

## IN SUPPORT OF TEACHING THE TRANSGENDER-NON-BINARY SINGER

As teachers of the art of singing, we serve a long tradition centered on enabling individuals to access their authentic voice through appropriate and healthy technique, thus allowing them to express their deepest thoughts and emotions through song. Every human being deserves this opportunity. In light of this sacred imperative, we, the members of The American Academy of Teachers of Singing fully support the teaching of the transgender-non-binary singer.

We live in a world constantly impacted by an exponential rate of change that affects every element of our lives. Societal, cultural and political change and growth impact us daily and the voice studio is certainly a place where we as teachers must learn to meet the exciting challenges attendant to these changes. Many teachers have embraced the opportunity to expand their teaching skills through continued education in areas of voice science, evidence-based teaching and specialized training in the teaching of a style of singing with which they have not been previously familiar. The emergence of the transgender-non-binary singing student, reflecting important changes in societal understanding of gender, presents exciting opportunities for the teaching community. As with any new field, there is a growing interest but still limited understanding of best practice in working with this student demographic.

To better serve the transgender-non-binary singer, a teacher needs to have some understanding of the unique range of diversity within this community. There are considerations regarding an individual's preferred pronouns, voice range versus chosen fach or vocal identity, gender versus sexual identity. All of these issues and more can play an important role in establishing the open communication and trust that is so vital to the successful voice studio experience.

In 2017, there was an article in the Journal of Singing on teaching the transgender-non-binary singer with an overview of the subject as well as case studies. At the 2018 NATS national conference, there was panel of recognized authorities on teaching the transgender-non-binary singer which covered the subject in a thorough manner. For the past seven years, The Voice Foundation Annual Symposium in Philadelphia has presented research papers, panels and numerous workshops on the subject of transgender voice. Schools of higher education are all addressing issues of gender identification and NATS has issued a statement regarding its position on this subject. Earlham College in Indiana has held two Transgender Singing Voice Conferences, in 2017 and 2019.

For teachers interested in expanding their pedagogic skills in order to include the transgender-non-binary singer in the studio, an increasing body of written material is becoming available. There are workshops being offered by individuals with extensive experience working with this singer population. There is also a need for collaborative research into this area of vocal pedagogy utilizing the experience and knowledge of singing teachers, speech language pathologist, laryngologists specializing in voice as well as voice scientists. As with any area of education, the teacher has a responsibility to have received the relevant training necessary to effectively help a student. While the training opportunities for working with the transgender-non-binary singer are still evolving, a singing teacher interested in working with this population should pursue the avenues currently available, knowing that even with the best of

preparation, there is much knowledge to be gained from the collaborative interaction between a dedicated teacher and an eager student.

## RESOURCES

### BOOKS

Adler, R. K., Hirsch, S., & Pickering, J. (2006). *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Gender Diverse Client: A Comprehensive Clinical Guide*. Plural Publishing.

Jackson Hearn, L. & Kremer, B. (2018). *The Singing Teacher's Guide to Transgender Voices*. Plural Publishing.

Sieck, S. (2017). *Teaching with Respect: Inclusive Pedagogy for Choral Directors*. Hal Leonard.

### ADDITIONAL READING

Aguirre, R. (2018). Finding the Trans Voice: A Review of the Literature on Accommodating Transgender Singers. *Sage Journals*.

Bos, N. (2017). Forging a New Path: Transgender Singers in Popular Music. *Journal of Singing*, 73(4), 421-424.

Lessley, E. (2017). *Teaching Transgender Singers* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Washington.

Manternach, B. (2017). The Independent Teacher: Teaching Transgender Singers, Part 2: The Singers Perspective. *Journal of Singing*, 74(2), 209-214.

Manternach, B., Chipman, M., Rainero, R., & Stave, C. (2017). The Independent Teacher: Teaching Transgender Singers, Part 1: The Teacher's Perspective. *Journal of Singing*, 74(1), 83-88.

Miller, J. R. (2016). Creating Choirs that Welcome Transgender Singers. *Choral Journal*, 57(4), 61-63.

Palkki, J. (2017). Inclusivity in Action: Transgender Students in the Choral Classroom. *Choral Journal*, 57(1), 20-34.

Sauerland, W. R. (2018). *Legitimate Voices: A Multi-Case Study of Trans and Non-Binary Singers in the Applied Voice Studio* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Teachers College.

Sims, L. (2017). Teaching Transgender Singers. *Journal of Singing*, 73(3), 279-282.

### Online articles

Bos, N. *Considerations for Teaching Transgender Singers in College Voice*. Vocapedia.info, NATS.ORG

Conley, E. (October 9, 2017). *Creating Gender Liberatory Singing Spaces: A Transgender Voice Teacher's Recommendation for Working with Transgender Singers*. Eli Conley's Blog.

Graham, F.A.,(2019). *Singing while female: A narrative study on gender, identity, & experience of female voice in cis, transmasculine & non-binary singers*. Columbia University.

<https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/d8-mnh1-st58>

#### **SOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

AMERICAN SPEECH-LANGUAGE-HEARING ASSOCIATION [www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org)

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TEACHER'S OF SINGING [www.nats.org](http://www.nats.org)

GLAAD (formally the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) [www.glaad.org](http://www.glaad.org)

NATIONAL CENTER FOR TRANSGENDER EQUALITY [transequality.org](http://transequality.org)

GALA CHORUSES [galachoruses.org](http://galachoruses.org)