

Self-Reported Musical Perceptions and Experiences of Austrian Males in School Choral Music

Abstract

This study was of adolescent males about their musical self-perceptions and experiences in one Austrian school's choral music program. There has been no comparable study of Austrian adolescent males about either their singing activity, their experiences of the voice change, and/or related vocal pedagogy. Meanwhile, the professional skillset required of Austrian conductor-teachers has become a focus of attention, with emphasis on training programs for those who work in schools (Schaumberger, 2019). The current national music curriculum in Austria reflects centuries-old traditions of preparing young male singers for service in cathedral choirs, only to be removed at the point of the adolescent voice change (Schaumberger, et al., 2020). Recent versions of the Austrian national curriculum acknowledge the male adolescent changing voice, requiring music teachers to accordingly adjust their pedagogy and repertoire (Bundesministerium, 2022).

There were twelve student participants aged 11 to 15 years. The interview protocol for this study included broad sets of prompts exploring each participant's identity as singer and musician, awareness of older male singers, differences between male and female singing/vocal development, description of their personal voice change, goals for future singing, and awareness of steps necessary to achieve those goals. The coding of interview transcripts followed Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis (2006, 2021) using Byrne's (2022) thematic mapping model as a guide.

Study participants who sang continuously in the school choir reported experiences consistent with flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Tan & Sin, 2021), specifically the need for levels of challenge and skill that are both high and matched. In contrast, participants who withdrew said that their school choral experiences lacked challenge levels commensurate with their interests and skills, and that they wished for greater opportunities for autonomy and control. Participants who never sang in school choir lacked older male singing role models, an element consistent with the theory of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The study

findings reflect those of previous research at a similar choir school in London, UK. Among these are that adolescent male singers may desire a prioritization of learning over performance, the development of vocal technical skills, the attainment of musical skills that transfer beyond the choral experience, and enculturation within a multigenerational community of singers and singing.

Keywords: Adolescent Males, Choir, Flow, Possible Selves, Voice Change