When I refer to the ‘successful portrayal of a trouser character by a mezzo-soprano’, success is measured by the audience members’ acceptance and emotional submission into the character during a performance. See chapter 2 Research Methodology for more information on this concept (André 2006, 182).

1.1.2 Rationale

As a young lyric mezzo-soprano who has recently sung my first few trouser roles, namely Cherubino, Sesto and Octavian from *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *La Clemenza di Tito* and *Der Rosenkavalier* respectively, a new world of questions has opened up to me. In this learning process I have come across a few technical stumbling blocks that can partly be ascribed to my own technical vocal level at present, but more so to the vocal differences between a male and a female singer. These technical difficulties are not merely issues that I struggle with, but could possibly be linked to the mezzo-soprano voice.

From the literature available to me during my initial investigation of this topic, it has become clear that there are immense differences in the way in which composers wrote music for *castrati* and the way they wrote music for women. As Mozart is not only said to have been the first person to write a trouser role for a woman, but is also famous for his fine examples of typical *opera seria castrati* characters like Idamante and Idomeneo from *Idomeneo* (Osborne 1978, 304), it would make logical sense to compare the compositional techniques he utilised in the role of Cherubino in *Le Nozze di Figaro* with his approach to Sesto in *La Clemenza di Tito*.

Sesto was written well after Cherubino and falls back to the old writing style, *opera seria*, which makes it the perfect opposite to Cherubino which was written in the new style of *opera buffa*. The two roles also oppose each other in age differences, Cherubino being a pre-pubescent boy and Sesto a fully grown heroic male character. The latter also adds to the separation of set characters which mezzo-sopranos nowadays have to be able to shift between: On one night a mezzo-soprano might have to perform an adult male role, the next an old woman and the night thereafter a prepubescent boy. Making the change between these extremely different characters can be an immense task.

By the end of this study I will have identified some differences in Mozart's writing style for singing *castrati* in male roles, and women in trouser roles. As the voice of a singing *castrato* and the voice of a mezzo-soprano operate in different ways, this information will hopefully aid other mezzo-sopranos in overcoming the difficulties presented to them when learning trouser roles which will make up a great part of their active repertoire throughout their career. It will equip them with knowledge of the difficulties lying ahead and how these gaps could possibly be bridged. The research will also be of help to other researchers in future in their studies of trouser roles. My research will take the first steps into discovering a whole new 'connecting area' of research concerning trouser roles which have not yet been explored. I will explain this connecting area more extensively in the next section.

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1.2 Literature review

In order to explain the need for my study and the research void that it will attempt to fill, I will mention and discuss the sources on which my historical investigation is based in the following literature review.

When I began familiarising myself with existing literature on the topic of (females in) trouser roles, I could not find research that had focused to any degree on my area of specialisation. The sources either branched completely into feminism and queer studies, scraping swiftly over the issue of women *en travesti*, but delving thoroughly into the phenomenon of *castrati* (historically as well as medically), or they researched trouser roles only in the era when it was at its peak. For this reason, I have extracted as much information from the sources that are relevant to my topic.

My search for information on the topic was restricted even further by the fact that I found that most musicologists writing on the topic had predominantly based their research on other written sources. Only a few of the sources proved to have had done field research, and many of the sources referenced Angus Heriot (1960) as their main source of information, adding only bits and pieces of their own research and opinions.

Heriot's research on the tradition and lives of the singing *castrati* is thorough and proved to be most helpful in my formulation of a broad overview. His book was also extremely helpful in referencing other primary sources such as the writings of renowned eighteenth century British musicologist Charles Burney (1771), which one could later explore for more information on topics he mentioned or brushed over lightly. Other musicologists namely Anthony Arblaster (1992), Heather Hadlock (2014), Mary Ann Smart (2000), Richard Somerset-Ward (2004), Piero Weiss and Julian Budden (n.d.), Mary Kathleen Hunter and James Webster (1997), Russel Oberlin (1990), Francis Rogers (1919), Piotr O. Scholz and John A. Broadwin (2001), Charles Osborne (1978), as well as Marita P. McClymonds and Daniel Hertz (n.d.) all contributed in some way or another towards my background knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of the singing *castrati*, mezzo-sopranos '*en travesti*', different historical movements in musical style, as well as speculations surrounding the reason behind Mozart's historically impacting decision to create Cherubino. The information and opinions of these musicologists continually influenced the direction in which my topic developed.

Quite a few sources researching *bel canto* vocal technique agree that the *castrati* acted as the chief vehicle for perfecting this technique, due to their otherworldly abilities derived from the combination of certain characteristics of a boy's voice with the adult male body (Celletti and Fuller 1996, 108; Heriot 1960; André 2006; Klein 1923; Peschel and Peschel 1987; Duey 1951; Elliott 2006). Some of these researchers merely focused on the voice and/or technique behind the *bel canto* style (Garcia 1894; Lamperti 1890; Stark 1999; Brown 1996; Tosi and Galliard 2009)

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Another musicologist, Naomi André (2006), proved to be a reliable source who had done thorough research on the topic of the mezzo-soprano in trousers. Her research unfortunately focuses mostly on the nineteenth century when mezzo-sopranos had already taken over the operatic roles of the singing *castrati* completely. Furthermore, the tradition of the mezzo was starting to move into a new direction of being seen as ‘the other’ with the emergence of the Romantic era and ‘Operatic Realism’ (André 2006, 7–8, 14; Van der Walt 2013). She did however provide some vital information in the steering towards her main focus and she formulated themes which proved to be useful. I will discuss these fully in Chapter 2 on Research Methodology.

André also made some interesting advances in research on the topic which she calls the ‘period ear’. This concept made complete sense to me and therefore I accepted and integrated it into my study (André 2006, 1–15).

Only a few current sources, such as G. B. Kauffman (1988), E. R. Peschel and R. E. Peschel (1987), as well as M. Hatzinger, D. Vöge, M. Stastny, F. Moll and M. Sohn (2012) have attempted to discuss the difficult topic of the medical ‘workings’ of the *castrato* voice, as none of these voices are available for first hand examination and experimentation today. Thus, one has to rely on the historical writings of the vocal teachers of these famous *castrati* singers, such as Manuel Garcia (1894), Francesco Lamperti (1890) and P.F. Tosi (Tosi and Galliard 2009), as well medical writings by doctors and scientists of today, explaining the physical consequences of castration.

The next step I took was to immerse myself in medical literature on the larynx, especially articles dealing with issues concerning sound production (Unteregger et al. 2017). I then turned my focus to research comparing the adolescent and adult larynxes (Kahane 1978; Prakash and Johnny 2015; Döllinger, Dubrovskiy, and Patel 2012; Glikson et al. 2017), as well as general studies that included evidence from both male and female subjects. This research led to further study into the calcification and ossification of certain laryngeal cartilages (Mupparapu and Vuppapalapati 2005; Friedlander 2014; Hatley, Samuel, and Evison 1965). Some of the studies at hand were conducted through the use of high quality technology scanning the laryngeal area while subjects were singing or producing sounds, and others were conducted on the remains of deceased subjects.

It needs to be mentioned that, throughout the vast body of literature that I consulted, I was unable to find any sources specifically writing about or commenting on Mozart’s idiomatic writing for male and female characters in trouser roles. Many musicologists such as H. C. Robbins Landon and Donald Mitchell (Landon, Abraham, and Mitchell 1956), D. J. Grout and C. V. Palisca (Grout, Burkholder, and Palisca 2010), Tim Carter (Carter 1987) and M. K. Hunter (M. K. Hunter 2008) have discussed the main characters (*primario*) in his operas. This list includes Susanna and Figaro, Count and Countess Almaviva, Donna Anna and Elvira, Don Giovanni, Papageno, Queen of the night, Pamina and Tamino, Dorebella, Fiordiligi and Guglielmo etc. Even less ‘important’ characters (*comprimario*) such as Don
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Otavio, Zerlina and Masetto, the three ladies and Papagena, are analysed to exhaustion. Yet, to my knowledge, it seems that no one has noticed the great need for research into this interesting phenomenon that perplexes many an opera enthusiast.

This is where my research comes in: I will attempt to begin filling the ‘missing middle knowledge’ by analysing and comparing the sheet music which Mozart wrote for Cherubino and Sesto (Mozart et al. 2001, 2010).

1.3 Summary

In this first chapter, the lack of research into the vocal and dramatic difficulties facing today’s mezzo-sopranos ‘*en travesti*’ presented itself evidently. Historical background was established by means of a literature review and the aims and objectives of the study were stated along with a rationale. In conclusion, much of the research for this study is based on raw, new material, leaving more to be explored in further studies on this topic. It will serve to assist future researchers with basic historical and analytical information about the phenomenon of the Mozartian operatic female ‘*en travesti*’. It will also discuss issues concerning cross-dressing within the operatic genre and generate more questions for further research.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

According to the Online English Oxford Living Dictionaries, research is defined as ‘the systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusion’ (‘research’ n.d.).

In order to be able to create a research design, one has to first set out the aims and objectives of a study (Pretorius 2017, 100). As explained in the previous chapter, the purpose of this study is to compare two different operatic roles written by Mozart and to identify how he adjusted his different compositional techniques when writing for *castrati* and mezzo-sopranos.

In this chapter I will present the research design and methodology by explaining the methods and techniques that were utilised throughout this study in terms of approach, as well as collection and interpretation of data. This will in turn create a fundamental understanding of the core principles on which my research is based. I will provide basic definitions of certain terms and also explain how these ideologies are intertwined with, and influence the research.

2.2 Research design

Research design can be defined as the formation of a research plan which includes the selection of subjects, research sites and procedures of data collection (McMillan and Schumacher 2010, 166; Mafuwane 2012a, 68). It serves as a strategic framework in linking theoretical problems or questions with empirical research (Pretorius 2017, 100; McMillan and Schumacher 2010, 166). In this study the strategic framework is rooted within the field of musicology and music criticism. A qualitative approach will be taken inductively, with interpretivism as a paradigm, while literature and data reviews will serve as research instruments.

Within a research design, the layout and transparency of the steps taken to complete a study is of the utmost importance. These steps help the reader understand the research process (Mutlu 2015, 932; Pretorius 2017, 100). In the following sub-sections I will further discuss the separate elements contained within this strategic framework.

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2.2.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research has been broadly defined by various musicologists. I will be referring to the definitions that seem to link best with the topic of my research in its purposes and aims.

The researcher, P. Van der Merwe, defines qualitative research as an approach focused on developing theories and understandings (Mafuwane 2012, 73). Denzin and Lincoln explains qualitative research in its essence as ‘a situated activity which locates the observer in the world’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 10). This involves an approach to the world that is interpretive and natural, i.e. a qualitative researcher studies phenomena in its natural surroundings in an attempt to make sense of, and interpret it, in terms of the meanings people attach to it. This implies that qualitative research places emphasis on the qualities of entities as well as on the processes and meanings that are not experimentally measured or examined (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 10).

Weinreich (Mafuwane 2012, 73–75), in concurrence with Denzin and Lincoln, states that the value of qualitative research lies in providing researchers with the viewpoint of specific audiences. These viewpoints are provided by means of immersion in a specific culture or situation, as well as by direct interaction with the studied individuals. This means that the researcher becomes an instrument of data collection, and that he/she directly influences the outcome of the study.

According to Barber Mafuwane (2012), the ultimate purpose of qualitative research is the advancement of self-understanding and insight into human conditions (Mafuwane 2012). This is one of the most important reasons why I chose to root my research within the qualitative approach rather than the quantitative approach. Certain methods associated with a qualitative research approach, namely the collection of information through words, pictures or objects, the subjective interpretation of situations, the personal involvement of the researcher, and the emergent design proved ideal for the circumstances surrounding this research project (Mafuwane 2012, 75–76; Pretorius 2017, 104).

Quantitative research, according to Van der Merwe, can be defined as an approach concerned with scientific testing of theories, determination of facts, demonstration of variable relationships and prediction of outcomes. As this study had not yet provided a theory which could be tested in its initial stages, the application of a quantitative research approach would have been premature.

This study merited a qualitative approach in order to explore and understand the phenomenon of contemporary mezzo-sopranos *en travesti* better as little research had previously been done on the topic. The research was also done from the perspective of a young mezzo-soprano and her personal experiences with the aim of helping other young mezzo-sopranos understand their voices and main repertoire better. The research question had called for the identification of factors that influence its outcome and thus fell right within the bounds of qualitative research (Creswell and Creswell 2017, 20).

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Another reason why a qualitative research approach was most fitting for the needs of this study, was the fact that an investigation was launched into a specific naturally occurring phenomenon – in this case, the singing voice. This investigation was launched after an empirical inquiry – in this case, the question of whether Mozart used different compositional techniques for different voice types – was made, which in turn serves an inductive research strategy (Nieuwenhuis 2010, 75). I will further explain the term inductive strategy and its place in this study in the following section on research approach.

2.2.2 Inductive research and Interpretivism

A research approach is a plan that organises broad categories of methods, data collection, analysis and interpretation into detailed procedures (Creswell and Creswell 2017, 3). As a qualitative research approach best fit this study, it also inevitably leaned towards an inductive approach (Pretorius 2017, 102; McMillan and Schumacher 2010, 323). Both of these approaches were further reinforced by interpretivism, an approach and method of inquiry to social sciences stemming from post-positivism.

An inductive research approach can be defined as a research technique in which an inverted approach is followed. Through this approach, information is gathered and synthesised in order to extract generalisations from the data (Pretorius 2017, 103; De Vos and Delpont, n.d., 49; Nieuwenhuis 2013, 107). In this study I made use of the inductive approach by gathering historical information about the *castrati* and the mezzo-sopranos '*en travesti*', as well as by analysing the scores of Sesto and Cherubino. Thereafter I merged the data and used it to formulate generalised theories of how Mozart possibly adjusted his compositional technique when composing for mezzo-sopranos.

Many scholars stand by Egon G. Guba's definition of a worldview as 'a basic set of beliefs that guide action' (Creswell and Creswell 2017, 6; Guba 1990, 17; Denzin and Lincoln 2011, 91). A research worldview can also be referred to as a research paradigm, epistemology or ontology, or a broadly conceived research methodology (Creswell and Creswell 2017, 6; Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba 2011; Mertens 2010; Crotty 1998; Neuman 2009). Creswell further explains that he perceives a research worldview or paradigm as a philosophical orientation towards the world that influences the nature of the research (Creswell and Creswell 2017, 6).

The paradigm I assumed in this study is that of interpretivism stemming from post-positivism. Positivism is defined as a worldview concerned with theory verification, empirical observations and measurements, determination and reductionism. Post-positivism challenges the traditional notion of complete truth of knowledge (Phillips and Burbules 2000, 36).

Post-positivists argue against the idea of objective reality within the social world. They believe that reality can only be estimated and never fully grasped (De Vos et al. 2011, 7). The paradigm relies on multi-method data capturing systems, and the discovery and verification of theories (Vosloo 2014, 305–6). Post-positivist researchers focus on fully comprehending their study throughout the investigation

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(Denzin and Lincoln 2011, 8). They begin their study with a study, and draw up a question and hypothesis before commencing the official study (Morris 2006, 77; Vosloo 2014, 306).

Interpretivism, also sometimes referred to as constructivism, was born out of the limitations associated with positivism. The new move away from the belief in the absolute truth of knowledge, led to the development of a collection of related perspectives. Researchers started asking questions about the validity and reliability of their findings and began approaching their research with more subjective measures (Vosloo 2014, 306). Interpretivists hence adopted the belief that social reality is subjective and nuanced as it is shaped by the participants' insights as well as the researcher's values and aims (Vosloo 2014, 307).

Interpretivism focuses on the exploration of the complex nature of social phenomena, with its main intention being that of gaining a better understanding. Research done through this lens aims at interpreting and understanding daily events, experiences and social structures along with the values that people attribute to them (Collis and Hussey 2009, 56–57; Rubin and Babbie 2010, 37). Interpretivists also believe that research done in the social world cannot adopt research principles from the natural sciences, as social phenomena cannot be understood in that way and require a different research philosophy (Wisker 2008, 69; Blumberg, Cooper, and Schindler 2011, 17) .

Here are the three main principles interpretivists live by:

- The social world is subjectively constructed and given meaning to by humans. These humans are conscious and their behaviour is influenced by their knowledge of the social world, which can only exist in synchronisation with human beings.
- The researcher forms part of the research.
- Interest drives research (Vosloo 2014, 307–8).

2.2.3 Research field

A research field is an area of specialisation, and in the case of this study, the research field is music. Within the world of musicology there are various research methods, such as analysis, historical research, as well as a method combining the previous two methods, called music criticism.

In line with Joseph Kerman's writings (Kerman 1985), the research method that I will be employing is music criticism. Although I will not necessarily be criticising the music as the term suggests, but rather analysing it and hypothesising about it, my research method still falls under the dome of music criticism as I will be looking at primary historical sources (such as letters, newspaper reviews, and articles) and secondary sources, as well as actively analysing the relevant scores.

[Type here]

What I uphold and try to practise is a kind of musicology oriented towards criticism, a kind of criticism oriented towards history (Kerman 1985, 19).

2.2.4 Instruments and data collection

Instruments used within a research study can be defined as anything that the researcher can use as a measurement device to collect information e.g. a survey (Piao n.d., 1). Within this study, no physical tools or equipment were used to collect the information needed to complete the study. In order to strengthen my research and attain triangulation, I used three different methods of data collection, namely a literature review of relevant sources, theoretical analyses of sheet music and the study of primary source documents.

A literature review is generally defined as a summation of previously conducted research on a topic in scholarly articles, books and other relevant sources (Bailey n.d.). I constructed a literature review from primary⁶ as well as secondary⁷ sources in order to gain understanding of the background surrounding the topic, as well as to detect weak and lesser-researched areas. This information could then be used to further advance the study. According to McMillan and Schumacher, information gathered on research methodologies could also be integrated into the study – an approach which I adopted in this thesis (McMillan and Schumacher 2010, 73).

2.2.5 Data collection

Three methods of data collection were used throughout this study in order to achieve triangulation. The term triangulation will be explained further in section 2.4. in terms of validity, reliability, credibility and transferability.

This study relied heavily on the examination of primary sources, as the main focus of my research question seemed to have been researched very narrowly. Research that had been done on the general topic of trouser roles focused on different elements than those that were relevant to this study. I used primary sources, such as letters, original manuscripts and notes from Mozart's personal notebook, to answer important questions that influenced the outcome of the research.

I also made use of another important primary source, namely sheet music. Theoretical analyses were made of the two operatic roles, Sesto and Cherubino, from Mozart's operas *La Clemenza di Tito* and *Le Nozze di Figaro* respectively. These analyses were juxtaposed and manifest deductions were made from the new found information.

⁶ Original documents pertaining to the research topic (McMillan and Schumacher 2010, 76)

⁷ Source of information created at a later stage, by someone who had no first-hand experience of the topic or events discussed e.g. scholarly books and articles (University of Illinois 2005).

2.2.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis pertains to the method in which gathered data/information is analysed and synthesised in order to, in the case of this study, draw generalisations which can begin to answer the research question(s). In this study, data/information was mainly analysed through comparative studies of empirical documents and sheet music. Findings were often juxtaposed against one another in order to locate similarities and differences. Information gathered through different methods, such as primary sources (e.g. letters) and secondary sources (e.g. journal articles), were also sometimes used to draw comparisons.

2.3 Limitations

As is commonly found, some limitations presented themselves within this research process. These limitations were mostly addressed by evidence from literature sources. In cases where no evidence could be found to enable resolution, I worked around the limitations or incorporated them into the study in order to strengthen the research outcome. The following section will serve to explain the choice of characters analysed.

The role of Cherubino in *Le Nozze di Figaro* is the main focus as it is speculated to be the first known trouser role composed for a female in the time of singing *castrati*. Luckily the choice of *castrato* role up for analysis presented itself with a bit more leeway. Various elements were considered in an attempt to make an accurate decision on most suitable character for comparison. The only two operas Mozart wrote which contained roles for *castrati* were *Idomeneo* and *La Clemenza di Tito* (Peschel and Peschel 1987, 580), and I decided to focus on *La Clemenza di Tito* as it was written in closest proximity to *Le Nozze di Figaro*.

Mozart also composed *La Clemenza di Tito* after he had already written the role of Cherubino. I thought that it would be interesting to see how Mozart's composition of a role written in the very traditional genre of *opera seria* was influenced by his practical knowledge of writing for – and even seeing a male role being performed by – a female *en travesti*.

I had two characters to choose from, namely Sesto and Annio, both young patricians, the former a friend of King Tito and the latter a friend of Sesto. I decided on Sesto due to the greater prominence of his role compared to that of Annio, which in principle also provided me with more material to analyse. It also came to light that Annio was not actually written for a *castrato*, but rather a female *en travesti* (Abert, Spencer, and Eisen 2007, 1233). This discovery already shows how Mozart was introducing a new tradition by incorporating it into the old style of *opera seria*, a tradition that was most likely influenced by humanitarian terms (André 2006, 47).

[Type here]

Limitations crept in with the distinct age differences between the two characters – Cherubino being a pre-pubescent boy (11–14 years old), and Sesto a fully grown man (I suspect somewhere in his twenties). Ideally, the two roles for comparison should both have been pre-pubescent boys.

Another limiting element is the fact that they are not both plot-changing characters, as Cherubino mostly serves in aid of comic relief. This can be overlooked as both characters were assigned two arias as well as numerous recitatives. This proves to be enough structural linkage, even though Sesto forms part of two duets, two trios as well as a sextet, while Cherubino merely participates in a single duet and the finale.

2.3.1 Limitations for the role of Sesto

There are various elements that contribute to our knowledge of when and how the relevant parties associated with the compositional process of *La Clemenza di Tito* were drawn together, as well as how they went about the creation process. I have used as many of the available sources as possible to draw conclusions from, in order to provide a better understanding of the unanswered questions about the conception of the opera, and more specifically, the role of Sesto.

There have been speculations about whether or not Mozart knew that he was writing Sesto for a *castrato* and not a tenor. This is supported by evidence of two ‘discarded’ drafts of Sesto’s part, nos. 1 and 3 (and possibly a third aria for Sesto, which has been lost), from *La Clemenza di Tito* in tenor clef, as opposed to treble clef (Durante 1999, 9). This theory could possibly have disproved my hypothesis, but on further inspection into the matter, it seems to merely have been a temporary mistake by Mozart, caused by either a lack of information, or due to oversight in the press for time.

Impresario Domenico Guardasoni was assigned by the Bohemia Estates to ensure the production of a new opera for the coronation of the king of Bohemia. He signed a contract on 8 July 1791 that stated all the details of the task he had to fulfil, including the involvement of a *prima donna* and *primo musico (castrato)* (Rice 1991, 4–6). After this he most likely travelled to Italy via Vienna (en route to Bologna – centre for singers), where he and poet Caterino Mazzolà agreed on *La Clemenza di Tito* as the subject for the libretto (Durante 1999, 565, 576). It is speculated that Guardasoni first attempted to acquire *Primo maestro di Cappella* of the imperial court, Antonio Salieri, as composer, but that he declined due to too many other engagements at the time (or he might have been a bit artistically inhibited) (Durante 1999, 565–66). After this, Guardasoni contacted Mozart who accepted and immediately commenced his writings on the opera (possibly late-July) (Durante 1999, 566 and 588).

Unfortunately Mozart was not familiar with the cast; except for tenor Antonio Baglioni with whom he had worked in *Don Giovanni* as Ottavio (Rice 1991, 48, 54). In an attempt to save time (or merely in his usual compositional process), Mozart started by writing some of the ensemble pieces including the first duet between Sesto and Vitellia, *Come ti piace imponi* (Durante 1999, 577, 586, 588). He continued

[Type here]

with ensemble work which included the duet between Annio and Sesto (*Deh prendi un dolce amplesso*) and the trio for Sesto, Tito and Publio (*Quello di Tito è il volto*), and even finished the quintet with chorus at the end of Act I as well as a part of the sextet with chorus at the end of Act II. By this time Mozart commenced with some of his solo writing for Tito, as he knew the singer's voice well⁸ (Rice 1991, 48–51).

It is speculated amongst academics such as Durante and Giegling that Mozart only commenced his composition of the rest of the music in which Sesto is involved after he found out that he had to include a major role for a '*primo musico*'/*castrato*, as all music written for Sesto after this point is in the treble clef. The two numbers written in tenor clef were discarded and new drafts were made (Giegling 1970). The two arias written for Sesto, along with most other arias, are speculated to have been written before Mozart reached Prague, but the accompanied recitative, *Oh dei, che smania è questa*, could have been written in Vienna or Prague (Durante 1999, 589).

This proves that, even if Mozart was initially writing for a tenor, the newly acquired knowledge forced his hand into a different direction early on enough for him to have been able to write for the correct voice type. He also had the opportunity to get to know the specific singer at hand's voice before composing the two arias which, rather than limiting, strengthens this analytical argument.

2.4 Validity/ Reliability/ Credibility/ Transferability

In the previous section I presented and discussed limitations which are of importance to this research question. The following section can be seen as an extension of that discussion by investigating and exploring issues which arose throughout this project and how their unravelling contributes to the strengthening and validation of my research. The aim of this section is to prove that the research done in this thesis can hold its own against rigorous validity measurements, prove itself to be a reliable source which future researchers could refer to, as well as to construct ideas which could be transferred onto other research topics.

In order to further strengthen the validity, reliability, credibility and transferability of my research, I have made use of three different data collection methods so as to achieve triangulation. Triangulation can be defined as a method of research validation in which multiple data sources are used in an investigation and it is often used as a method to cross-validate patterns occurring throughout the research process (Pretorius 2017, 123; Cohen and Crabtree 2006). By conducting a study into primary and secondary sources as well as analysing sheet music, I verified the validity, reliability, credibility

⁸ All of this is speculated by looking at Mozart's use of paper throughout the opera (Allan Tyson's '*La Clemenza di Tito and its chronology*' in *Musical Times*' 1975, 116) reprinted in Mozart: studies of autograph scores (Cambridge, mass., 1987, 48-60.).

and transferability of the research which in turn acted as a strengthening agent (McMillan and Schumacher 2010, 331). See figure 1 below for an illustration of how triangulation was implemented in this study.

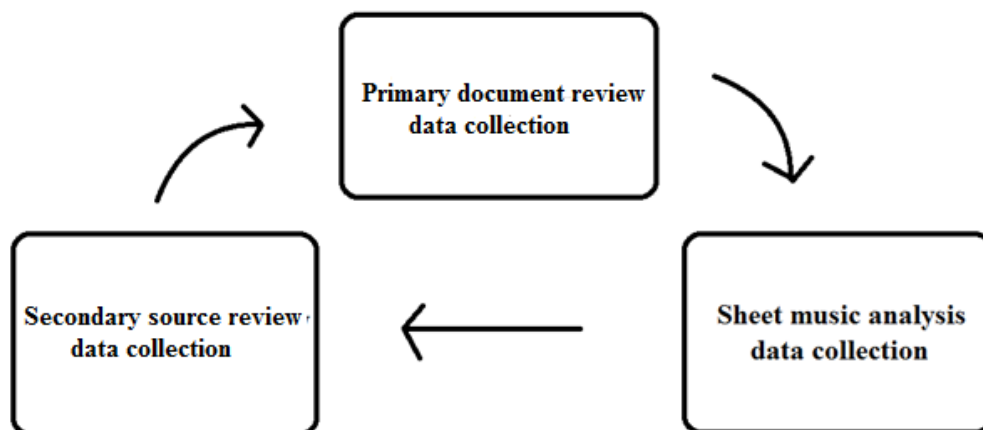


Figure 1: Triangulation in this study

2.4.1 Musical observations

As mentioned previously, the limiting element of size of the two chosen roles can be overlooked due to their equal participation in recitatives and arias. This limitation is also countered by Cherubino and Sesto's participation in 'conspiring' duets: Cherubino, just before he escapes from the Countess's room by jumping out of the window, and Sesto in the first act when Vitellia commands him to assassinate Tito. This counter-action in turn strengthens the validity of my research.

Another important fact which came into question in some of the literature which I looked at was whether Sesto was not perhaps actually intended to be sung by a mezzo-soprano 'en travesti' and Annio by a castrato? Four important sources (including the *Neue Mozart Ausgabe*) (Abert 1924, 712; Jahn and Deiters 1867, 470; Giegling 1970, VII) printed the premiere cast list of *La Clemenza di Tito* as follows:

<i>Tito</i>	Baglioni	<i>Sesto</i>	Bedini
<i>Vitellia</i>	Marchetti-Fantozzi	<i>Annio</i>	Carolina Perini
<i>Servilia</i>	Antonini	<i>Publio</i>	Campi

This cast list was most likely drawn from entries of Mozart's own documentation of performances of his operas in a journal. His entry on *La Clemenza di Tito* shows the following (Westrup 1958, 335):

Actresses: Ms. Marchetti Fantozzi and Ms. Antonini;

[Type here]

Actors: Mr. Bedini, Ms. Carolina Perini (as a man), Mr Baglioni and Mr. Campi.

By looking only at Mozart's journal it is easy to see how these sources reached the conclusion of Sesto being intended for Carolina Perini, a woman. Fortunately Mozart also wrote a letter to his wife on the evening of 7 October 1791 (Westrup 1958, 334):

The strangest thing of all is that on the very evening when my new opera [i.e. *Die Zauberflöte*] was performed for the first time with such success, *Tito* was given in Prague for the last time with tremendous applause. Bedini sang better than ever. The little duet in A major which the two maidens sing was repeated; and had not the audience wished to spare Madame Marchetti, a repetition of the rondo would have been very welcome. Cries of 'Bravo' were shouted at Stodla [i.e. Stadler] from the parterre and even from the orchestra (Mozart et al. 1938, 1437).

Mozart's reference to Bedini most clearly implies that he sang a major role; and the only duet in A major throughout the opera, is *Ah Perdona al primo affetto*, sung by the couple Servilia and Annio. Mozart's reference to the two maidens consequently proves that both Servilia as well as Annio were to be sung by women (Westrup 1958, 333–35). As a result, this discovery disproves the cast list printed by the NMA and others, and strengthens the validity of my research.

2.4.2 'Successful' portrayal and the period ear

The next issue which arose within my research is the idea of a 'successful portrayal' of certain operatic characters and the factors that determine and influence it. This 'successful portrayal' can be divided into vocal and dramatic (characteristic) success. I will mostly discuss characteristic elements, although vocal elements will arise.

I believe that one can render a performance 'successful' if the singer portrays his/her character in such a way as to allow their audience to submit into accepting and 'believing' that the character introduced to them is indeed the opposite sex of the performer. This acceptance then allows audience members to truly understand – as well as to feel – the emotions of the character without gender bias. My understanding of a successful portrayal is based on Naomi André's explanation of 'the period ear' in the eighteenth century (André 2006).

André introduces her concept of the period ear by creating an extension of Thomas Laqueur's models on modern and pre-modern constructions of gender (Laqueur 1990), and Marjorie Garber's research on cross-dressing (Garber 2012). The ideologies of these two researchers serve in contextualising the changing of meanings in ideological and visual codes. André combines these two ideas and strengthens the credibility of the topic by adding a third dimension to the concept: sound (the voice). In her book she discusses how sound (the voice) interacts with visual images (a male role portrayed by a female

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body) in order to create an aesthetic ideology which accepts the combination as ‘heroic’ (André 2006, 13).

According to this concept, André explains that an overlapping of sonic phenomena occurs between the sound of the voice of the *en travesti* hero and ‘second woman’⁹, and different character types. In the period surrounding the *castrati*, it often came to pass that a specific singer would perform a *travesti* role on one night and appear as the second woman on the following night e.g. singers like Francesca Cuzzoni (1696-1778) and Faustina Bordoni (1697-1781) (André 2006, 7, 38). Performance practice of the time allowed audience members to explore the instability between the ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ sounds, and hence submit to believing the different characters more easily. André calls this ‘the period ear’ (André 2006, 12).

She also argues that the *bel canto* technique, specifically the implementation of register blending (*voce mista* – mixed voice), assists in tracing the different aural and visual codes associated with the singing *castrati*. This blending of chest and head (falsetto) registers, along with the ambiguity associated with their body aesthetics, greatly contributed toward them being accepted as both male and female characters. The *voce mista* created a new hybrid sound which transcended the borders of gender ideologies and hence juxtaposed the ‘heroic’, ‘masculine’ as well as ‘feminine’ sounds (André 2006, 43). When female singers inherited these roles originally written for the singing *castrati*, they also took on the complex codes associated with the hybrid sound (André 2006, 44).

As the *castrati* disappeared into history and females ‘*en travesti*’ became the ideal ‘heroic’ voice, the amalgamation of male and female was reconstructed. Unlike the singing *castrati*, whose vocal and physical aesthetics easily fit into either gender group, females were seen and understood to be women dressed as male characters, rather than being able to pass as man or woman. Stylisation came into place when these female voices were heard as ‘male/heroic’ due to the history of the *castrati* and the demand for treble voices. Thus, the various meanings of the flexible treble timbre was transferred from the *castrati* onto female singers due to the period ear (André 2006, 36, 44–45).

André continues to strengthen her concept of the period ear by drawing on Laqueur’s conceptions of gender in the ‘modern’ (after the seventeenth century) and pre-modern era. Laqueur states that pre-modern ideologies dictated male and females to be inversions of each other – motivated by genitalia inside and outside of the body. The consideration of females as the lesser version of males led to a single-sex model where both genders were viewed as different versions of the same whole. If truthful, this theory enhances our understanding of how the *castrati* and even Shakespearean boy actors on the Elizabethan stage were accepted as female characters by audiences of the time (André 2006, 45).

⁹ The second woman is often in a rivalry with the first woman (heroine paired with the primo *uomo/ musico*) if the first is a love interest of the tenor (André 2006, 7).

In the task of successfully presenting one gender as another, vocal timbre played an extremely important part. The physical appearance of *castrati* also added to the illusion of ‘femininity’ because of the substantial difference in physical aesthetics between men and women (deepening of the voice, visibility of the ‘adam’s apple’, hardening of defined muscles). Thus, as mentioned before, the vocal timbre and physical appearance played an important role in allowing the audience to submit to believing that the character on stage is either masculine or feminine. Even though both of these elements played a part in the successful portrayal of a character, the voice took the most direct path as it needed no other attire (costume) to fulfil its purpose (André 2006, 45–46).

André goes on to explain Laqueur’s theory on ‘modern’ ideologies of biological sex and gender¹⁰ developing alongside the new focus on enlightenment and science (and decline in *castrati*), and eventually ending up on opposite ends. From here on, male and female were seen as two different genders, inherently different. This new view of sex and gender emerged while *castrati* were still in reign, which meant that both ideological theories existed in their time - the pre-modern during the beginning of their reign and the ‘modern’ at the time of their decline (André 2006, 46).

André discusses both Garber and Laqueur’s ideologies surrounding hermaphrodites (persons born with male and female sexual organs), but I will not be discussing that part of her research in much detail, as it scratches the surface of a completely new topic. André merely explains how opera proved to offer a special case to Garber’s discussions of cross-dressing. Unlike the hermaphrodites, who caused distress among society due to their potential ability to destabilise cultural gender constructions, *castrati* were revered for their ability to temporarily suspend society’s gender restrictions by portraying opera characters of both sexes in a hermaphroditic or ambidextrous way (André 2006, 46–49). As the phenomenon of the *castrati* started to decline from the end of the eighteenth century, the single-sex model gave way to the double-sex model, and the legacy that females *en travesti* inherited was that of a treble voice with the ability to pass as either masculine or feminine without different aural markers. André explains the possibility of not hearing these voices in an exclusive sense as either ‘male’ or ‘female’, but rather a combination of the two (André 2006, 48). This understanding of the singing voice as a ‘third’ option fits well into other feminist research of the romantic period where these women’s voices (mostly mezzo-sopranos) developed into being heard as ‘the other’ as I mentioned in the literature review section of chapter 1.

I will use the theory of the ‘period ear’ later by juxtaposing it against contemporary audiences of today in order to further explore how twenty-first-century mezzo-sopranos *en travesti* have to adjust certain aspects of their performance in order to convince audiences of their gender.

¹⁰ Sex and gender are separately referred to as biological sex and associated gender respectively.

2.5 Ethical considerations

The term ethics can most plainly be defined as rules of conduct distinguishing between the acceptable and the unacceptable. In research it is necessary to set ethical rules as almost all people recognise certain ethical norms, but interpret and apply them differently according to their environment and personal experience. These rules set standards of conduct which promotes the essential values of collaborative work and ensures the protection of participants and subjects. They also promote research aims such as knowledge, truth and avoidance of error. Most importantly, rules of conduct promote accountability of actions. Honesty, objectivity, integrity, confidentiality, respect for intellectual property, responsible publication as well as mentoring, respect for colleagues, non-discrimination, legality, animal care and human subject protection are but a few principles involved when considering ethics (Resnik 2015). This thesis did not require ethics clearance from the University of Cape Town, as no human subjects were involved.

2.6 Summary

In this chapter I have set out and discussed in detail the research plan for this study. The aim of the research design is to connect the theoretical issues and questions at hand with empirical research. This plan includes the selection of subjects, research sites as well as the procedures involved in the various methods of data collection.

Through a process of trial and error it was established that the study will be rooted in musicology, more specifically music criticism. The study will be conducted qualitatively, via inductive approach with interpretivism as a paradigm. The study will aim at exploring the complex nature of the social phenomenon that is Mozartian trouser roles in order to gain a better understanding of the complexities of such roles in the twenty-first century.

The research will be validated by means of triangulation, while all limitations have been discussed thoroughly. A detailed discussion of Naomi André's concept of the period ear and its influence on our understanding of a successful performance can also be found in this chapter. Last but not least, a discussion about the ethics involved in the study has been included.

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CHAPTER 3: BACKGROUND TO VOICE TYPES AND OPERA GENRES

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss and compare all the information gathered from primary and secondary sources which I have consulted and found relevant to this research topic. The chapter will be divided into a section focussing on the phenomenon of the singing *castrato*, a section on the mezzo-soprano, as well as a section on the development of *opera seria* and *opera buffa*. This will include a Venn-diagram for drawing connections between the overlapping elements of the two voice types, with the main focus on trouser roles.

The section on *opera seria* and *opera buffa* will serve in providing the reader with a fully rounded understanding of the specific operatic styles as well as how the two voice types were supported, developed and influenced by the specific styles.

The chapter will not only serve the purpose of providing information about the history of these elements of opera, but also of examining the technical workings of the female mezzo-soprano voice, as well as the *castrato* voice, which is mostly unknown to the modern vocal enthusiast. This understanding of the voices and operatic styles will provide the necessary data which will be used to draw comparisons in relation to the score later in this chapter as well in other chapters.

3.2 The Phenomenon of the *Castrato*

I found Angus Heriot's book *The Castrati in Opera* most helpful in filling in my knowledge of the *castrato*'s emergence on the scene of opera, their lives and eventual 'fall from grace' as he put it (Heriot 1960, 12).

Castration is the act of either surgically or chemically nullifying the use of the testes. Thus the *castrati*'s dawn came when boys were castrated in order to keep their voices in a high register (Heriot 1960, 10). If this operation was performed before a boy reached the age of puberty, it caused his voice to stay within the range of the treble clef as it had been at that point (Heriot 1960, 10), hence him either remaining an alto or a soprano. This phenomenon emerged and survived for hundreds of years due to various reasons ranging from the importance of the Catholic church and females being banned from singing in churches, to economic distress and poverty (Heriot 1960, 9; Somerset-Ward 2004, 64; Oberlin 1990, 18; Weiss and Budden, n.d.; McClymonds and Hertz, n.d.).

It is not clear when exactly the tradition came into existence, but it is speculated that it started in Rome as early as the fourth century. Unfortunately there is no proof either to support, or dismiss this statement

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and Heriot, along with a few others, believe that they most probably masqueraded as falsettists (Heriot 1960, 10; Oberlin 1990, 18; Stark 1999, 207). Eunuchs seem to have existed almost from the beginning of time (Heriot 1960, 9), but performing this operation on children purely for the sake of preserving their voices, was of course highly illegal at all times (punishable with excommunication, as well as being liable for civil penalties). This meant that whoever executed it had to have had a ‘valid’¹¹ excuse (Heriot 1960, 42; Peschel and Peschel 1987, 580).

In April 1599, the first two acknowledged Italian *castrati*, Pietro Paulo Folignato and Girolamo Rosini, were mentioned in Rome’s books (Heriot 1960, 12; Peschel and Peschel 1987, 580; Barbier 1996, 9). The sizeable amount of *castrati* already available around 1600, serves as confirmation of their existence, rather than a completely new introduction (Heriot 1960, 11). Charles Burney, renowned British musicologist of the eighteenth century, went on a tour through France and Italy in the 1700s for the sake of collecting material to write a general history of music. On his journey he inquired from Milan right through to Naples as to where boys were primarily trained for singing after castration, but every time he was sent away to ‘the next town’ (Heriot 1960, 46). Although it was clear that the operation was being performed in all of the major regions of Italy – by the 1780s there were estimated to be more than 200 *castrati* in the service of the Catholic churches in Rome alone – most Italian regions denied the practice bluntly (Heriot 1960, 11).

Operatic composers and audiences treasured these voices for their agility, strength and sparkling tone colour and they soon became the talk of the town and ‘divos’ in their field (Heriot 1960, 12). This marked the rise of a convention that survived for more than 300 years, confirming its popularity among people from the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and even *primo ottocento* (early-nineteenth) century.

3.2.1 The physiology of the singing castrato’s voice

In the following section, I will provide an explanation of the biological characteristics of a singing *castrato*’s voice. I will not be analysing the anatomy of their bodies and larynx extensively, but rather the outcome of certain characteristic features connected to the *castrati*. In order to create a better understanding of the internal vocal apparatus of the singing *castrato* voice, it is important to bring this voice type into relation with a voice type that is similar to theirs, but also familiar to society after the singing *castrati*’s reign. When considering the basic elements that influence the *castrato* voice – child-like larynx in an adult male body – I think that it would be most beneficial to analyse the workings of

¹¹ I placed valid within inverted commas, because this led to many reports of attacks from animals such as wild pigs and geese. Naturally very few of these cases truly seemed to be valid. Unfortunately they could not be proved otherwise, and thus created a loophole for doctors performing the operation to escape the legal consequences (Heriot 1960, 42).

the adolescent male voice in order to be able to draw connections between the two. Placing these findings into relation with their female counterparts will also shed more light on the hypothesised problem within this thesis.

At birth, an infant's vocal chords are between 6 to 8 millimetres in length with the membranous and cartilaginous sections each 3 to 4 millimetres in length. Up to the age of six years, the vocal chords grow rapidly, after which the growth slows down until puberty is reached. At the onset of puberty, boys' and girls' vocal chords are similar in length at between 12 to 15 millimetres, with the membranous and cartilaginous sections measuring 7 to 8 millimetres. During puberty the secretion of androgen hormones (testosterone) cause boys' vocal chords to enlarge considerably. An adult male's vocal chords can reach a total length of 18 to 23 millimetres with the membranous and cartilaginous sections at a whopping 12 to 16 millimetres (double the pre-pubescent size).¹² Naturally, the vocal chords of a boy castrated before puberty will develop significantly differently, due to the lack of these hormones which stimulate rapid growth and which are produced within the interstitial Leydig cells situated in the testes. Without these hormones, the castrated adult male's vocal chords are not only smaller than his non-castrated counterpart, but they are also smaller than those of an adult female (which are 13 to 18 millimetres long and the membranous section 8 to 12 millimetres) (Peschel and Peschel 1987, 578–79; Brown 1996, 67; Prakash and Johnny 2015; Kahane 1978, 14, 16–17). In figure 2, letters A and B are images of a lateral view of the thyroid cartilage during the developmental stages within each sex. C and D are lateral view images illustrating sex differences in different developmental stages; and E and F are superior views of the thyroid cartilage illustrating sex differences in different developmental stages. The images in figure 2 are based on the actual sizes of the thyroid cartilage.

Symbols:

Prepubescent male: --

Pubertal male: ——

Prepubertal female: ._.

Pubertal female: _x_

¹² According to field research done by members of the *Skoptzi* (a religious sect believing in self-mutilation) that include various anatomists' dissections of *castrati*'s throats, the larynx of a castrato could even be three to four times smaller than that of a normal adult male (Duey 1951, 168).

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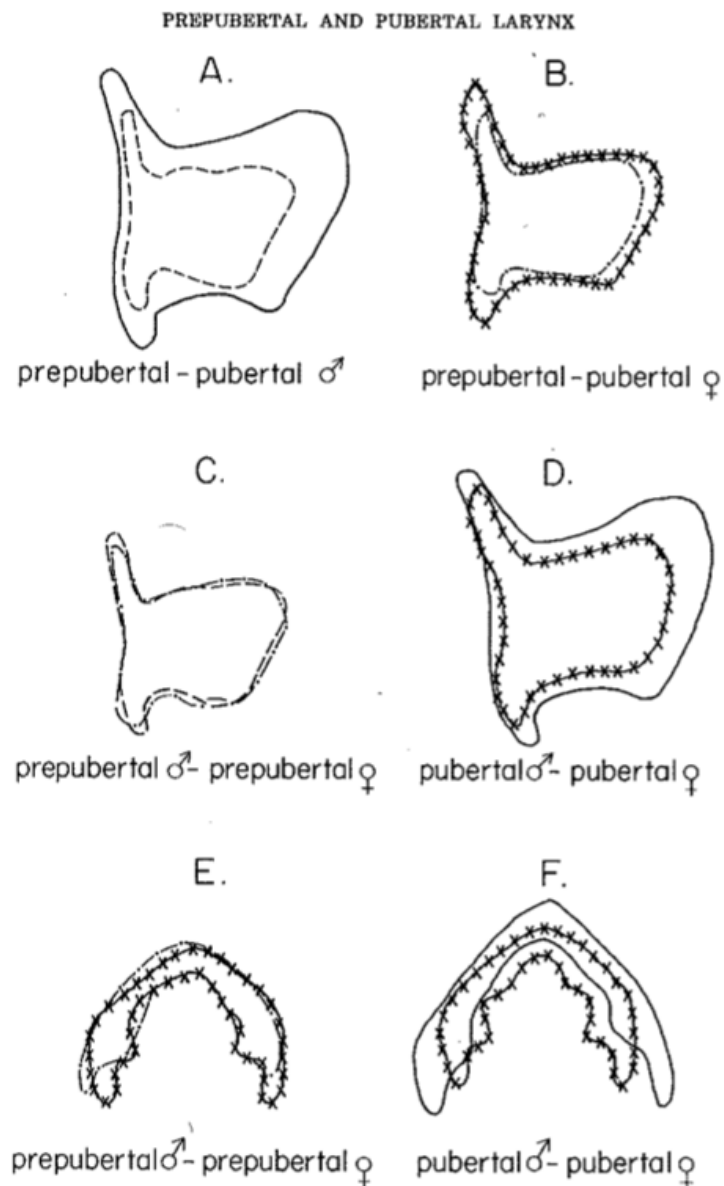


Figure 2: Prepubertal and pubertal thyroid cartilage (Kahane 1978, 13)

Castrati's voices would not have been recognisably unique due to the size of the vocal folds only, but possibly also because of the form and most likely position (angulation of the thyroid cartilage) of the larynx. Once (non-castrated) boys reach puberty, their vocal folds do not only enlarge, but the complete voice box (larynx) also shifts to a lower position with an interlaminae angle (63° to 100° in men and 80° to 130° in women) which often causes their voices to be unstable with slight 'cracks' during the transitional period (Ravindra Daggupati, slide 20; Kahane 1978, 18; Glikson et al. 2017, E354; Komaroff 2018). This descent of the larynx would not have taken place in castrated males, due to the lack of change in hormone secretion. This would inevitably have left their child-sized vocal chords closer to the resonating cavities in 'the mask' (head and nasal cavities), thereby most likely reinforcing

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clarity and brilliance in the voice, as well as affecting the natural selection of harmonics. This combination of features would have created a considerably distinct timbre in the *castrati*'s voices (Barbier 1996, 16; Duey 1951, 52–53).

Something is also to be said about the ease with which *castrato* singers were able to sing big leaping intervals. In terms of vocal sound production, the untrained singer uses mostly only the vocal folds (thyroaretenoids) that lie within their speaking register, below the *passaggio*, to produce sounds. In order to access the higher registers, one has to employ the cricothyroids and lateral cricoarythenoids. These muscles are located behind and below the vocal folds. These muscles are responsible for stretching and lowering the folds to become elongated as well as to create more tension, which in turn produces higher pitches than those created from mere tension in the vocal folds (Unteregger et al. 2017, 1639). The *passaggio* area usually lies within three to four semitones that fall within this transition between muscles. Trained singers mostly aim at employing both muscles/mechanisms throughout the registers, by 'mixing' or 'blending' the sound to achieve enough lightness and intensity, as well as warmth, throughout their range (Brown 1996, 52–54).

During his study, Joel C. Kahane found that there is no significant difference in the angle of the two thyroid laminae before and after puberty, but that the thyroid laminae junction (adam's apple) is more eminent in the pubertal male larynx than in the pubertal female larynx (Kahane 1978, 17). He also explains that the angle of the junction of the thyroid laminae changes during puberty. In this regard, almost no difference can be observed between the sexes pre-puberty, but after puberty the angle becomes much more acute in the male larynx than in the female. As mentioned above, this angle of the junction of the thyroid laminae (interlaminae angle) is disputed to be anywhere between 63 ° to 100 ° in males and 80 ° to 130 ° in females (Kahane 1978, 18). Unfortunately, I was unable to find any medical research done on the subject of the emergence of the *passaggio* after puberty. This means that no definitive conclusion can be made in this research essay as to why prepubertal children (and hence the singing *castrati*) are and were able to cross the *passaggio* more easily and therefore to jump between registers with greater ease. I can only speculate that the interlaminae angle has something to do with it. This suspicion was supported by Dr Rory Atwood. He confirmed that, to his knowledge, the reason for the ease of movement through the *passaggio* is still unclear to researchers and warrants further studies. He also agreed that the tilt of the thyroid cartilage could possibly have some influence on it (Atwood, 2018).

Another element related to the adolescent male voice which could have influenced the crossing of vocal registers, is that of calcification and ossification. According to Nichole Theresa Schultz, calcification and ossification of the thyroid cartilage usually occurs after adolescence due to a natural process of mineralisation (Schultz 2015, 5). This process is not fully understood, but the frequency and degree at which calcification and ossification occur, are influenced by the different male and female hormones.

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More often than women, men experience complete ossification of the thyroid cartilage (Schultz 2015, 7; Mupparapu and Vuppalapati 2005, 200). From this I can derive that certain male hormones influence the speed at which the process occurs and that a lack of these hormones would most likely slow down, or even halt the process completely. This would most likely result in a much slower transition of the thyroid and cricoid cartilage into bone, which in turn would allow for more flexibility within the larynx. This would explain how, just as in the female voice, the voice of a castrato could start out in a certain fach and develop into a different one as he matured, due to the extended gradual physical change throughout his life (Barbier 1996, 15–16; Duey 1951, 52–53).

The cartilage within the human larynx gives singers more flexibility in the voice, as cartilage is less rigid than bone. When a singer exerts different amounts of tension on the vocal folds and muscles responsible for sound production, the cartilage can bend and adjust position accordingly (Friedlander 2014). This small amount of leeway might have been exactly what helped the singing *castrati* in crossing vocal registers more easily. Just as a pre-pubescent boy has a *passaggio*, but crosses it without much effort, in the same way I also think the singing castrati benefited from this non-change within their larynx (Atwood, 2018).

Castration would also lead to a major development of the chest area. Due to a combination of a deficiency in certain male hormones and an increase in other female hormones, the *castrati*'s ribcage area would tend to expand into a rounder shape, which could measure almost the same from front to back as from side to side. This enlarged chest would then act as a 'boombox' in service of the small vocal folds and in turn provide the *castrati*, once fully matured, with exponentially more vocal power than that possessed by females or falsettists (Barbier 1996, 16; Duey 1951, 52–53).

Due to the small size of these vocal folds they would in turn require less air to pass between them in order to produce sound. The latter, combined with a rounder adult male chest and adult male sized lungs, creates the ability to sing longer passages within a single breath (Duey 1951, 53).

Thus, a voice would remain in the natural high pitch of a boy resulting from a castration, but only acquire the additional strength and power characteristic of the *castrato* voice once the rest of the body grows into adulthood. The combination of small vocal folds and an enlarged body already forecasts certain abilities, but these abilities would be enhanced even more by subjecting the castrated boys to rigorous breathing and singing exercises on a daily basis. These activities would develop the singing *castrato*'s lung usage and diaphragmatic support (breath control) to such extremities, that one could understand why audiences often described their abilities as humanly impossible (Oberlin 1990, 20; Barbier 1996, 16; Duey 1951, 53).

3.2.2 Vocal characteristics

The following section lists the characteristics attributed to the singing *castrato* voice.

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1. Sweetness – sweeter than women’s voices. Goethe described the *castrati*’s voices as beautiful and caressing and even the French Voltaire admitted their voices were more beautiful than women’s (Rogers 1919, 423; Peschel and Peschel 1987, 579–80).

Nothing in all music is so beautiful as the fresh young voice of a *castrato*; no woman’s voice has the same freshness, strength and sweetness (William Heisse, quoted in Peschel and Peschel 1987, 580).

This element came from the remaining characteristics of a child’s voice – light, clear and sweet (Oberlin 1990, 18).

2. Piercing timbre, brilliance and limpidity (Heriot 1960, 14; Barbier 1996, 17).
3. Vocal power (Barbier 1996, 17).
4. Extensive range: ranges exceeding three octaves (Scholz, Broadwin, and Frisch 2001, 276).
5. Skill in executing difficult intervals (Stark 1999, 205).
6. Great economy of breath in executing brilliantly long bravura passages or *fioritura* (Stark 1999, 205; Duey 1951, 53).
7. Ability to produce *messa di voce* exceedingly well (Duey 1951, 53).

The technique used by these singers required a sweet, pure tone; blended registers; command of the *messa di voce*; a facility for perfecting florid ornaments; and the ability to convey emotions of the text clearly (Elliott 2006, 136).

3.3 The Mezzo-Soprano

It is unclear exactly when singing *castrati* started becoming less common, but is speculated to be around 1796 when Napoleon won the war (he did not find *castrati* agreeable). This coincides with the change from the Baroque to the Classical period roughly between 1750 and 1775 (Elliott 2006, 92, 106), or between 1790 and 1825 (Stark 1999, 205). This means that, somewhere between 1750 and 1825, trends changed causing the demise of the *castrati* which inevitably left their musical roles unfilled (Elliott 2006, 106). Opera houses had no choice but to either transpose the music down for a tenor or baritone (Elliott 2006, 106; Dean and Knapp 1987, 501–2), or as was the case most often, place a female (usually mezzo-soprano as identified today¹³) in the role ‘*en travesti*’ – and thus the tradition of the trouser role was born (Elliott 2006, 135).

¹³ Before the 1800s, female voices were either referred to as soprano or contralto. There was no distinction between different kinds of sopranos as known today. For the sake of clarity, I will be differentiating between sopranos and mezzo-sopranos in this study, as I believe there is a great difference between the two (Jander et al. n.d.).

3.3.1 *The physiology of the female mezzo-soprano voice*

As is visible from the section on the biology of the *castrato* voice, the adult female's vocal chords are not much bigger after puberty than before. This explains why females do not see a great difference in vocal range post-puberty. There is also no big downward movement of the larynx after puberty in females, but merely a slight shift lower, which in turn has an effect on the timbre of the voice (Barbier 1996, 16). The biggest change audible in female voices after puberty, is the maturity of the voice as perceived in strength, warmth and timbre (Brown 1996, 67).

Female voices are divided into three registers, namely chest, middle and head voice, according to the different timbres that they produce and the strength which they have. These three registers are produced by different mechanisms within the larynx. The employment of these mechanisms either individually or simultaneously (the thyroaretenoides/vocal folds and cricothyroid muscles), produce sets of notes that are divided by small 'breaks' or difficult passages which we know as the *passaggio* (Garcia 1894, 8; Brown 1996, 54; Unteregger F et al. 2017, 1639).

The mezzo-soprano chest register usually begins between around B₃ and could even start from D₄ in sopranos. This means that the starting range of the lyric mezzo-soprano could fall anywhere in between. The chest register is generally strong and energetic in lower, as well as dramatic mezzos and contraltos, and slightly weaker in lyric mezzos, yet still stronger than in sopranos. The middle register of all the different female voices usually begin between C₄ (middle-C) and D-flat₄. This register is much stronger in lower voices, but frequently breathy and weak in higher voices. The highest register, which is called the head voice, usually begins between C-sharp₅ and E₅. It is the most sonorous register, especially in lyric mezzos and sopranos. It is much lighter than the other registers, but can also be made stronger or 'heavier' by blending the registers (Garcia 1894; Unteregger et al. 2017, 1642; Lamperti 1890, 7–8).

3.3.2 *Vocal Characteristics*

The following section lists the vocal characteristics of the mezzo-soprano.

1. Distinctive break around E-flat and F in the untrained voice (continued pure head register from G on upwards) (Garcia 1894, 8–9; Lamperti 1890, 5).
2. Warm timbre, especially in the middle and lower register (André 2006, 7; Garcia 1894, 9).
3. Strength in lower register (André 2006, 7; Garcia 1894, 8–9).

3.4. Comparison – Venn-diagram

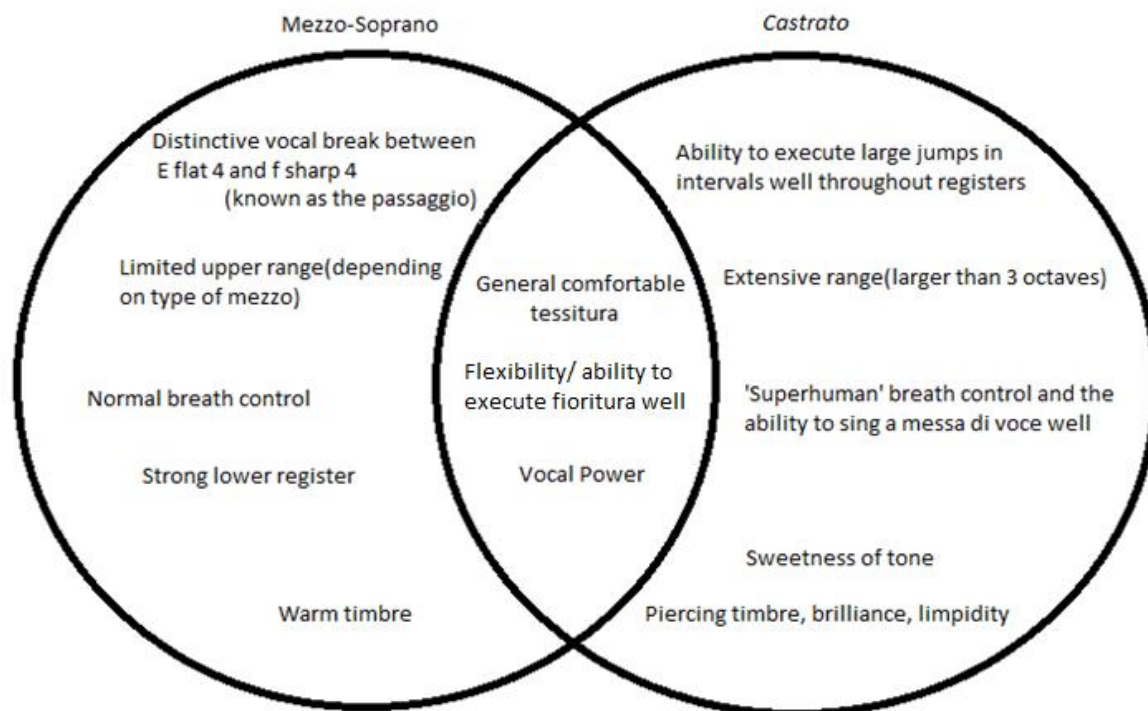


Figure 3: Venn diagram comparing characteristics and abilities of the singing castrato and mezzo-soprano.

3.5 Opera *Seria* of, and before the eighteenth century

The information in the following discussion of *opera seria* is mostly taken from a journal article by McClymonds and Hartz in the Oxford Online Library (McClymonds and Hartz, n.d.), unless otherwise cited.

As there was no other rivalling opera genre at the time, *opera seria* was rarely referred to by this name before the end of the eighteenth century, when its descent in popularity against *opera buffa* began. The characteristics of *opera seria* took shape in the first twenty years of the eighteenth century along with a reformation led by the Arcadian Academy of Rome. The reform was sparked by French criticism of Italian poetry and drama and the 'undisciplined, irrational and often licentious *libretti*' in use at the time was one of the biggest fundamentals under scrutiny (Weiss and Budden 2001; Parker 1994, 47). In order to make these *libretti* desirable again, they had to be brought into consensus with the principles of the Classical Greek drama, which were set forth in Aristotle's *Poetics* and exemplified in certain works by the French neo-classical dramatists, Jean Racine and Pierre Corneille (Weiss and Budden 2001; Landon 1996, 76).

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By the end of 1710, certain ‘rules’ had been put into place to render opera *libretti* in good taste once more. The plot had to transpire within a short time frame – preferably a day – and the different settings needed to be within close proximity. Actions were limited to a single, central argument that employed a maximum of eight characters. The new *libretti* were also designed in such a way as to have a consistent amount of characters within a scene. As soon as one character exited the stage, a new scene unfolded. These participants’ entrances and exits were cleverly designed with the intent of never having an empty stage, except between acts and during set changes. Arias were usually placed at the end of a scene, with the character exiting the stage at the end of his/her statement (Weiss and Budden 2001; Lindenberger 1998, 65–66).

These new rules were created in order to assure the compliance of society’s principles on morals, respectability and, as previously mentioned, ‘good taste’. Tragic endings were the first to fall under the guillotine, as it was seen as too uncivilised. In the event of a death, strict rules had to be followed to ensure that it was treated with the necessary respect. Murder was out of the question; however death in battle or by suicide was acceptable as long as it transpired off-stage. Poets were encouraged to write stories about the ideal world, rather than bombard audiences with harsh reality. Historical events were preferred as plot lines over fables and myths, and trips to the underworld were prohibited. Spectacle was also limited to natural phenomena and human activity, while any kind of resolution through the supernatural was frowned upon. Last, but not least, was the reservation of ballet and comedy – which was at the time branded ‘coarse, improper and tasteless’ – for entr’actes (*intermezzi*) only (Weiss and Budden 2001; Parker 1994, 47). The aim of these new rules was to create *libretti* that were high enough in quality to be regarded as literature, but also to entertain and teach – all of this, while still remaining simplistic, natural and dignified.

In contrast with the new rules for poetry, no alterations were made to the musical structure. Basic *basso continuo* accompanied *versi sciolti* (unrhymed seven- and eleven-syllable lines freely alternating) in order to move the action forward. These recitatives were only interrupted by *da capo* arias in strophic verse, which served as vehicles for reflection, reaction or précis/summation (Grout, Burkholder, and Palisca 2010, 489; Lindenberger 1998, 64; Landon 1996, 75). *Libretti* created through the reformation contained copious amounts of *versi sciolti* (recitatives) while the number of arias were limited to thirty. Theatres in reaction reduced the amount of these recitatives to the bare minimum, using only what was necessary to successfully convey the plot line. Operas remained to be produced in three acts with ensembles and duets limited to single numbers per opera. Act III was typically finished off with a *coro* including the entire cast, which personified the happy ending (Parker 1994, 82).

At the time, most poets and composers served as permanent artists for theatres and courts (Weiss and Budden 2001; Parker 1994, 47–48). Their duties included the re-working of old works and the composition of new ones. Other composers relied on church-affiliated posts for their income. These

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composers often received contracts from theatres to compose one or more operas on an individual basis. In such cases they would be required to travel to the designated theatres in time to get to know the singers of the season. After they were properly acquainted with the voices, arias and ensembles would be composed to fit the different vocal abilities. The most important job for all composers was to utilise the various vocal strengths of the singers and to conceal their weaknesses (Weiss and Budden 2001; Parker 1994, 82).

Opere serie were predominantly only performed for a single season (Weiss and Budden 2001; Parker 1994, 49–50). Subsequently composers and librettists would rework productions or set it to completely new music, the only remaining element being certain ‘favourites’ of specific singers. Thus began the tradition of the *pasticcio*. Singers travelled to different cities with these arias and theatres often used them to conclude seasons. By mid-century, singers had obtained immense power from the success of these tailor made arias (Weiss and Budden 2001; Lindenberger 1998, 58–59).

Another set of rules, regulating the distribution of arias, was put in place to assure a set hierarchy of rank. By this time the number of arias had been further diminished to twenty per opera. Of these, four to five were given to the *primo uomo/musico* and *prima donna* who filled the position of dominant couple. The position of *primo uomo/ musico* was filled by a top of the rank singing *castrato*, in order to maintain the treble voice, while women were still prohibited from singing in churches and on stage (Weiss and Budden 2001; Lindenberger 1998, 64; Landon 1996, 75). Duets were reserved for the principal couple and a trio might have been formed with the tenor, who portrayed a ruling or patriarchal character. Another three to four arias were also awarded to the second ranking couple, leaving advisors and confidants with no more than one or two arias. As the number of arias continued to decrease, ensembles and extended dialogues were also counted as arias. Important musical characters were required to sing at least one contrasting aria chosen from the list of *aria cantabile*, *aria d'affetto*, *aria di bravura*, or *aria di mezzo carattere*. The loose textural relationship between aria and scene made it easy for singers to substitute the assigned aria with a ‘favourite’ aria or text with the right affection (Weiss and Budden 2001; Parker 1994, 59–61; Lindenberger 1998, 58).

Meeting all the new strict requirements of the *opera seria* genre proved to be an extremely difficult task. Librettists had to maintain the historical plot while avoiding political offences, creating enough dramatic content in order to motivate a large amount of arias correctly distributed between characters entering and exiting at strategic times. Even with the immense task of complying with all these rules, certain poets still managed to execute their *libretti* with grace and simplicity.

One of the poets who became well known for his masterful execution of this genre was Pietro Trapassi, generally known as Metastasio. He was not one of the first poets to gain success from writing these kinds of libretti, but inherited the mature style from Apostolo Zeno. This enabled him to build on what

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had been done before, and eventually he perfected the skill to such a point that the dramaturgy of the time, as well as the genre of *opera seria*, became known as Metastasian. His works projected the ideals of the enlightenment era, where characters had the self-control to conquer human desires so as to achieve greatness in not only thought, but deed as well. His *libretti* merged the moral principles of the monarchs and their subjects, while still remaining apolitical in order to not cause offence to the biggest patrons of the genre. Metastasio had the extraordinary ability to adhere to all the new rules through a logical approach, while maintaining simplicity and dignity of text and an overall effect of elegance. Another aspect that made his works so successful was the way in which he could capture the essence of both realism and drama. Metastasio gained much greater success in his work than other poets due to his ability to craft his *libretti* in a way that was ideal for musical setting (Weiss and Budden 2001; Parker 1994, 50–57; Lindenberger 1998, 58; Burney 1771, 927).

As Italian opera became supreme within almost all of the European countries – and not all of them were Italian speaking – the importance of understanding the language declined. This resulted in the main importance being attached to text shifting rather to the enjoyment of the music and creation of an *Affekt*¹⁴ (Heriot 1960, 13; Lindenberger 1998, 66). Thus, the Metastasian period of *opera seria* – where arias typically conformed to an ABA structure, with the same short *libretti* repeated continually – contributed to the *libretto*'s loss of importance and created an opportunity to show off singers' technical abilities by inserting elaborate passages of ornamentation into the repeated A-section of the arias (Weiss and Budden 2001; Parker 1994, 58; Lindenberger 1998, 66). Consequently, *opera seria* proved to be one of the *castrati*'s biggest supporters. It became the platform for composers to write music that would show off the remarkable otherworldly and ethereal abilities of these voices (André 2006, 3).

Seeing as the genre of opera and the phenomenon of the singing *castrati* emerged at the same time, it would be difficult to determine whether the *castrati*'s vocal skills influenced the development of *opera seria* or vice versa.

3.6 Opera Buffa of, and before the eighteenth century

The information in this section has drawn greatly from an article by Weiss und Budden (Weiss and Budden, 2001) in Grove Music Online.

The genre known as *opera buffa* today, was originally referred to in a variety of ways, such as '*dramma giocoso*', '*dramma bernesco*', '*dramma comico*', '*divertimento giocoso*' and '*commedia per musica*' from as early as 1695. Only a small amount of these comic operas, with specific intention to be

¹⁴ Atmosphere and emotion within music (Lindenberger 1998, 66).

performed as independent works rather than comic *intermezzi* for *opere serie*, were produced before the eighteenth century (M. Hunter and Webster 1997, 197). A prototype of *opera buffa* as an autonomous genre made its debut in Naples in 1706 with the first performance of *La Cilla* by composer and lawyer Michelangelo Faggioli and librettist F.A. Tullio. In its initial stages, this new type of comic opera thrived due to the financial support of the eminent, and possibly enlightened, members of the aristocracy and legal profession (M. Hunter and Webster 1997, 165; Weiss and Budden 2001).

La Cilla was set in a district of Naples and all the characters spoke in the local dialect (Weiss and Budden 2001; Parker 1994, 84). Conventional *opera seria* characters, such as the *innamorati*, still made their appearance as serious characters, but their expressions in the ‘more relaxed’ Italian dialect caused them to become less stylised and more natural (M. Hunter and Webster 1997, 197; Weiss and Budden 2001; Parker 1994, 89). Later, these male lovers were sometimes portrayed by females, with the plot revolving around the fate of the couple. Other comedic stock characters from the earlier Baroque period surrounding them were: ‘the old woman’ (tenor), ‘the old man’, ‘the overconfident captain’ (bass) and ‘the risqué shop boy’ (female ‘soprano’¹⁵). What was true for the *innamorati*, also proved to be true for these characters. By expressing themselves in the local dialect, they became less of the caricatures they used to be, and much more believable as ‘real’ characters with which the audience could associate (Weiss and Budden 2001; Parker 1994, 84).

Merely three years later (1709), the first Neapolitan *opera buffa*, *Patrò Calienno de la Costa*, made its debut in the *Teatro dei Fiorentini* with music by Antonio Orefice and *libretto* by ‘Agasippo Mercotellis’ (speculated to be the pen-name for the lawyer Nicolo Corro or Giaseppo Martoscelli) (Croce 1891, 234; Markstrom 2003, 24–25). This marked the official beginning of a genre which would entice many composers to explore its creative depths and contribute their own artistic insights. In general, the performers of these operas were at first untrained singers sourced locally. Other than the relative lack of bravura passages, due to the lack of technical ability of the untrained singers, the music of the Neapolitan *opera buffa* was not different to the music of the existing *opere serie*. Most arias were still written in ABA-form (*da capo*) and the structure of the opera remained that of the three act division (Weiss and Budden 2001; Landon 1996, 75). A little quarrel was often placed at the end of Acts I and II, and it eventually metamorphosed into what we today know, as the extended *opera buffa* finale (Weiss and Budden 2001; M. Hunter and Webster 1997, 216).

Opera buffa next spread to Rome in 1729 with the help of leading librettist Bernardo Saddumene and composer Giovanni Fischietti. Fischietti created a new version (*La Costanza*) of Leonardo Vinci’s opera, *Li zite ’ngalera*, which had been performed in Naples in 1722. In this version, the female roles were portrayed by *castrati ‘en travesti’*, as women were not yet allowed to sing on stage in Rome (Weiss

¹⁵ As previously discussed, this would most likely be referred to as a mezzo-soprano today.

and Budden 2001; Parker 1994, 88). Another way in which *opera buffa* diverted from this point onwards, was in the distribution of dialect and true Italian between character ranks. True Italian was reserved for the serious roles while the original dialect was used by the comic characters. Rome hence became the hub of *opera buffa* as it spread further north of Italy and eventually, around 1750, to the rest of Europe.

With Naples and Rome's great success and enjoyment of the genre, Venice also quickly assimilated the new trend and further contributed to its development. After a series of successful *opere buffe* by composer Baldassare Galuppi and librettist Carlo Goldoni, which established a model for the genre, *opera buffa* began challenging its contemporary in popularity (M. Hunter and Webster 1997, 197; Weiss and Budden 2001). At the time, Goldoni's spoken comedies were his most famous works and his *libretti* merely derivatives of these achievements. Although his *libretti* were not his most celebrated pieces, they were nevertheless expertly produced, with certain aspects of the works lending themselves effortlessly to the genre of opera and especially *opera buffa*. His *libretti* treated a great mixture of subjects – from the realistic to the fantastic – with rich amounts of scenic effects. Standard features such as humorous vocabularies ideal for musical reiteration, metrically varied arias (frequently departing from the ABA-form scheme) and most of all 'sequential' finales are but a few examples of Goldoni's techniques which aided Galuppi in the composition process (Weiss and Budden 2001; Parker 1994, 90–91).

As mentioned previously, the last feature on this list proved to be one of the biggest design features of *opera buffa* as we know it today. These 'sequential' finales were usually positioned at the end of Acts I and II and typically concerned many characters involved in an extensive hullabaloo (Weiss and Budden 2001; M. Hunter and Webster 1997, 216). Galuppi, speculated to be the first composer to make use of this kind of musical and textual integration, connected separate sections of different temperaments and tempi with orchestral music. Throughout these connected sections a great number of performers would enter and exit the stage. What gained this new feature such success and importance was the fact that the music portrayed not only sentiment, but also encapsulated embodied action. This had never been done before and delighted audience members.

Galuppi also introduced another aspect of *opera buffa*, namely the reconciliatory duet in the penultimate scene of the third act, which served to replace the newly obsolete *intermezzo*. This introduction proved to be extremely successful among audience members and made its way into standard practice. The duet was followed by a much simpler finale by an ensemble or chorus (Weiss and Budden 2001; Parker 1994, 90). After the amalgamation of comedy and sentiment, *opera buffa* did not develop much further. Its spirit was merely enriched with the characters of the different instrumental genres of the Classical period and comedies of the contemporary authors. 'The sly observation of human foibles within the

context of contemporary society was and remained its main business', as quoted from Pieter Weiss's article *Opera buffa* in the Oxford Music Online (Weiss and Budden, 2001.).

Only with the appearance of Mozart's three Lorenzo Da Ponte operas, did an ultimately unchallenged level of psychological depth, dramatic timing and technical mastery make its way into the genre (M. Hunter and Webster 1997, 221; Weiss and Budden 2001; Parker 1994, 77). Mozart's absolute genius proved to be the epitome of the genre and eventually overshadowed its development to the point where all previous works were seen merely as a preparation for his arrival onto the scene.

3.7 Summary

In this chapter I have gathered information from primary and secondary sources in order to form a comparison. The comparison was divided into three sections, of which the first explored the phenomenon of the singing castrato and the second the mezzo-soprano. These sections were subdivided into sections on the history and physiology of each voice type as well as characteristics associated with them. I included a Venn-diagram to simplify my findings. Thereafter a brief overview was given on the history of *opera seria* and *opera buffa* in order to contextualise the role and use of each voice type. The aim of this chapter was to compare all the acquired data and, with the use of a Venn-diagram, to point out the differences and similarities between the two voices which will be used in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

In the following chapter I will compare elements from the operas *La Clemenza di Tito* and *Le Nozze di Figaro*, with particular reference to the music of the characters Sesto and Cherubino.

4.2 Role analysis: *La Clemenza di Tito* - Sesto

Mozart composed the opera *La Clemenza di Tito*, with poetry by Pietro Metastasio and *libretto* by Caterino Mazzolà. The role of Sesto was written for the *castrato* Domenico Bedini (Oberlin 1990, 23), as Mozart was contractually bound to include a principal role for a famous *musico (castrato)* in an *opera seria*. The opera was commissioned as a tribute to the new king of Bohemia, Leopold II, on his coronation day: 6 September 1791 (Rice 1991, 4).

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4.2.1 Mozart's Sesto

In line with the typical traditions of *opera seria*, the character of Sesto is not as original as the characters one sees in Mozart's *opere buffas*, who experience complex psychological problems. Sesto merely slots into a typical *opere serie* character type, namely the ever-changing, passive and sentimental young lover (Abert, Spencer, and Eisen 2007, 1230, 1233). This seems absolutely fitting to an age where sentiment carried favour above heroism (Abert, Spencer, and Eisen 2007, 1230).

Within the opera, Sesto repeatedly proves to be a supreme *opera seria* character through various elements such as strident dynamic changes (Abert, Spencer, and Eisen 2007, 1232), *obbligato* clarinet usage, elaborate *fiorituri* between voice and clarinet, as well as the build-up in tension through form and tempi (adagio, allegro, allegro assai) all within the first aria (Abert, Spencer, and Eisen 2007, 1235). His music also consistently places emphasis on musical character rather than dramatic intention (Abert, Spencer, and Eisen 2007, 1238). Even though Mozart truly wanted to better serve the drama, he did not always press his librettists to change the words in order to compliment the music and drama, but rather used the faults of the *libretti* to emphasise certain flaws in the characters (Landon, Abraham, and Mitchell 1956, 284–85). Mozart had the ability to musically embody characters and situations, and he used the words merely as vehicle for delivering the music, hence the words acted as a comprehensive 'label' for the audience's understanding. (Landon, Abraham, and Mitchell 1956, 285).

In contrast to these various *opera seria* elements, another aspect of *opera seria's* compositional technique, namely leaping intervals and wide range¹⁶, is particularly visible in Mozart's writing for Sesto. This, combined with sweet-toned melodies – of which Sesto is the primary recipient – in turn adds some (Mozartian *opera buffa*) warmth to his character type (Abert, Spencer, and Eisen 2007, 1233). Mozart also avoided his typical modulation to distant keys and the few times in which he made swift harmonic shifts to remote keys, the effect turned out to be that of higher emotion and less of sentimentality (Abert, Spencer, and Eisen 2007, 1236 and 1240).

¹⁶ It is not clear whether these elements originally stemmed from the music or whether the abilities of the *castrati* influenced composers to write in such a way.

39
E co-me può a ver-ne un tra - di - tor? Se - sto in - fe - li - ce! tu tra - di - tor!

45
Cheor - ri - bil no - me! Ep - pu - re t'af - fet - ti a me - ri - tar - lo. E chi tra - di - sci? il più gran - de il più

50
giu - sto, il più cle - men - te prin - ci - pe del - la ter - ra a cui tu de - vi quan - to puoi quan - to

53
sei. Bel - la mer - ce - de gli ren - di in ve - ro. Ei t'in - nal - zò per far - ti il car - ne - fi - ce suo.

Figure 4: Bars 39-56 of *Recitativo accompagnato*, 'Oh Dei, che smanie è questa'.

In the figure shown above, Mozart modulates from f minor to g minor in bar 45 and then to A-flat major from g minor in bar 48. This minor second shift from g to A-flat, combined with the change from minor into major, is quite harsh on the listener's ear, and in turn creates a fitting atmosphere of shock to accompany the words 'e chi tradisci?' ('and whom do I betray?'). This kind of abrupt minor to major modulation was not common in Mozart's time (Taruskin n.d.; Kostka, Payne, and Almén 2013, 289, 312) and this unknown ('strange') sound further adds to the effectiveness of the music. Sesto had been talking to himself for 47 bars about his upset and confused state of mind and how terrifying his surrounds are, but only in bar 48, after the harsh sound of a *sforzando* unison D-flat chord, does he truly realise that he has betrayed and 'killed' his best friend and the king of Rome. From bar 48 onwards, Sesto is flooded with inner turmoil, shifting between horror, nostalgia, love and self-pity.

He is gradually lulled into a state of remembrance as Mozart modulates back to the familiar territory of c minor, where the recitativo began. This docile atmosphere is quickly upset by the word 'carnefice'

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(‘assassin’). In figure 5 shown below, it becomes clear through the sudden modulation back to A-flat major in the interlude in bars 57–58, that the thought of becoming his best friend’s assassin horrifies Sesto, and it prompts him to say ‘*M’inghiotta il suolo prima ch’io tal di venga*’ (‘May the earth swallow me up before I become that’).

The image shows a musical score for a recitative piece. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a soprano or alto clef and contains the lyrics: "M'in-ghiot-ta il suo-lo pri-ma ch'io tal di-ven-ga". The piano accompaniment is in a bass clef and is marked with a forte 'f' dynamic. It features a trill in the right hand in bar 58, indicated by a '(b) tr.' above the notes. The score is numbered 57 at the beginning.

Figure 5: Bars 59-62 of *Recitativo accompagnato* ‘*Oh Dei, che smania è questa*’.

Mozart’s intelligent use of certain modulations thus heightens the emotions of the characters and in turn also the dramatic effectiveness.

I agree that most of these elements fit well into the practises of *opera seria* in which the voice was considered more important than the orchestra, and characterisation was last on the list of importance, with theatrical effectiveness and lavish (vocal) beauty at the top (Abert, Spencer, and Eisen 2007, 1243; Grout, Burkholder, and Palisca 2010, 493). However, I also think that some of the elements show how Mozart’s skill in composition had grown and been influenced by his *opera buffa* techniques, such as giving more importance to the words, and in my opinion, showing early signs of Wagner’s ‘*Gesamtkunstwerk*’ ideals. Mozart’s usage of tonality, rather than his use of form, acts as a unifying element which can be found in most of his operas (Landon, Abraham, and Mitchell 1956, 291)

4.2.2 Musical observations

In the following section I will analyse the musical content of the role of Sesto and structure it in the form of sections on specific characteristics which were mentioned in chapter 3, in sections 3.2.2 and 3.3.2. The characteristics for further discussion will be: vocal range; tessitura and timbre; vocal power; interval jumps and breath control; *messa di voce*; and bravura passages. I will also be discussing interpretive issues which will be tied into the argument later in this chapter.

The first musical observation pertains to the vocal range of the role of Sesto. As mentioned earlier, some singing *castrati* had exceptionally large vocal ranges and Mozart made use of this advantage by writing all the way up to B-flat₅ (just below top-C) for Sesto. On the other end of the spectrum, Mozart did not write very low notes for this role and stopped at C₄ (middle-C). This is very interesting, as he

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wrote a rondo aria ('Non più di fiori') for the soprano, Vitellia, in which he exploited her raw chest sound so as to add to the intensity of her distraught when she realises what she had done. She is required to sing a few B-flat₄ notes and even low A₄'s when she speaks of death.

When looking at the general tessitura¹⁷ of the role of Sesto, it mostly lies in the top part of the middle voice, through the *passaggio* and above it in lower head voice as well. This is quite high see figures 6 and 7) and it becomes clear that Mozart did not want to exploit the singer's lower chest sound (possibly because it was not very strong). Instead, he focused on the brilliance, limpidity and piercing timbre of the higher register to intensify the raw emotions that Sesto experiences throughout the opera. Rather than emphasising the horrible deed that Sesto contemplates (and eventually executes) through raw chesty sounds, Mozart turns to the special sweet timbre that the singing castratos were famous for, thereby emphasising Sesto's reluctance to commit a murder and, after it is done, his repentance and sorrow (see figures 8 and 9). This contributes greatly to the listener's understanding of Sesto's personality and being. Although Sesto is merely an imitation of a *commedia dell'arte* stock character, Mozart uses this technique to give the character a more humane aspect – something he is famous for doing in his *opere buffe*.

Andante

11

stes-so a - mi - co il ciel, e o - gnor per me lo stes - so ti

16

ser - bi a - mi - co il ciel a - mi - co il ciel a - mi - co il ciel.

Detailed description: The image shows two staves of musical notation in 6/8 time, marked 'Andante'. The first staff (bars 11-15) contains the lyrics 'stes-so a - mi - co il ciel, e o - gnor per me lo stes - so ti'. The second staff (bars 16-21) contains the lyrics 'ser - bi a - mi - co il ciel a - mi - co il ciel a - mi - co il ciel.' The music features a mix of quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, with some rests and a fermata over the final note of the second staff.

Figure 6: Bars 11-21 of Duettino 'Deh prendi un dolce amplesso' sung by Sesto and Annio (Mozart et al. 2001, 39).

10

gli e - stre - mi miei so - spi - ri quel - l'a - li - to sa - rà gli e -

15

stre - mi miei so - spi - ri quel - l'a - li - to sa - rà

Detailed description: The image shows two staves of musical notation in 6/8 time. The first staff (bars 10-14) contains the lyrics 'gli e - stre - mi miei so - spi - ri quel - l'a - li - to sa - rà gli e -'. The second staff (bars 15-20) contains the lyrics 'stre - mi miei so - spi - ri quel - l'a - li - to sa - rà'. The music features a mix of quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, with some rests and a fermata over the final note of the second staff.

¹⁷ A section within the music where most of the notes lie ("Tessitura" n.d.).

Figure 7: Bars 10-18 of Terzetto 'Se al volto mai ti senti' (Mozart et al. 2001, 172–73).

49

51 di - sci? il più gran - de, il più giu - sto, il più cle - men - te
 prin-ci-pe del - la ter - ra, a cui tu de-vi quan-to puoi, quan-to sei. Bel-la mer

Figure 8: Bars 49-53 of Recitativo accompagnato 'Oh Dei, che smania è questa' (Mozart et al. 2001, 131–32).

110

gior-no La no-bil al-ma ver-sò dal sen tra - fit-to

Figure 9: Bars 110-112 of Recitativo 'Sesto! Da me che vuoi?' in Quintetto con coro (No.12) (Mozart et al. 2001, 146).

The next musical observation pertains to the vocal strength required for the role of Sesto. Mozart wrote two passages in *La Clemenza di Tito* that requires immense vocal power. The first of these passages appears in the Act III finale (Figures 10 and 11), when Sesto decides to stop the coup from happening. In the line 'Un gran tumulto io sento d'armi, e d'armati: Ah! Tardo è il pentimento' ('A great tumult I hear of arms and armed men: Oh, too late is repentance'), he realises that all hope is lost and that he has no choice left but to execute Vitellia's plan of vengeance. This horrible thought is realised in Mozart's music through a sustained high G-flat₅ on the word 'Tardo'. Sesto's next line 'Deh conservate, oh Dei, a Roma il suo splendor' ('Ah protect, o gods, of Rome its splendour'), also reaches a climatic point on 'o Dei' where the singer is required to sustain a high note merely four bars after the previous utterance, this time a semi-tone higher on G₅.

79

Ah! tar - - do è il pen - ti - men - to.

[Type here]

Figure 10: Bars 78-82 of *Recitativo accompagnato* 'Oh Dei, che smania è questa'.

1
Deh - con-ser va - te, oh De - i!

Figure 11: Bars 1-3 of *Quintetto con coro* 'Deh conservate, oh Dei'.

The second appearance is also seen in the Act I finale, shortly after the first, where Sesto comes running out of the Capitol, just having assassinated 'the king' of Rome. He sings the words 'Ah dove mai m'ascondo, ah dove mai m'ascondo? Apriti, o terra, inghiottimi! E nel tuo sen profondo, rinserra un traditor, rinserra, rinserra un traditor' ('Oh, where ever can I hide myself? Open up earth and swallow me! and within your profound breast, shut in a traitor') (figure 12). The music reaches a climax on the word 'terra' where the singer once more sustains a G-flat⁵. After the climax, Mozart creates a few smaller climaxes on the words 'nel' and 'rinserra'. The sentence has an intense mixture of regret and anger, which is extremely enticing emotionally and further intensifies our knowledge of Sesto as a more rounded and balanced character.

93
A - pri - ti, oh ter - - ra, in - ghiot ti-mi,

Figure 12: Bars 93-95 of *Quintetto con coro* 'Deh conservate, oh Dei'.

Both of these sections require immense vocal strength from the singer, as a G-flat⁵/G⁵ is already within difficult vocal territory for a *castrato*. Unlike female sopranos, *castrati* would have found it difficult to sustain a soft G⁵, as it falls within a part of the lower/heavier voice that requires more energy or effort

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to produce tone as it is quite high. The result of singing within this high tessitura, with the added resonance created by the *castrati*'s roundly developed chests, would inevitably have resulted in incredible vocal power and volume. This in turn would also have an influence on the listener's understanding of Sesto's emotions.

My next observation is extremely relevant to this topic and can be seen as confirmation of my hypothesis of the *castrato* voice as discussed in chapter 3.2.1. The observation is that of big leaping intervals. As the *castrato* voice worked physically differently to any voice known today, this might well be one of the biggest differences.

In *La Clemenza di Tito*, Mozart wrote a great amount of leaping intervals for Sesto. Most of these leaps occur within the ensemble pieces and arias, with particular prominence in the latter. These leaps do not only fall within specific registers of the *castrato* voice, but sometimes also across two different registers, or even within or close to the '*passaggio*' sections of different registers (figures 13 to 15).

Figure 13 shows an example of a falling interval between middle and chest voice.



Figure 13: Bars 95-102 of *Quintetto con coro 'Deh conservate, oh Dei'*.

This example in Figure 14 illustrates an interval crossing the middle and head voice registers:



Figure 14: Bars 70-74 of *Terzetto (No. 18) 'Quello di Tito è il volto'*.

Figure 15 illustrates an interval falling within the *passaggio* areas:



Figure 15: Bars 14-16 of *Rondo (No. 19) 'Deh per questo istante solo'*.

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The majority of interval jumps Mozart wrote throughout the entire role of Sesto were 4ths, but 5ths and 6ths were also often utilised (approximately sixty 5th intervals, and forty 6th intervals). There are approximately twelve jumps of 7ths, of which five appear in Sesto's aria 'Deh per questo istante solo', and nine octave jumps of which five appear within ensemble work and four in the two arias. There were also at least seven intervals bigger than an octave, with the largest, a 10th, appearing at least six times).

Interval size	Quantity approximation
4th	• 140 (52%)
5th	• 60 (22.5%)
6th	• 40 (15%)
7th	• 12 (4.5%)
8th	• 9 (3.5%)
>8th	• 7 (2.5%)

Figure 16: Table of different interval quantities.

In my opinion, this seems to have been a speciality of the *castrato* voice, possibly due to the angulation of the thyroid cartilage which might have enabled a smoother transition between registers. I do not think that Mozart would have written so many large jumps for the voice if it would not have been easy to execute or put into practice. Another factor that might also have made these jumps easier for the *castrati* than for the mezzo-sopranos of today, is that of the natural development and flexibility of the voice due to hormone secretion, as discussed in chapter 3, section 3.2.1.

Another important musical aspect of Mozart's Sesto, is the need for impeccable breath control. This will allow the singer to complete long passages in a single breath and would also enable him/her to execute brilliant bravura passages. Throughout the opera, Sesto is often required to sing long phrases as can be seen in figures 17 to 19.

13

ciel, e o-gnor per me lo stes - so ti ser - bi a-mi-co il ciel _____, a - mi-co il ciel _____, a - mi-co il ciel.

Figure 17: Bars 13-21 of Duettino (No. 3) 'Deh prendi un dolce amplesso'.

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136

do - na - ste al - la bel - tà,

Figure 18: Bars 136-141 of Aria (No.9) 'Parto, parto'.

108

tà, do - na - ste al - la bel - tà, al - la bel - tà, do -

113

,al - la bel - tà, do -

117

na - ste al - la bel - tà, do -

Figure 19: Bars 108-121 of Aria (No. 9) 'Parto,parto'.

The last example (Figure 19) is also an example of the *fioritura* that Mozart wrote for Sesto. The section of the aria in which these lines appear is marked 'Allegro assai'. This means that the singer has to make the runs light and agile to be able to execute them at the requested speed throughout different vocal registers. He/she has to have excellent breath control and technique in order to make it through six bars of music varying between sustained tone and agile runs rising to the outer limits of his/her range. From my own experience in this role, I know that even if the singer 'steals' a breath in bar 110 between the words 'alla' and 'beltà', the four bars of fast runs ending in two minims and a quaver, still prove to be extremely difficult to execute in a single breath. This 'solution' is not ideal due to the separation of preposition/article and noun, but nevertheless is almost always used by mezzo-sopranos today in order to cope with the great demands of the role. Young singers such as myself often have to 'steal' another breath in bar 114 after the G₄ in order to get through the phrase. To make this section even more difficult, Mozart repeated both running passages directly after this section.

The performance practice of *messa di voce* is the only characteristic that I have not discussed in this section. The reason for this is the fact that it did not appear throughout Sesto's music.

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From the discussion in this section one can clearly see how Mozart wrote the music of Sesto idiomatically for a singing *castrato*, in order to make full use of their otherworldly abilities. These abilities were unique to the singing *castrati* and were not shared by any other voice categories, as I am sure will become abundantly clear in the next section on the music of Mozart's Cherubino.

4.3 Role Analysis: *Le Nozze di Figaro* – Cherubino

Mozart composed the opera *Le Nozze di Figaro* in collaboration with librettist Lorenzo da Ponte. It is seen as his first mature *opera buffa* and is based on the play *La folle journée ou Le mariage de Figaro* by French playwright, Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais. The play was already written by 1781, but only performed in 1784 due to its revolutionary political content. The latter made it the ideal subject for an *opera buffa* – distinctive characters, strong issues and a fast pace as Tim Carter explains in his book (Carter 1987, ix). The opera was premiered in Vienna at the Burgtheater on 1 May 1786, with Dorotea Bussani in the role of Cherubino (Carter 1987, 10; Rushton 1992).

4.3.1 *Mozart's Cherubino*

Cherubino is a pre-pubescent boy (page) between the ages of 12 and 14 years and, as mentioned earlier, is speculated to be the first role of its kind written to be sung by a female *en travesti* (Smart 2000, 68). He portrays the epitome of a youth awakening to love in action, word and music (Carter 1987, 147). Although Cherubino is not a plot changing character, he is highly involved in aiding the dramatic momentum and comic relief, and constantly finds himself in the wrong place at the wrong time throughout the opera (Carter 1987, 52, 53, 56, 63, 68). The character of Cherubino is completely new to its audiences and cannot be found among the *commedia dell'arte* stock characters (Carter 1987, 108–9).

4.3.2 *Musical observations*

In the following section I will analyse the musical content of the role of Cherubino. It will be structured in the form of sections on specific characteristics which were mentioned in chapter 3, sections 3.2.2 and 3.3.2. The chosen characteristics will be: vocal range; tessitura; *passaggio*; warm timbre; vocal power and interval jumps; and breath control/bravura passages.

The first observation made in my analysis of Cherubino's music is that of the vocal range, with the lowest note being C₄ (middle-C) and the top note an A₅. Mozart does not constantly write within the outer limits of Cherubino's range, but rather stays well within the bounds of comfort. Mozart only writes a C₄ once throughout the entire role in the aria 'Voi che sapete' ('You, who know'), which, if looked at in context, is a short 'song' supposedly written by Cherubino himself. Mozart clearly uses the change

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into the chest register and the intensity of a mezzo-soprano's chest sound to enhance the character of a young boy undergoing bodily changes such as a 'breaking voice' during puberty. As explained in chapter 3, it is natural for boy who is going through puberty, to feel that he has no control over his voice, as the massive physical changes and shift in position of the larynx can cause the voice to make sudden, unintended leaps between registers when speaking or singing.



Figure 20: Bars 37-40 of Cherubino's aria 'Voi che sapete' in Act II.

Mozart also does not write A5 notes for Cherubino in any of his solo music. The only time that 'he' has to sing that high is in the finale of the opera, where he sings in unison with Marcellina (mezzo-soprano), Barbarina (soprano), Susanna (soprano) and Countess Almaviva (soprano). Thus, even when Cherubino has to sing in a weaker (most likely 'thinner' sounding) part of his voice, Mozart does not expose 'him', but rather enhances the reconciliation-effect/atmosphere of the music by having all the female voices sing in unison.

My second observation pertains to the general tessitura of the role. Unlike Sesto's music, Cherubino is not required to sing in as high a tessitura. Generally, the music lies just below the *passaggio* in the middle voice and often ventures into the *passaggio* itself. In a few spots Mozart wrote above the *passaggio*, but these moments are used as highlights as they are not heard often. The tessitura of the role is of extreme importance to mezzo-sopranos. If the general tessitura is too high, mezzo-sopranos would find it difficult to sustain and complete such a role. The kinds of roles that lie slightly higher than 'comfortable' would be better executed by lyric mezzos or females categorised as *Zwischenfach*.

One of the aspects that makes Cherubino difficult to sing, is Mozart's use of the *passaggio*. Even though he did not write the music within a very high tessitura, he wrote within the *passaggio* throughout the role. Mozart did however accommodate the abilities of the mezzo-soprano by easing into the *passaggio* of the voice with systematic chromatic movement (figure 21).



Figure 21: Bars 13-16 of Aria 'Voi che sapete'.

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In figure 19, Cherubino's music is dominated by this kind of systematic chromatic movement into the *passaggio* which is accessed twice within only four bars. Throughout Cherubino's two arias, Mozart used this method approximately thirty times. I think this gives us an indication of Mozart's thoughts on the juxtaposition of the timbre of a mezzo-soprano's *passaggio* and the voice of a pre-pubescent boy. The 'tension' one hears in the mezzo-soprano voice that moves into this in-between area can be compared to the tension that one hears in the voice of a boy during puberty. Both can be slightly unstable at times and release into a prime sound: the mezzo-soprano into top notes with warmth and depth and the boy into a new unexplored range.

The next observation, which extends from the previous observation, pertains to Mozart's use of the mezzo-soprano's specific timbre. Just as the singing *castrati* were known for their ethereal/angelic timbre, so the mezzo-soprano is known for a 'full bodied' sound with a warm timbre. Mozart uses this 'red blooded' sound to accentuate the raging hormones of a teenage boy. Before his first aria 'Non so più cosa son cosa faccio' ('I know no longer who I am or what I do'), Cherubino has just stolen a ribbon of the Countess Almaviva (whom he fancies) from Susanna. When Susanna demands its return, he gives her the music of a little song he wrote and says that she should read it to every woman in the palace. The excitement of possessing a ribbon that has touched the skin and hair of the woman he is 'secretly' in love with, sends him into a frenzied explanation of these new emotions. In figure 22, at bars 26 and 27 we can see how Cherubino tries to suppress the intensity of his desire, but how its force then causes him to state it in a passionate declaration which is affirmed by a second repetition in the following bars.

26
un de - si - o, un de - si - o ch'io non pos - so spie - gar, un de -

32
si - o, un de - si - o ch'io non pos-so spie - gar Non so

Figure 22: Bars 26-37 of Aria (No. 6) 'Non so più'.

In the next example (figure 23) Mozart uses a combination of the mezzo-soprano's warm timbre, the release after crossing the *passaggio*, as well as the vocal strength of her upper register to emphasise Cherubino's statement of 'ogni donna' ('every woman'). By writing a G5 on the first beat of the bar,

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as well as making use of a dental plosive consonant¹⁸, Mozart strengthens the impact of the line which in turn creates an even better release after passing the ‘point of tension’.

41
 ghiac-cio o-gni don - na can-giar di co - lo-re o-gni don-na mi fa pal-pi- tar, o-gni

46
 don-na mi_ fa pal - pi - tar o-gni don - na mi fa pal - pi - tar.

Figure 23: Bars 41-51 of Aria (No. 6) 'Non so più'.

The next aspect I observed is that of the general usage of jumps within the voice/registers (intervals). As we have seen in the previous section on musical observations in the role of Sesto, Mozart constantly requires the singer to sing big leaps in intervals. This is not the case with Cherubino at all. The biggest general interval size that Mozart uses in Cherubino’s music is that of a 4th, with the rest of the intervals being mostly smaller. Within the two arias he sometimes uses interval jumps of octaves (8^{ve}) and sixths but these almost always fall within or on the edge of a specific register of the voice, which helps the singer considerably in terms of adjusting between registers (see figures 24 and 25). Mozart also helps the singer to manage some of these leaps by systematically broadening the jumps, as can be seen in the notoriously difficult first line of the aria, ‘Voi che sapete’ (figure 26). Mozart lightens the technical requirements considerably by employing these methods, thereby accommodating the fact that mezzosopranos have distinct passages between their vocal registers in/through which it is difficult to sing.

¹⁸ A consonant that is created with a small ‘explosion’ against the front teeth (UCL n.d.).

Interval size	• Quantity approximation
4th	• 15 (41.5%)
5th	• 12 (33.5%)
6th	• 7 (19.5%)
7th	• 1 (2.5%)
8th	• 1 (2.5%)
>8th	• 1 (10th) (2.5%)

Figure 24: Table of different interval quantities.



Figure 25: Bars 3-5 of Aria 'Non so più'.

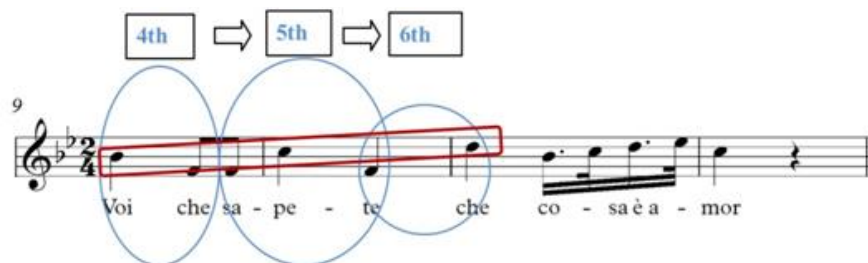


Figure 26: Bars 9-12 of Cherubino's aria 'Voi che sapete' in Act II from *Le Nozze di Figaro*.

The last observation that I noted is the lack of *fioritura* or any kind of run within Cherubino's music. I do not think that there was any significant reason for this. Singing *castrati* were known for their vocal flexibility and agility and as a result Mozart wrote *fioriture* for Sesto's role. This was done in order to show off this ability and to adhere to the *opera seria* tradition of boastfulness and importance of the singer. Cherubino on the other hand, was part of an *opera buffa* that did not make use of all the conventional methods to showcase the singer and his/her vocal abilities in a flashy manner. This lack of bravura passages does not imply that there was also no showcasing of breath control. Even though Cherubino does not have lines as long as those of Sesto, he still has lines that require a decent technique and command of breath control (figure 27).

[Type here]

65

ven- ti, che il suon de' va - ni ac - ce - ti por - ta - no - via con se

fp *p* *cresc.* *f*

Figure 27: Bars 65-69 of Aria (No. 6) 'Non so più'.

Note: If the singer is unable to sing through the complete phrase, a breath may be taken between the words *accenti* and *portano*.

4.4 Summary

In order to recapitulate the findings, I will now briefly revise all the information that has been collected and discussed in this chapter. All of the discussions around the musical examples are based on my own knowledge and experience with the operas *La Clemenza di Tito* and *Le Nozze di Figaro*. Some of the practical issues have been clear to me since the first time I became acquainted with the music, while other parts required a more in-depth academic approach by examining the scores.

The first observation regarding both roles, is that of the lack of great differences in range. Both Cherubino and Sesto are required to sing C₄, with Cherubino going up to an A₅ and Sesto merely a semi-tone higher at B-flat₅. However, in practice Cherubino does not sing higher than a G₅ in any of his arias, whereas Sesto sings more than one B-flat₅ in his aria, 'Parto, parto'. Cherubino is also only required to sing an A₅ in the finale where he is supported by all the other female characters. Thus, what at first might not have seemed like a big difference, in actual fact turned out to be significant.

This knowledge of range inevitably indicated the outcome of the general tessitura of the roles. Sesto is clearly written in a higher tessitura throughout the role and he even sometimes sings the top line (melody) in ensemble pieces. In the duet between him and Annio (a trouser role), 'Deh, prendi un dolce amplesso', Sesto is required to sing the melody which lies mostly between E₅ and G₅ which we now know is within and above the *passaggio*. This general tessitura of the duet can also be seen in the rest of the role, where he often sings between C₅ and G₅. Cherubino on the other hand, is not required to sing above the *passaggio* as often, and mostly stays below it or, more often than not, within the break between the registers. It is very plausible therefore that Mozart used the slight 'instability' and 'tension' in the voice of a mezzo-soprano to enhance the vocal effect of a young boy undergoing puberty. Mozart also on occasion used the distinct break between the chest and middle register to highlight the 'breaking voice' of the aforementioned boy. In contrast with the usage of the upper registers for Sesto, Mozart

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did not utilise the low chest sound of the *castrati*, but rather relied on the timbre of the upper registers to introduce the audience to a more three dimensional ‘stock’ character.

This brings me to the next observation, which is timbre. In both roles Mozart used the specific colours associated with the different voice types to develop the dramatic intent of the character and to subtly depict certain characteristics. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Mozart used the timbre of the mezzo-soprano’s *passaggio* to musically characterise the ‘breaking voice’ of a teenage boy. He also used the ‘full bodied’, warm timbre of their voices to personify the raging hormones of a young boy. On the other end, Mozart used the angelic timbre associated with the *castrato* voice to epitomise the raw emotions surrounding Sesto’s decisions and actions. The brilliance and limpidity within these voices embody his reluctance and remorse, which in turn reveals to audiences a new side of the customary *innamorati* (lovers) *commedia dell’arte* character.

The next observation point concerned vocal power. In both of these roles Mozart uses the strength of the voices in their top registers to emphasise certain emotions. In Sesto’s case these emotions are shock, horror and despair in the realisation that there is no turning around from the situation. On the other hand, in Cherubino’s case, vocal power is used to emphasise his intense desire for all women. Mozart also uses a system of elements to enhance the emotion: By moving upward through the *passaggio*, which builds tension, a release of this tension into the upper register strengthens the effect of the vocal power. Even though Mozart used this method to enhance the emotional effect in Cherubino’s music, Sesto’s music still requires more power. The arpeggiated chord that Sesto sings, running up from the bottom register to a sustained top note, creates the effect of an outcry to the gods.

This led to the most important observation made thus far, which is Mozart’s use of leaping intervals. Sesto is required to sing a great variety of interval sizes greater than 4ths, falling between chest and middle voice and middle and head voice, or even within the *passaggio* areas. I argue that this must have been physically effortless and well possible for a *castrato* due to the angulation of the thyroid cartilage and the flexibility within the larynx – the latter phenomenon being attributed to smaller sizes of laryngeal cartilages and bones, as well as the lack of cartilage ossification due to less growth hormone secretion (Unteregger et al. 2017; Kahane 1978, 18; Friedlander 2014; Pate 2015; Hatley, Samuel, and Evison 1965, 586, 590). This argument is confirmed by comparing the analysis of the music of Sesto and Cherubino, where it is found that Cherubino is not usually required to sing intervals greater than a 4th. In the few instances where he is required to sing greater intervals, Mozart systematically broadens the jumps to make it more technically manageable.

The last observation pertains to bravura passages and *fioritura*. Mozart wrote extended passages of ornamentation for Sesto’s arias. This was done in order to show off the flexibility of the singer’s voice and his/her impressive breath control, as was true to the decadent genre of *opera seria*. In contrast with the latter, Cherubino received no ornamented passages. This was also true to the style of *opera buffa* as

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it strove to intensify dramatic intention rather than showing off the singer's abilities (Weiss and Budden, 2001; M. Hunter and Webster 1997, 215).

In order to clarify all the differences and similarities that I have noted throughout the two roles, I have created a Venn-diagram:

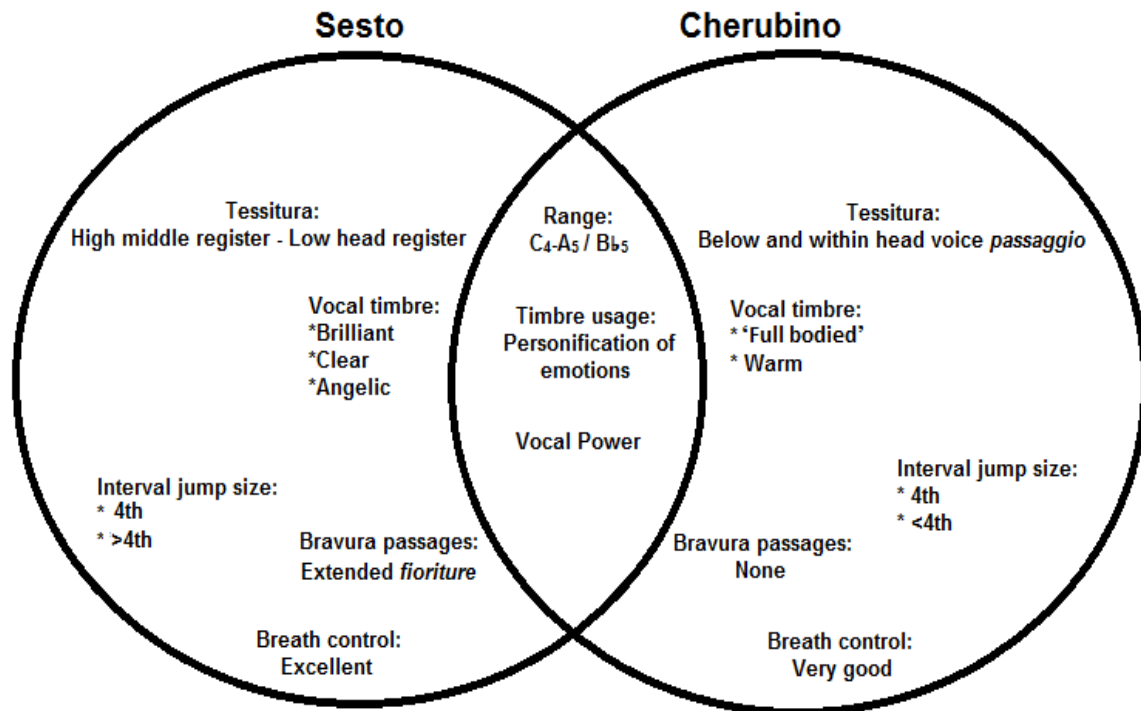


Figure 28: Venn-diagram comparing characteristics and abilities of Sesto and Cherubino.

From this section it has become clear that Mozart definitely wrote idiomatically different music for the singing *castrato* and mezzo-soprano voice types. Mozart preferred writing music for specific singers so that the music would fit their voices like a glove, and he is known for becoming extremely unhappy when listening to singers perform arias that did not suit their voices (Elliott 2006, 106). Mozart composed almost every role in his major operas for specific singers whose voices he knew well (Landon, Abraham, and Mitchell 1956, 290).

CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATION

5.1 Introduction

In this final chapter of my thesis I will consider the outcomes of this academic study and discuss how it influences the performance of a mezzo-soprano in the twenty-first century. As singers of today live in a completely different era than that of the singing *castrati*, their audiences will naturally live in a completely different socio-political environment which in turn influences their understanding of opera and its traditions. This means that these singers have to adjust certain aspects of their vocal technique and performance practice in order to render their performances ‘successful’. In section 5.2 I will suggest possible adjustments which I think might aid singers in rendering a more convincing performance. I will also address some of these socio-political differences and the influence of these on how contemporary audiences hear, see and understand certain characters.

The information in this chapter is of a new and sensitive nature and is in its developmental stage, which means that this thesis may serve as the foundation for further studies on the topic. As I mentioned in the first chapter, and as can be seen throughout the rest of my thesis, I decided not to discuss issues of sex and gender outside the boundaries of the operatic genre in much detail. I made this decision in order to keep the focus of my study on proving that there would have been physical differences between the voices of *castrati* and mezzo-sopranos, and that Mozart would have accommodated these different demands in the way he composed the different roles. However, the all-encompassing influence of sex and gender ideologies on my research topic cannot be denied and should be explored in detail in future studies.

5.2 Recommendations from a Mezzo-Soprano

In the following section I will make a few suggestions about vocal and performance practice techniques that I think will help present-day mezzo-sopranos in their portrayal of heroic adult male and adolescent male roles. These suggestions will be based on my personal experiences with both adult and adolescent male roles. Through these experiences I have come to understand that the importance of becoming a singing actress has increased immensely for mezzo-sopranos in modern society. I will divide this section into two parts concerning vocal difficulties and performance practice. This discussion will create a link to the following section where I will discuss the most important socio-political differences between the *castrati* era and today’s operatic scene.

Thinking about the first women who reworked roles that were originally composed for the singing *castrati*, I would argue that it is most likely that these singers would have studied the vocal technique

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of these famous men, adapting it to fit their voices (André 2006, 35, 38). In reviewing the outcome of my research I think that this also has to be the case today. It becomes slightly more complicated for mezzo-sopranos of today, as we cannot observe the singing *castrati*'s vocal habits or even hear their voices in live performances. However, even without the benefit of first-hand experience, as singers we have been left with a legacy of writings on the voices and technique of the singing *castrati*. The *castrati* were not merely gifted, but they were also subjected to intensive training for a great number of years through which their vocal quality and singing technique were developed to fantastic heights. The training of the *castrati*, along with their role as vocal pedagogues, became an important element in the circulation of their different singing techniques and the dispersal of it onto other voice types (André 2006, 36–37).

From my personal experience, I can only suggest that my fellow mezzo-sopranos immerse themselves in literature on the *castrati*'s *bel canto* technique and the development of it through the centuries. This will expand their knowledge and create a full understanding of the vocal mechanics and the workings of the *bel canto* technique, especially with regards to the blending of registers (André 2006, 39). This knowledge will serve as a foundation for further practical exploration and the eventual mastery of the voice. Written works by Lamperti (1890), Garcia (1894) and Stark (1999) are good sources to start with and will lead the reader to a great variety of other sources on this topic.

My next discussion links to the issue of contemporary perceptions on cross-dressing, which will be further discussed in section 5.3. In the Metropolitan Opera's 2014 HD production of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Isabel Leonard (who plays the role of Cherubino) is praised for her extremely masculine portrayal of the character. She explained that she owed her 'success' to years of experience with male roles as well as a lot of research into the art of walking and moving in a stereotypically masculine way. She also said that she went about this research by watching her male friends' movements and asking them to help her project these movements onto her female stature (Halvorson and Levine 2014).

In my first and second year of studies I had a Singers' Theatre lecturer who always encouraged the students to sit on a bench in a public place and watch people's movements and ways of walking. She continued to say that each character which we would have to portray on stage would have a different walk. She went on to explain the importance of a character's walk by saying that the first introduction of a character to the audience is not through his first sung words, but rather his first steps onto the stage. Thus, the first audience impression of a character has nothing to do with the music, but purely relies on physicality.

My suggestion to other mezzo-sopranos who face this immense task of convincing audiences of their 'masculinity' is similar to the previous suggestion. In order to be able to portray a character – that is nothing like oneself – in such a way that it adequately distracts the contemporary audience from the obvious femininity of the voice, mezzos have to do more practical experimentation. The art of
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‘becoming a man’ is not one that can be mastered overnight. One has to step out of your comfort zone and develop creative, often strange ways to find the technique that works for you as individual. Whether it be wearing only trousers for a while and sitting in a stereotypically masculine way, or binding one’s breasts for safe periods of time in order to step into the shoes of a man, or imitating different men’s walks in the street: *experimentation* is the key word. Through this kind of experimentation, I think that more mezzos will be able to ‘channel’ their inner man and produce characters on stage that are not merely empty vases of movement, but rather a more believable extension of themselves.

In conclusion to this section, and regarding the two main suggestions that were made, I can only say that there is no right or wrong way to complete the task at hand. Each mezzo-soprano has to find words and images that strongly resonate with herself. What works for one might not work for another. Sharing experiences and ideas with each other will greatly benefit the development of the characters and most likely lead to more convincing portrayals.

5.3 Surrounding issues

Between the time of the *castrati*’s rule and our contemporary operatic scene, there has been an enormous amount of development and change within the operatic genre as well as the socio-political environment. It would be impossible to discuss and compare all of it. I will therefore strengthen the deductions I make in this chapter by incorporating the work of Laqueur, Garber and André (Laqueur 1990; Garber 2012; André 2006) even further into my research. By using their ideologies, I will single out the three most important concepts that, in my opinion, influence the performance of a contemporary mezzo-soprano ‘*en travesti*’:

- 1) Contemporary ideologies of sex and gender
- 2) Contemporary perceptions of cross dressing
- 3) Aesthetic preconceptions of the voice

When looking at a contemporary understanding of sex and gender, various ideologies spring to mind. That is why any discussion on this topic is intricate and complicated as explained earlier at the beginning of this chapter. Today’s society is provided with many options when considering sex and gender, and each individual is ‘free’ to make his/her own life choices. This subject is extremely controversial, as there are various beliefs around whether people choose a specific sex or gender or if they are born with it based on genitalia. (Mosia 2017; Ayala 2017). Without statistics it is not possible to support this statement, however it seems that contemporary society in general has accepted Laqueur’s ‘modern’ ideology of a two-sex model, where male and female are seen as two different genders, each intrinsically different. Today’s societies have also introduced and possibly accepted various other understandings of

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sex and gender such as androsexuality, aromanticism, asexuality, bisexuality, demi-sexuality, gynosexuality, homosexuality (gay and lesbianism), pansexuality, queer, transsexual and transgenderism, drag and many more (University of California 2017).

After considering the above-mentioned possibilities, it becomes clear that the topic of sex and gender has become intricately complicated in today's society as there are various beliefs and perceptions that influence people's comprehension of gender, both on and off stage. This said, gender stereotypes have been alive and thriving for many centuries and prove to still have a hold on today's society (Firestone 2014). These stereotypes are ever-changing, especially in the twenty-first century where the authority of technology and instant access to information via media can be felt very heavily (Rai 2014). This in turn creates a world where the majority of society is familiar with many of the different gender understandings, which influences their acceptance or rejection of certain 'unconventional' operatic characters, such as female singers portraying adolescent and heroic adult male roles.

In order to truly understand just how much the socio-political climate has changed today, I think it is important to look back at the elements concerning sex and gender which influenced the *castrati's* audiences. As previously stated, Laqueur's explanation of pre-modern gender ideologies greatly contributed towards the comprehension of the interchangeable nature of genders within the operatic genre (André 2006, 45). The single-sex model enabled audiences to look past the fundamental vocal and physical differences between male and female performers with which modern and contemporary audiences are confronted. The consideration of male as the ultimate sex and female as merely a lesser version thereof, sheltered audiences from confrontation with the realities of gender within contemporary society and its effect on the operatic phenomenon of females *en travesti*. The latter, along with the general cultural aesthetic demand for a destabilisation in terms of sound (which I will be discussing later), prompted audiences into accepting the ambiguity which these adult heroic roles introduced within the operatic world (André 2006, 46).

Furthermore, with the decline of the singing *castrati* and the passing of the adult heroic male role to females *en travesti*, the operatic world offered another exception to Laqueur's ideologies on pre-modern and modern sex and gender constructions. Rather than seeing this character as either masculine or feminine, audiences were charmed into seeing 'it' as the other, as the role temporarily suspended society's pre-conceptions on gender once more. The first suspension occurred with the ambiguity concerning the *castrati*, and the second occurred with the passing of their roles onto women. This notion of seeing the mezzo-soprano as neither the first nor second, but rather the 'third', proved to stick around and continued developing well into the late-eighteenth and nineteenth century as the tenor assumed the position of the hero.

Next I will be looking at contemporary associations of sound. In the time of the *castrati*, audiences' understanding and opinion of these heroic adult male or even adolescent trouser roles for women were
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influenced by different elements than audiences of today. First and foremost was the *castrati*'s continual presence on stages throughout Italy, where audiences came to know them for their treble voices and ethereal abilities, and where they were eventually connected to the heroic roles (André 2006, 45). This meant that treble voices (especially female trebles) came to be associated not only with the females who naturally possessed them, but also with the heroic and masculine. As explained in chapter 2, section 2.6.2 on Naomi André's ideology of the 'period ear', audience members were easily convinced of these heroic characters' gender in the seventeenth, eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. This was due to the fact that they were familiar with the *castrati*. In cases where a *castrato* was not available to perform the adult heroic role and a female was assigned to the *en travesti* role, it also did not take much convincing as the similarity in pitch and timbre could be aurally aestheticised (blended or juxtaposed into being neither one nor the other) enabling audiences to also associate the female treble voice with the heroic male character (André 2006, 47; Lindenberger 1998, 64).

In today's times, the task of convincing audiences that a female *en travesti* is truly portraying a heroic male character or an adolescent male character, seems to present itself with a bit more difficulty. Just as the ideologies surrounding sex and gender in the *castrati*'s era influenced those audiences' view of gender-associated sound, so contemporary sex and gender ideologies are bound to have influenced modern society's view of male and female sounds. The influence of the two-sex model can be felt the heaviest today, as there are even voice operations and treatments available in practice with the aim of changing transgender individuals' voices (Meister et al. 2017; Schwarz et al. 2017; Orloff et al. 2006; Cosyns et al. 2014). Researchers have also started linking up studies of these changed voices with older research on the voice. The influence of media most definitely also plays a big role, as various studies have been done on the influence of media stereotypes (Seiter 1986; Wolska 2011; Wood 1994). The advancement of vocal stereotypes on television programs and movies play a big role in how modern audiences 'hear' gender, as well as how receptive they are to the ambiguity of vocal aesthetics. The media often ridicules men with high voices, one example of which can be seen in the older, yet highly popular television show *Friends*, which continued for fourteen seasons (Crane and Kauffman 1994). In my opinion, after having performed a few trouser roles, as well as seeing people's reactions to topics surrounding females *en travesti*, modern society finds the vocal aesthetics associated with the period ear problematic. This means that the element which played the greatest part in convincing audiences of the *castrati* era of certain characters' sex, now proves to be the element that generates the most resistance.

In 2015, when I made my debut in the role of Cherubino in a modern production as a fourth year BMus Opera student, the director decided that he wanted the character to have short, curly, bob-length hair instead of a short cut (boy's cut), as is common for adolescent boys today. Unfortunately there was not enough money available in the production budget to enable them to buy wigs, which meant that we had to make do with our own hair. Fortunately, the colleague with whom I shared the role already had short,

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naturally curly, bob-length hair; I on the other hand had long, straight hair which the director decided would look best with big curls that hung loose. As there are various fashions for boys with long hair, I understood his decision and went about portraying the character as best as possible. After the production had finished, I spoke to a group of music students who saw the production and they enquired from me whether my character was a lesbian. This question made me realise just how intricate the current physical portrayal of a trouser role is, which leads me into the last discussion of contemporary perceptions of cross-dressing.

Elements from the *castrati*'s era that influenced the success of the performance of these adult male roles were not only the physical appearance of the *castrati*, but also the dress code of the time. Gerber's ideology on cross-dressing and the influence of the *castrati*'s physical appearance – which had both masculine and feminine features – introduces the second element of this section which I will now elaborate on by incorporating contemporary gender-associated dress codes.

In the *castrati*'s era men wore trousers, while women generally wore only dresses until the time that public figures like George Sand publicly wore trousers, further aided by the rise of feminism as well as the Second World War (Grochowski 2009; Cooper 2014; Patzer 2012; Conger 2013). There were of course exceptions in certain situations and cultures, but for all intents and purposes I will be looking at what was the most common practice of the time as it influences common societal formations of stereotypes. I believe that this association of trousers with men and dresses with women made it much easier for audiences of that time to understand the presentation of sex and gender on stage. Today on the other hand, there are so many different dress codes and people are free to choose what they want to wear, whether it be trousers or dresses. This means that the introduction of women's rights in the feminist movement of the twentieth century strongly influenced this aspect of the discussion. As women started wearing pants, the stereotypical association of this clothing item weakened. Today, men in general still mostly wear trousers and the consistency of this element seems to be what stage directors rely on the most in order to present a cross-dressed female as a male character.

This means that the element which played the smallest part in convincing audiences of specific characters' cross-dressed gender, suddenly became the most important element. Contemporary ideologies of sex and gender, along with aesthetic preconceptions of the voice, has influenced audiences of the twenty-first century to such an extent that the exploitation of modern stereotypical associations has most possibly become the only way in which these audiences would submit into believing that a cross-dressed female is indeed a heroic adult male character. Examples of this phenomenon can be seen in Sir David McVicar's 2005 production of *Giulio Cesare* (Haym et al. 2006) and the Glyndebourne production of *La Clemenza di Tito* (Kušej 2003). McVicar's production has also been performed by various performers at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, but whether the role of Cesare is played by a counter-tenor or a mezzo-soprano, the performer always appears in an outfit fitted with a breast plate.

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In the Glyndebourne production of *La Clemenza di Tito*, Elina Garanča plays Annio and is dressed in a suit with a short, boy's haircut. Both of these examples support my ideology that today's society is more restricted by their aesthetic preconceptions of the voice, with the inevitable result that greater emphasis and importance needs to be attached to gender-stereotypical cross-dressing.

5.4 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to assess whether Mozart used different compositional techniques when composing for mezzo-sopranos and singing *castrati* and, if he did, how he went about the task. The research involved looking at secondary sources, as well as intensely analysing primary sources such as letters, notes, and most importantly sheet music.

Through acquainting myself with research previously done on and around this research topic, I realised that the study would most likely be fairly new in specialisation. This meant that I would have to place more importance on the primary sources in order to steer the research into the direction that I wanted it to move, rather than focusing on previously explored areas.

The outcome of the research indicates that Mozart used different compositional techniques when writing for these two different voice types. In order to enable the singers to make use of the strongest elements and characteristics of their voices, as well as to extend their technical abilities to their greatest limits, Mozart took the strengths and weaknesses of each individual singer into consideration.

This finding proves that mezzo-sopranos have, since the end of the singing *castrati*'s reign, been given a very difficult task. Mezzo-sopranos now have to portray characters that are vocally, as well as characteristically, more difficult and require skills that are not necessarily attributed to their voice types and physique.

By looking at contemporary conceptions of sex and gender, cross-dressing, as well as aesthetic preconceptions of the voice, one becomes aware of the many difficulties that mezzo-sopranos have to face when portraying a heroic adult male or adolescent male role in the twenty-first century. I have made two general suggestions that mezzo-sopranos might find beneficial in their journey towards 'successful portrayal' of trouser roles. These suggestions stem mostly from my own experience with these types of roles.

The first proposal states that singers have to emerge themselves in written sources on the topic of the *bel canto* singing technique. In order to fully comprehend and eventually transfer onto oneself the technique which the singing *castrati* used to support their extreme abilities, it is imperative that singers study the writings of these legends and their teachers, as well as other works on the topic.

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The second proposal pertains to the most important element involved in convincing contemporary audiences of a character's gender: characterisation. Singers of today are confronted with the various understandings of sex and gender and in order to be able to portray what is seen as a stereotypical view of masculinity, mezzo-sopranos have to experiment more with the physicality involved. Experimenting with the different aspects of 'masculinity' and finding what works for each individual singer is the key that will eventually lead to convinced audiences.

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