

An Analysis and Discussion of *Zwischenfach* Voices

by

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ABSTRACT

Zwischen in the German language means ‘between,’ and over the past century, as operatic voices have evolved in both range and size, the voice classification of *Zwischenfach* has become much more relevant – particularly to the female voice. Identifying whether nineteenth century composers recognized the growing opportunities for vocal drama, size, and range in singers and therefore wrote roles for ‘between’ singers; or conversely whether, singers began to challenge and develop their voices to sing the new influx of romantic, *verismo* and grand repertoire is difficult to determine. Whichever the case, teachers and students should not be surprised about the existence of this nebulous *Fach*. A clear and concise definition of the word *Fach* for the purpose of this paper is as follows: a specific voice classification.

Zwischenfach is an important topic because young singers are often confused and over-eager to self-label due to the discipline’s excessive labeling of *Fachs*. Rushing to categorize a young voice ultimately leads to misperceptions. To address some of the confusion, this paper briefly explores surveys of the pedagogy and history of the *Fach* system. To gain insights into the relevance of *Zwischenfach* in today’s marketplace, I developed with my advisors, colleagues and students a set of subjects willing to fill out questionnaires. This paper incorporates current interviews from two casting directors of national and international opera houses, an emerging American mezzo-soprano, a mid-career working European mezzo-soprano, an operatic stage director, an education

director for opera houses and a composer. These interviews, along with modern examples of *zwischenfach* voices are analyzed and discussed.

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EXPLORING THE PEDAGOGY OF VOICE CLASSIFICATIONS

Before embarking on a discussion of *Zwischenfach*, a review of the ways voice classifications evolved through history is necessary. Uncertainty about classification has the potential to impact the entire career of singers who struggle with these issues. Teachers and singers alike may turn to the science of singing in hopes of obtaining clarity around the classification process. An understanding of pedagogy may help illuminate whether a voice, particularly one that seems to straddle more than one classification (a *zwischenfach* voice), is best suited to a particular categorization.¹ The science helps clarify what teacher and student are ‘hearing.’ Despite advances in the field of voice pedagogy, there remains a ‘gray area’ within the discussion of voice classification. The ultimate choices made by a singer possessing a *zwischenfach* voice may be impacted by personality and temperament as well as more practical considerations such as marketability and circumstance.

Zwischenfach is a flexible vocal category, as this paper will explore. However, in its most general sense, it can be defined as a voice that lies between two or more traditionally accepted vocal classifications, most typically the soprano and mezzo soprano categories. This paper will consider the history and development of classification in singing and examine the unique careers of well-known singers who exemplify the *Zwischenfach* category. Arguments for

¹ A full discussion of male *zwischenfach* lies outside the scope of this paper. In musical theater as well, the term baritenor is in current usage.

acknowledging this category in studio, casting, and performance environments conclude this study.

Although the topic of voice classification is daunting, a handful of reliable resources on the subject are available. The initial chapter in *Training Soprano Voices* by Richard Miller is titled “Categories of the Female Voice.” Miller immediately notes that the fundamentals of good singing techniques are applicable to all vocal *Fachs*² and include good breath management, balanced registration and freedom of articulation.³ He has the foresight to note however, that “range and tessitura capabilities are of less importance to professional *Fach* designation than are individual voice color and the requirements of dramatic portrayal.”⁴ An admirable aspect of Miller’s writing is his definitive approach to the definition of the *Zwischenfach* voice type:

The *Zwischenfachsängerin* has a large voice with good command of low range and is most comfortable in dramatic roles that, while requiring relatively high tessitura, evade exposure of the very top of the voice for extended periods of time. ...[She] is able to portray both dramatic soprano roles and some that lie within the dramatic mezzo-soprano categories, including Amneris (*Aida*, Verdi), Lady Macbeth (*Macbeth*, Verdi)...[and] Santuzza (*Cavalleria rusticana*, Mascagni). Possessing the weight and color of the dramatic soprano, she can manage much of the same literature as the dramatic, but her most comfortable range is closer to that of the mezzo-soprano.⁵

² A clear and concise definition of the word *Fach* for the purpose of this paper is as follows: specific voice classification. Literal translations of the word include ‘area of expertise’ and ‘box/compartment.’

³ Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

Miller acknowledges that many professionals consider dramatic voices, particularly the *zwischenfach* and the dramatic mezzo-soprano, as sub-categories of the dramatic soprano voice. That rationale, he argues, does not take into consideration the variety of timbres or ‘registration events’ that help characterize the female voice.⁶

Timbre

Timbre,⁷ range, and flexibility are qualities directly related to issues of vocal classification. Timbre is often one of the first indicators used to establish voice type. Dark, heavy sounds are often associated with a mezzo-soprano, while a healthy brightness may frequently indicate a soprano voice. The amplitude of vocal fold vibration, which is related to the size of the instrument, affects the color and timbre of the voice. The range and the registration characteristics of the voice are two other factors determined by the physiology of the larynx as well as the size and shape of the resonators (i.e. the vocal tract). These are all factors in classification, though some external control of the resonators is left to the singer by way of vowel choices and muscle control of the soft palate.

Phonation is produced by air moving through the vocal folds, which are comprised of muscle fibers that respond like any muscle in the human body. The length of the fibers imposes a pre-established limitation for their extension. Additionally, their thickness determines how much air pressure is required to

⁶ Miller, 12.

⁷ Timbre is described as the following: tone-color; that which distinguishes the qualities of one voice from another.

extend them to their fullest.⁸ The thickness of these fibers directly relates to the timbre of the singing voice and only when these fibers have been trained and coordinated to their fullest potential will the singer be able to demonstrate her full vocal flexibility and range.

Registration and Range

Registration is a controversial pedagogical topic that refers to points of transition within the singer's vocal range. Singers and teachers often use these transition points, or *passaggi*, to determine vocal classification. Many mezzo-sopranos and sopranos have common range capabilities but have differing abilities in terms of sustained *tessitura* and managing registration.

In his book, *Principles of Voice Production*, Ingo Titze states that registers are distinct portions of a vocalist's entire range.⁹ Analyzing vowel characteristics can be helpful when listening for registration shifts, since most singers exhibit some shift in vowel clarity as they transition throughout their range. Young singers often struggle with maintaining consistency from one register to the next. Registration can be equalized with laryngeal and lung pressure adjustments, as well as vocal tract adjustments that affect the frequency of the sound by shaping vowels in specific ways.

William Vennard's reliable book, *Singing – the Mechanism and the Technic*, discusses voice classification within the chapter on registration.

⁸ Miller, 38.

⁹ Ingo R. Titze, *Principles of Voice Production* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1994), 254.

Registration is reflected not only in a sound's pitch, but also in the properties of intensity and quality in relation to tone.¹⁰ Unlike some pedagogues, Vennard encourages the teaching of *one* voice – developed from the middle voice outward – with classification issues resolved. He identifies range as only one of the criteria of voice classification. More importantly, he emphasizes tessitura, development and maturity as more relevant indicators of classification.¹¹

In his book *National Schools of Singing*, Richard Miller devotes an entire chapter to the argument that registration is a controversial phenomenon. He follows up with a chapter on voice categorization in which he determines that, “chief registration events will tend to occur in the voices of a given *Fach* at identical pitches.”¹² Despite its conceptual vagueness, Miller maintains that registration is a better contender than range or pitch in determining *Fach*.¹³

Miller re-affirms our understanding of the pedagogy: the shape of the vocal tract affects the ‘character’ of the acoustic property, which is further manipulated by the articulators. Vowel formation is essential to sound quality and as a result, the essence of a singer’s technique. Regarding voice classification however, Miller refers directly to Webster’s dictionary:

¹⁰ William Vennard, *Singing – the Mechanism and the Technic* (New York, Carl Fischer, Inc., 1968), 77.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹² Richard Miller, *National Schools of Singing English, French, German and Italian Techniques of Singing Revisited* (London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1997), 125.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 126.

These cavities (mouth, pharynx and nose), definitely shaped for each vowel, are believed to reinforce those partial tones of the complex voice-tone whose pitches correspond to the natural resonance of the cavities so shaped, independently of the pitch tone. Thus in pronouncing any vowel, however the voice as a whole be raised or lowered in pitch, these partial tones will automatically become prominent which fit the forms assumed by the mouth and pharynx for that particular vowel. Hence the characteristic pitch or pitches for each vowel remain fairly constant, and so identify the vowel to the ear.¹⁴

The natural resonance to which Miller refers is unique to the bone and muscle structure of each individual, hence creating unique characteristics for every voice.

Though his delineations for male voice categories are fairly straightforward, his approach to female designations is, in his own words, approximate: “Categorization of the female voice is in large measure determined by the location of registration events within the vocal scale.”¹⁵ His *passaggi* assignments are accompanied by this advice,

These factors are reflected in the *passaggi* events which determine register definition, the heavier soprano approaching more nearly the mezzo-soprano pivotal points. The lighter-voiced mezzo will have pivotal points not far removed from those of the soprano... Decisions regarding *Fach* must often be made cautiously in these cases, since it is possible the singer could go in either direction; the decision will partly determine the technical handling of the voice.

In conclusion, Miller considers vocal maturity in relation to change of vocal production, particularly for heavily-weighted voices. He emphasizes the time it

¹⁴ John S. Kenyon, “Pronunciation,” in *Introduction to Webster’s New International Dictionary of the English Language*, 2d ed./ unabridged (Springfield, Mass.: G. and C. Merriam Co., 1961), xxviii; quoted in Richard Miller, *National Schools of Singing English, French, German and Italian Techniques of Singing Revisited* (London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1997), 46.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

often takes for a singer to develop a balanced resonance, thereby allowing the true color of the voice to emerge.¹⁶

¹⁶ Miller, 129.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODERN DAY FACH SYSTEM

Because it was the home of the *Florentine Camerata* circa 1600, Italy was considered the birthplace of opera and thus was revered as the center for western European classical vocal training. This impact would eventually culminate into the *Fach* system that is recognized today, based upon the German model most notably elucidated in Rudolf Kloiber's *Handbuch der Oper*. The Italian heritage, interpreted through various eras, styles, and nationalities, has also provided the foundation of the modern approach to vocal training.

As the emphasis of the musical drama onstage moved from the chorus and ballets to the solo singer, the demands on the virtuoso singer greatly increased.¹⁷ This was particularly relevant during what is now considered the Bel Canto era (approximately 1800-1840), as well as its adjacent eras, extending from the late seventeenth century throughout the early nineteenth century. Vocal music thrived during this time, and opera was extremely popular. During the Baroque period, singers such as Faustina Bordoni were exalted and composers like Bordoni's husband, Johann Adolf Hasse, were great celebrities of the day.

During the Bel Canto era, many prominent composers wrote their music with specific singers in mind. As a result, these voice categories became the archetypes for dramatic characters. Because these roles were intended for specific singers, the composers thereby limited themselves to the ranges and sounds these singers were able to produce.

¹⁷ Dan Marek, *Singing The First Art* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2007), 14.

Products of social and religious mores, the *castrati* profoundly influenced this era, since composers often featured them in leading operatic roles; these singers became prototypes of voice classifications as we know them.¹⁸ The popularity of the *castrati* spread throughout Europe and composers wrote many lead roles for specific singers. For example, a few of the most lauded *castrati*, Cafferelli, Farinelli, and Senisino all debuted dozens of roles, including Serse, Giulio Cesare and Orlando.

Boy Sopranos, Falsettists and Castrati

Mullier taceat in ecclesia – Women are to be silent in church. Led by interpretations of the biblical Apostle’s Paul writings, the Papal States banned women from singing in church. In their stead, boy sopranos were utilized in church services for the cantor and soprano parts. Due to the young boys’ lack of musical training and discipline, *falsettists* were also often employed during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.¹⁹ The falsetto voice was an obvious replacement for the female voice both in church choirs and the stage, and cross-dressing (men dressing as women) for characters on stage was socially acceptable throughout the eighteenth century.²⁰

¹⁸ A male singer who kept the soprano or alto range of his voice into adulthood as a result of having been castrated before puberty, usually between the ages of six and eight.

¹⁹ Marek, 11. A trained male vocalist who sang in the treble range using ‘artificial’ means by which the vocal cords produced sound using only the medial compression of the vocal folds. Clifton Ware, *Adventures in Singing* (McGraw-Hill, Inc. New York, NY 2008), G-3.

²⁰ This was true for particular regions of Italy more than others.

The practice of castration dates back to 400 A.D. Eunuchs were also quite common during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly in the Spanish region, though they were mainly used to guard the royal and the wealthy.²¹ The clergy began incorporating more *castrati* into their church choirs in approximately 1562 and gradually, the falsetto voice fell out of favor, outshined by the power and unique quality of the castrato voice. The *castrati* dominated cultural tradition for over 200 years and some sources estimate that at the peak of the practice in Italy alone, 4,000 children were castrated annually in hopes of a notable singing career.²²

²¹ Marek, 4.

²² *Ibid.*, 12.

The Flourishing of Bel Canto

The training of *castrati* began at a very young age and many children were sold to music schools, teachers or churches. A *castrato* – if he was deemed fit for the stage – debuted in his late teens, often in the lead romantic female roles. The successful *castrati* went on to establish their careers performing the majority of heroic male roles, such as Serse and Giulio Cesare. The *castrato* range was comparable to that of today’s trained mezzo-soprano voice. The relevance of the *castrati* is hard to over-emphasize. Though they flourished on the music scene for “only” two hundred years, they were among the most influential singers in vocal history. Most importantly, the *castrati* were paragons of vocal technique whose style influenced female singers for generations to come.²³ As opera became increasingly popular across social classes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, female singers began to emerge and this trend contributed to the decline of the *castrati*.

Decline of *Castrati* in Popularity

The popularity of the *castrati* began to fade after 1800. Before then, from approximately 1680, the expectation and, eventually, the rule was that the leading male part in a serious opera (*primo uomo*) should be sung by a *castrato*; a less important, *secondo uomo* part sometimes provided a role for a second *castrato*. “Natural” tenors were often relegated to secondary roles of kings and old men and often, elderly women.

²³ Michael Scott, *The Record of Singing to 1914* (Great Britain: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1977), 9.

Much of the *castrati*'s appeal was based on their exploitation of ornamentation, vocal dexterity and their abilities of *messa di voce*.²⁴ Due to their physical mutations, excessive training and expansive ranges (many *castrati* commanded up to three octaves), the *castrati* were able to perform a variety of roles. Their boyish voices, coupled with their tremendous breath capacity and large chest cavities, united to provide their unique tone quality. As a *castrato* aged, his voice slowly lowered in range, and he often ended his career as a contralto voice rather than soprano. Despite the lowered range, the *castrato* contralto still retained a brighter and louder voice than its female counterparts. The vocal technique paramount in developing and nourishing the *castrati*'s development was taught concurrently among the young women in *conservatori* throughout Italy.²⁵

Vocal music and technique evolved at an accelerated pace during this era and the burgeoning of vocal technique and consequent performance opportunities inevitably resulted in fuller, higher male voices, achieved *without* castration. A fine example is the occurrence of the first full-voiced high C,²⁶ performed by tenor Gilbert-Lois Duprez during a production of *Guillaume Tell* in 1831.²⁷ Despite Rossini's widely-quoted comparison of his voice to the 'squawk of a

²⁴ *Messa di voce* is the ability to crescendo and decrescendo a sustained pitch. Clifton Ware, *Adventures in Singing* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 2008), G-4.

²⁵ Marek, 21.

²⁶ Full-voice refers to vocal phonation without the use of falsetto.

²⁷ Marek, 37.

caupon with its throat cut,' Duprez enjoyed widespread success as the first *tenore di forza* and went on to create roles in operas by Donizetti, Berlioz and Verdi. He was a composer and teacher himself and it can be deduced that he passed along his vocal beliefs and skills to his many students both at the Paris Conservatory (where he worked from 1842-1850) and also at his own vocal school, which he founded in 1853.

Specialized and Individualized Roles and/or Voices:

Wagner, Beethoven & Verdi (Grand Opera)

The decline of *castrati* in the early nineteenth century presented opportunities for further development of virtuosic roles for female singers. An abundance of excellent teachers throughout Europe had been training young women for years. Some examples of the first 'prima donnas' to emerge were Maria Malibran (1808-1836), Isabella Colbran (1785-1845) and Adelina Patti (1843-1919). These women sang a variety of roles, many of which were written specifically for them. They based their methods and styles on the *castrati's* example and a new voice classification emerged. These women each possessed exceptionally low voices; their high notes were 'the products of art rather than nature' and used more for ornamentation than for substance.²⁸ Combined with the development of the full-voiced *tenor di forza* and the gradual development of higher-voiced sopranos, more specific vocal categories evolved. Gone was the freedom of transposition for specific singers, for earlier in the era,

²⁸ Scott, *The Record of Singing*, 15.

[A] more rigorous classification did not recommend itself. In the days of *opera seria* a great virtuoso made whatever adjustments were necessary to fit a part to his voice....This was the age of the transposition, a device invented for singers....[It is] hard to believe that it was once as much the rule as the exception, that Handel, Hasse, Gluck, Mozart and Rossini were content if their music was well sung, and the singer would not be straight-jacketed into an uncongenial key.²⁹

As different voice styles emerged, composers reworked their original compositions or wrote new music that explored the possibilities of larger voices and more expansive ranges. The growth of the opera orchestra during this time also impacted vocal composition. Many composers experimented with these trends that collectively led to Grand Opera, exemplified by the works of Beethoven, Weber, Meyerbeer, and Verdi.

It was Beethoven who first wrote the music and then found the artists to perform it. The singers of the premiere of *Fidelio* complained that it was unsingable and Henriette Sontag and Caroline Unger pleaded that the tessitura of the soprano parts of the Ninth Symphony and Missa Solemnis were too high. Beethoven told them to go home and practice until they could negotiate their parts.³⁰

Weber attempted to develop a more definitive national German style with his 1821 opera, *Der Freischütz*. His two female leads in this opera are good examples of roles – both mezzo-soprano and soprano – that required substantial sound throughout their entire range. Giuseppe Verdi's leading soprano role in *Nabucco*, Abigaille, is notorious for 'ruining' voices – so much so that unquestionable stars such as Joan Sutherland and Leontyne Price refused to sing the role. Nevertheless,

²⁹ Scott, 15.

³⁰ Related in Dan H. Marek, *Singing: The First Art* (place: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007), 17.

it is Richard Wagner's name that is most associated with the transition to larger opera orchestras. Wagner based his majestic operas on heroic tales and fantastic plot lines, and explored the emotional breadth of his characters through the melodic line. A more declamatory emphasis was the result.³¹ His vocal lines made extreme demands on the performers and, coupled with the era's thicker orchestration, led many singers to vocal fatigue and abuse.

Various Schools of Teaching and Splintering Philosophies

"It's called Bel Canto, not Bel Wordo."³² This amusing quote encapsulates the response of those who did not see the value of Wagner's complicated orchestrations and longer, lyrical lines. Grand Opera emphasized emotion and character through melody, musical cooperation with the orchestra and dramatic vocal declamation. Those who favored the Bel Canto style preferred their stories expressed through clarity of tone, traditional vocal flourishes and simple and often predictable character and plots. The allure of the music was revealed through the beautiful singing. As Scott wrote, "it was impossible to separate the music from the singing, interpretation from technique."³³

The evolution of nineteenth-century vocal technique led to divergent schools of thought regarding voices, voice training and voice classification. As mentioned earlier, in 1951, in an effort to summarize these developments, Rudolf

³¹ Scott, 18.

³² Robert Harrison, Professor of Music, University of Indiana, permission granted via email correspondence with author.

³³ Scott, 9.

Kloiber wrote *Handbuch der Oper (Handbook of Opera)*.³⁴ Kloiber was a conductor, pianist, director, theorist and musicologist. In the introduction, he stresses his intention to consider the musical works from all aspects, emphasizing that new interpretations of these works and different stylistic approaches may always be found. Within these considerations, he acknowledges the ‘question of pragmatic instrumentation (or matching the proper voice to each role).’ As a result, he included a *Fachpartien* (Fach role) directory for the works of Monteverdi through Richard Strauss.³⁵ Many roles are cross-listed under different *Fachs*. The commentary supporting his listing choices is clear and concise, particularly after reading his historical and stylistic background of each opera. This reference book offers a rare, impartial view of voice assignments; it is highly regarded for its insight and clarity. Historical context and stylistic development also play a large part in his determinations of *Fach* criteria.

Regarding classification, Kloiber directly links Wagner to the splintering of vocal categories,

He [Wagner] also wanted to create a musical expression in singing and acting which should grow out of the music. In Bayreuth slowly came the gradual transformation of performance style as a result. . . . This led to a refined individualization of stage singers and through that to a more narrow definition of stage "Fächer" (*Fachs*).³⁶

³⁴ Rudolf Kloiber, *Handbuch der Oper* (Germany, 1951). Trans., Caroline Waterman and Carole FitzPatrick, 801.

³⁵ The book has subsequently been expanded to encompass operas through the late twentieth-century.

³⁶ Kloiber, 7.

However, he clarifies that “the accomplishment of all individual works...involved for an opera...has been considered.” In other words, each opera has its unique demands, and casting based on those criteria can vary tremendously from another opera. Historical context and stylistic development also play a large part in Kloiber’s determinations of *Fach* criteria.

Kloiber begins with the recognition that our basic vocabulary of voice categorizing begins with characterizing the tones (or basic divisions) of the voice—soprano, alto, tenor and bass—with two ‘intermediate’ stages: the mezzo-soprano voice in women and the baritone voice in men. When unique attributes are considered, voices are categorized by other standards such as quality (color), size (large vs. small) and volume. These attributes contribute much more than the range of the voice when considering *Fach* classifications.

Kloiber notes that the heroic (dramatic) voice arose with the advent of Wagner’s music and contrasted sharply with the lyrical voice. Additionally, he acknowledges that there is a specific *Fach* for the “in-between voice” – the *Zwischenfach*. Today the term *Zwischenfach* is widely recognized as a voice that lies between vocal categories.³⁷

³⁷ Albeit, there are often fevered discussions about categorization *within* a specific range.

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION ON THE *ZWISCHENFACH* CONCEPT

Though general, broad categorizations of voices— low, medium and high – have persisted, increased specialization on the part of singers has emerged and with that, more specificity of vocal categorization. In her dissertation, “Seven Massenet Operas,” Deborah Baxter summarizes the hazy discussion of the development of the *Fach* idea.

At no time in history...have vocal authorities met on a substantial amount of common ground. Nor has there been an accord between one generation and the next on the issue. Even within the same generation, one singer may be labeled as a contralto, mezzo-soprano and soprano by different authors, or by the singer herself. Add to this that there have always been differences in the national tonal ideas, and we begin to sense the elusiveness of the issue of categorizing voices.³⁸

In the 1900s, different opinions and personalities emerged in regard to voice classification and these affected the way singers themselves began to interpret their own voices. Splintering ideas continued to spread across regions, establishing a wide variety of teaching styles. One legacy of Wagner’s specified demands in the Ring Cycle was the lingering effect of voice type and character association. Wagner’s thicker orchestrations demanded larger voices that delineated stronger characters and as a result, more definite classifications evolved. In her article *Operatic Characters and Voice Type*, K. Mitchells summarizes the associations a listener makes between characterization and vocal

³⁸ Deborah Baxter “Women’s Voice Classifications in Selected Operas of Jules Massenet: Computer Analyzation and Anecdotal Study.” DMA, diss., University of Missouri, 1989, 10. The concept of national tonal ideals, as explored in Richard Miller’s *National Schools of Singing*, supposes there are unique pedagogical differences between the four largest schools in singing history: English, French, German and Italian.

quality. “In opera, because of its very nature, the singing voice assumes a more dominant role....The voice type allocated to an operatic part can be regarded as an auditory mask, which through its distinctive tone quality provides an impersonation of the operatic character.”³⁹ One significant point in her article is the concept of choice. Mitchells argues that we associate the general characteristics of the voice – low, high, dark, bright – as we would with any other sensory mode. As a result, we automatically assign universal character traits to our understanding of voice timbres as well.⁴⁰ However, in the already slippery world of aural perception and voice classification, Mitchells explains that these ‘instinctively’ assumed characterizations are further exaggerated when a third (or more) voice is added to emphasize the awareness of each character.

The distinctive quality of a voice type which is already noticeable on its own is thrown into special relief when it is actually contrasted with a voice of a different pitch and timbre....Their juxtaposition sharpens our awareness that each voice type has an expressive message, and accentuates its distinctive meaning in respect of the individual operatic character.⁴¹

Often, this third choice is “the neutral middle” against which the other voices are measured for their expressive qualities on either their higher or lower qualities. As a result, the middle voice often is associated with the most ‘normalized’

³⁹ K. Mitchells, “Operatic Characters and Voice Types,” 47. Royal Music Association. *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, vol. 97. Oxford University Press, 2003. The concept of character and personality emoted through the voice is fully explored in Roland Barthes essay, “The Grain of the Voice,” Chapter 11 of *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Ferrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977), trans. Stephen Heath.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 48.

⁴¹ Ibid.

characters. Here, the *zwischenfach* singer encounters her dilemma of identity.

While the middle voice to which Mitchells refers has many defining examples in the baritone repertoire, this concept for the female voice has been more elusive.

Furthermore, nineteenth-century scientific advancement in pedagogical studies increased the overall knowledge of the vocal mechanism. Though this knowledge was beneficial to the evolution of vocal development, it also muddled and complicated vocal ideals in relation to vocal studies and consequently vocal categorizations.

My own struggles with voice categorization certainly came into play when I selected this thesis area for research. I was also inspired by many of my colleagues who spoke of their own frustrations surrounding the subject area – both in their experiences as a singer as well as with their students. The flourishing Bel Canto era spread the popularity of classical music and singing to the rest of the world. While classical music seems to have lost some of its following due to the central role popular music plays in the United States, its initial popularity still lingers in colleges and universities. An abundant number of undergraduates, music majors, many of whom major in voice performance, aspire to be career musicians. Some opt to continue their studies in graduate school in order to refine their instruments and become more desirable to a variety of potential agents, conductors and stage directors. On the other hand, younger children whose parents hire teachers for private voice instruction (e.g., the American Idol phenomenon), hope that an early start may provide an added benefit and bypass the need for higher musical education. These two elements

combined, splintered teaching tenets and more students engaging in musical lessons for a shorter amount of time, have contributed to a female voice categorization identity ‘crisis.’

Review of *Zwischenfach* Data, Examples and Opinions

Ample documentation establishes the fact that young (and often amateur) singers should avoid any sort of voice typing early in their studies, for a variety of reasons.⁴² One of these reasons, and the most applicable for the purpose of this paper, is misclassification due to vocal prematurity. Additionally, overuse often occurs as a result of attempts of “pigeonholing” young voices into specific *Fachs*. Perhaps the most important reason to avoid early voice classification is to dissuade drawing attention away from basic vocal technique and musical development. For older singers, pressure to identify with a particular *Fach* often takes precedence as the resources for professional classical singing careers dwindle; it is much easier to promote oneself with a specified label than as a generalist. This pressure, along with the contributing aforementioned elements of vocal identity crisis, led me to ask a variety of questions when I began researching this topic. However, two questions remained relevant throughout the whole process:

1. Has the concept of the *zwischenfach* become more or less clear in my own lifetime than it was in the early twentieth century?

⁴² Clifton Ware, *Adventures in Singing* (McGraw-Hill, Inc. New York, NY 2008), 102.

2. What is at stake, if anything, when singers take risks to present themselves as a certain *Fach*, without exploring other viable options?

One unique way in which the *zwischenfach* voice performs is in its freedom to remain undefined. Though this vague definition comes with its own drawbacks, it also offers the chance for the artist to showcase her ability as a singer – not constrained by the bounds of a defined voice-type, but rather, only by her own capabilities and limitations.

Substantive research that specifically focuses on the topics of either *zwischenfach* voices or *zwischenfach* music and roles is difficult to find. Both the basic pedagogy and the influence of the historical development of voice typing offered a fair amount of resources. However, the current place of the *zwischenfach* in classical music society has remained elusive. To help fill this void, I sent out a handful of questionnaires to a variety of professionals in the opera field. The goal for collecting this data was to gather ideas about the *Zwischenfach*, voice typing, vocal training and characterization in today's market. Ideally, I hoped the answers might help me understand which questions were most pertinent when determining voice classifications – or even if voice typing is rather an archaic idea upon which to focus.

When approaching the enigmatic concept of the *Zwischenfach*, dividing the discussion into three general areas helped establish coherence. I questioned my subjects about educational and beginning development, emerging artists and young artists; the auditioning phase; as well as established and mature career/potential *Fach* transitional pivot points. Subjects received questions most

pertinent to their respective fields of expertise; therefore, no subject received every question in the bank (See Appendix for Question Bank and Answers).

One common denominator between questions asked and responses received included performing (and auditioning) appropriate repertoire. In his article *Criteria for Selecting Repertoire*, John Nix highlights four broad categories for the selection of repertoire. Though his article is focused generally on voice students, he expands his thesis into their development as professional singers.⁴³ His discussion is organized by physical limitations, voice classification, expressive/emotional factors, and musicianship skills.

Nix emphasizes the important skill of selecting appropriate repertoire coupled with secure technique as key to an enduring and successful singing career.⁴⁴ Repertoire decisions and vocal classifications often intermingle. Despite highly technical terminology – perhaps one reason why the subject has become so elusive – his writings largely match the responses I gathered from the casting directors, staging directors and coaches/administrators I questioned. Regarding voice classification, Nix wrote,

Vocal timbre must also be considered. A singer's unique timbre is the result of several factors, including vocal tract length, the amount of vocal fold adduction used during singing, the thickness of the vocal fold mucosa, prior training, and personal preference. Timbre is often very important in determining subclassifications within a voice category, and as

⁴³ John Nix, *Journal of Singing – The Official Journal of the National Association of Teachers of Singing* 58.3 (Jan 2002): 217-221.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 218.

anyone familiar with the Fachsystem is acutely aware, it plays a crucial role in revealing a stage character's personality.⁴⁵

Subject A, a casting director in a European opera house agrees, based on her years of experience.

This is very much also a matter of taste. Above I have listed only roles that I consider as “my *Zwischenfach*.” As I said, I like to hear a high mezzo in the role of Zerlina, because that brings so much colour to [a] cast with only soprano voices.⁴⁶

For reasons discussed in the first section of this paper, the development of the vocal mechanism is a continuous and delicate craft; one can be considered a ‘beginner’ for many years. After a comprehensive knowledge of the instrument, technique, musicianship and adaptability has been implemented to an applicable degree, it is plausible that the individual considers herself ready for the next step in her career. At this point – when the singer begins exposing herself to the discretion of agents, directors and arts administrators – she will experience the effects of her *Fach* decision. If she was uncertain about her voice type and felt rushed into a category, her choice likely was based upon the opinion of her teacher(s), colleagues and individual study and research.

A singer in the emerging artist/post-graduate/young artist age stage of her career who considers herself a *zwischenfach* or suspects her voice will not develop into its full *Fach* until later in her life must decide how to present herself to the artistic community. This impending responsibility can be daunting and hence, can pressure young singers to classify themselves into a specific *Fach* –

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Subject A. She adds “I could go on forever talking about casting, but my English sets limits...”

with its accompanying repertoire – which may not be suitable for their vocal health and progress over the long term. Nix mentions in his article that physical limitations, specifically age-related ones, are to be particularly followed when making repertoire choices.⁴⁷ If the voice in question is a potential *zwischenfach*, the development of her instrument will be slower, in pedagogical terms, than that of her coloratura or lyric colleagues. However, due to her need (whether financial, psychological or a combination of both) to establish a career, she must begin to audition and perform frequently. A prominent perspective among young and emerging singers is the concept that it is vital to identify oneself as a particular *Fach* even to be heard for an audition. When asked about the importance of establishing one's voice type for auditions, Subject B, an emerging artist I questioned, stated quite bluntly,

I think it's pretty important. Nowadays, the people we audition for don't want to think too much when making decisions. They want to be told who you are and what roles you should sing FOR them. They are not too creative these days, so determining your voice type and what YOU want to sing is a huge part of auditioning.

However, Subjects A & C, two influential casting directors agreed that while it is important to establish oneself on paper (i.e. resume) as a definitive *Fach*, it is the repertoire list from which they glean the most pertinent information.

The singer should identify herself by her repertoire. Some auditioners are confused by this, so list yourself as one or the other. The panel will see from your rep list that you are capable of both and will probably ask for a selection that represents this.

⁴⁷ Nix.

Their responses confirm that selecting appropriate repertoire – despite whatever *Fach* associations it may have – and allowing oneself to explore music outside of the “pigeonhole” of their assigned voice classification can lead to beneficial results – for both professional and vocal maturity. Hearing the potential in a well-presented and well-developed voice is the responsibility of the directors and agents. Subject C, a European casting director stated quite clearly, “My job is to listen with ‘big ears’ and maybe ‘hear’ her sing certain roles that she may never have thought she could sing.”⁴⁸ Kloiber agrees with subject C.

Casting questions are among the most difficult tasks of a responsible director or conductor. The task...requires: mature experience; a fine sense of style; precise knowledge of the vocal roles and the score; and the ability to assess the possible limitations of a specific singer: his voice as well as his individuality as a performer..⁴⁹

Kloiber acknowledges both the difficulty and the importance of using the correct *Fach* while casting an opera. Additionally, Kloiber further emphasizes “vocal quality and their artistic maturity,” as guidelines for vocal classifications.⁵⁰

A singer's particular “Fach” is not always entirely clear. Especially the views of the singers themselves about their true "Fach" do not always correspond to the given facts.... Very often non-artistic reasons play the main role (for example salary issues, personal vanity...). On the other hand, the "Fach" boundaries are certainly not fixed.... Sometimes they can even take over a large part of the adjacent “Fach.”⁵¹

Relevance of *Zwischenfach* – Performers vs. Auditors

⁴⁸ Subject C.

⁴⁹ Kloiber, 809.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 810.

The *zwischenfach* voice clearly has its place among the arbiters of the operatic world. Responses from auditors acknowledged both the validity of the voice type and its essential function within operatic repertoire. *Zwischenfach* is currently most often applied to a voice based on the opinions of professionals and past and present examples of singers who have sung the repertoire both successfully and unsuccessfully. In one of my questions, I asked the subjects to identify which – if any – characters they associate with the *zwischenfach* voice. I expected to find some intertwining ideas due to the ‘specialized’ topic of focus. From the seven responses I received – a few disqualified themselves because they felt there were not expert enough to answer the question – there were over *twenty* potential *zwischenfach* roles named. Many of these roles were mentioned because of the dramatic side of the *Fach* umbrella; that is, a role demands a *zwischenfach* voice because of its dramatic weight. However, a handful of the characters mentioned are normally classified as lyric roles. Der Komponist from *Ariadne auf Naxos* and Santuzza from *Cavalleria Rusticana* require specific colors unique to the *zwischenfach* voice due to color/timbre, range (tessitura in the middle) that affect the characterization.

Discussion of Roles Mentioned in Questionnaires

Subjects mentioned, among others, Stephano from Gounod’s *Romeo et Juliet* (originally marked for a soprano); Rosina from Rossini’s *Il Barbiere de Seville* (originally marked for a contralto); and Dorabella from Mozart’s *Così fan Tutte* (originally marked for a soprano) as lyric roles suitable for the *zwischenfach* voice. Dramatic roles included Der Komponist from Strauss’ *Ariadne auf Naxos*

(originally written for a tenor, re-written for a mezzo-soprano, but in the debut cast it was performed by a soprano); and Santuzza from Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* (originally marked for a soprano).

These roles may be cast with great flexibility. Each, however, has become associated with its own *Fach*. Zerlina for example, often calls to mind a soft-minded and fickle ingénue often associated with a soubrette or light lyric soprano voice; Rosina should be a fiery, yet flexible mezzo-soprano; and Dorabella is a temperamental, full-lyric mezzo-soprano. In these ways, character and voice description have become interchangeable. In the last few decades, it has become more prevalent to incorporate more *zwischen* voices into these and similar roles.

Germane Examples of Singers Considered as *Zwischenfach*

Maria Malibran (1808-1836), daughter of pioneer pedagogue Manuel Garcia (1775-1832) is often considered by vocal historians to have possessed a *zwischenfach* voice. Debuting in the pivotal role of Rosina in *il Barbiere di Siviglia*, as a mezzo-soprano, Malibran performed a variety of roles in both the soprano and mezzo-soprano repertoire, including Susannah in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, the title role in *Norma*, Leonore in *Fidelio* and she sang the title role in the premiere of Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda* in 1835. During that era, women commonly sang an array of roles representing different *Fachs*. Malibran's voice however, was "notable for [its] colour and range, and was described as being 'like the costliest gold, but it had to be mined, forged, and stamped like metal under the

hammer to make it malleable.”⁵² These qualities, among others, suggest that, the *Zwischenfach* is an ineffable concept. Later examples illustrate this point further.

⁵² *Grove Music Online*. Accessed April 01 2012.

Dramatic Examples of Zwischenfach Voice Types

Waltraud Meier (b. 1956) attended Würzburg University in the early 1970s, where she studied languages and took private voice lessons. She debuted as Lola in *Cavalleria Rusticana* in 1976 and steadily worked her way through the dramatic mezzo-soprano operatic repertoire, performing Verdi's *Eboli* and *Carmen*. Her first foray into soprano repertoire was as Isolde in 1983. From there, she explored other Wagner *zwischenfach* roles and progressed to other dramatic repertoire such as Santuzza, der Komponist, Dalila and Jeanne d'Arc. Her successful career was based on her reliable technique. In order to express and define the wide variety amount of roles she grew into, she manipulated only her acting and musical expression, rather than her sound. Though she has enjoyed a fruitful career, her voice continues to be the fodder of debate in regard to vocal quality. While many musicians enjoy her voice, there are many who would not pay to hear her even in her prime.

Grace Bumbry (b. 1937) provides a unique example when discussing *Zwischenfach* philosophies. She won the Metropolitan Opera auditions in 1958 after studying with Lotte Lehman from 1955-1958 and made her Paris debut in 1960. She performed successfully as a mezzo-soprano for fifteen years. Towards the end of these years, however, she began to explore more *zwischen* repertoire such as Santuzza and Lady MacBeth (1964 and 1966). She debuted at Paris Opera as Amneris in Verdi's *Aida* – though she was offered the title role, one of the

definitive soprano leads in the repertoire.⁵³ Her decision to explore the mezzo repertoire allowed her to perform for over a decade in the majority of dramatic mezzo-soprano roles. In 1970 however, she made her soprano debut as the title role in *Salome* at Covent Garden. She also performed the role Tosca at the Metropolitan Opera as well as Bess in *Porgy and Bess*. Early in her studies with Lotte Lehman, Bumbry also received lessons from Armand Tokatyan, who stated her voice was that of a dramatic soprano. Lehman vehemently disagreed and encouraged Bumbry to persist with singing mezzo-soprano repertoire. Their disagreement continued until Tokatyan passed away in 1960.⁵⁴ Lehman continued to teach Bumbry as a mezzo and Bumbry's win at the Metropolitan Auditions certainly must have secured her confidence in the choice. In 1970, when Bumbry pronounced her intent to focus on soprano repertoire, she was met with derision from the public as well as from Lehman. Not until her detractors heard her performance of *Salome* were they pacified for a time.⁵⁵ Over the decade of her soprano career, she was criticized because her higher voice was never quite as full and/or secure as her middle and lower registers.

⁵³ Anne Midgette, "2009 Kennedy Center Honors: Singer Grace Bumbry," *The Washington Post* Online 2009 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/12/04/AR2009120400141.html>. Accessed March 12 2012.

⁵⁴ Anne Midgette, *Oxford Grove Music Encyclopedia Online*: <http://www.answers.com/topic/grace-bumbry>. Accessed March 12 2012.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Lyric Examples of Zwischenfach Voice Types

Joyce DiDonato (b. 1969) studied at the American Vocal Academy and made her American debut performing a number of contemporary roles that included the debut of Meg in the workshop production of *Little Women*. Not until she traveled to Europe did she perform more traditional roles onstage, most notably as Angelina in *La Cenerentola* and Rosina in *il Barbierie de Seville*. Many of her roles, for example Dorabella, Elvira, and Stephano, are considered lyrical *zwischenfach* roles. She is now exploring much more versatile repertoire such as the title role in Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda*. She is comfortable in her higher register and her debut as Maria will be an excellent barometer of her capabilities sustaining the soprano repertoire.

Cecila Bartoli (b. 1966) provides a further example of a lyric *zwischenfach* voice type. She is well known as a mezzo-soprano with successful performances of Rossini and Mozart as well as a very active recording schedule. Similar to DiDonato, she began exploring other repertoire – *zwischenfach* – both in range and vocal weight in the early twenty-first century. With roles judged by current days standards to be soprano, such as Despina and Zerlina, Bartoli has also expanded her repertoire to include Donna Elvira from *Don Giovanni* and Dorabella from *Così fan Tutte*. Bartoli recently undertook the role of Norma.⁵⁶ Though once performed by Maria Malibran to whom Bartoli likens herself, Norma is not a *zwischenfach* role. One may be willing to concede that the range necessary for the role can be accessed by well-developed mezzo-sopranos with a

⁵⁶ Scott, *The Record of Singing*, 13. Bellini wrote the role for Guiditta Pasta.

high extension, or *zwischenfach* singers with excellent vocal agility. However, dramatic heft is still needed for the role. Bartoli's talent lay on the lyrical side of the vocal spectrum and her solution to that particular problem was to manipulate the orchestration. Dortmund Hall in Germany is an acoustical wonder that allows even the smallest sigh to be heard throughout the room. Additionally, Bartoli required gut-string instruments, wooden flutes and early brass instruments in her production.⁵⁷ Her fellow cast mates were 'non-traditional' as well. The lead tenor role, traditionally a dramatic voice was cast as a lyric, and the other female lead, most often cast as a mezzo-soprano, was sung by a soprano. Bartoli received mixed reviews for the production, though many were positive at the time.

Personal opinions abounded however, and some did not understand her reasoning or her rationale. This study's Subject B wrote,

I feel that both lyric and dramatic voices can be successful in this repertoire, if the artist chooses the proper role. Bartoli, of course, is now becoming too dramatic, yielding to the pressure of her critics to prove that she does not have a small voice. Her recent attempt at NORMA is almost unbelievable to me.

Once again, the concept of success within one's natural *Fach* is encountered.

While DiDonato has remained successful wading through more ambiguous repertoire, Bartoli encounters disdain and criticism, albeit based on more radical choices. It is interesting to note that both DiDonato and Bartoli focus much of their career on Baroque music, much of which is composed mid-range. Both are extremely comfortable in their middle voices and secure enough with their high

⁵⁷ Shirley Apthorp, *Financial Times FT.com* Online
<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/7604ba5e-8916-11df-8ecd-00144feab49a.html#axzz1oe8sk4Im>. Accessed March 12 2012.

notes that they are able to add impressive high flourishes when they chose to. This practice was common during the Baroque and Bel Canto era, as well.

In *Voices: Singers & Critics*, J. B. Steane offers his subjective, yet well-developed theory on vocal classification, based largely on examples of singers from the past fifty years. He discusses his reasoning behind his classifications, most notably emphasizing his argument about why mezzos with good upper registers chose to sing soprano. He speculates that their decision is often based upon the ‘less than stellar’ status attached to mezzo-sopranos, not only in operas and solos (oratorios, masses, etc.) but also amongst colleagues. Sopranos are often paid more; the audience comes to ‘hear the high notes.’ A mezzo-soprano’s vocal identity however, often seems to be determined by the roles that they can or cannot sustain. Steane uses Kirsten Flagstad as an example of his theory. Regarded as the predecessor to Birgit Nilsson, Kirsten Flagstad’s name was practically synonymous with Wagnerian repertoire in the first half of the twentieth century. Her warm tone and easy vocal production was lauded and she became an archetype for a Wagnerian soprano. However, Steane debates that it was not her higher register that was most beloved.

Well before...she had had trouble with the highest notes, the Bs and Cs, and going back...in the late 1930s...one hears a voice that is so gloriously comfortable in the middle and lower registers that one almost begrudges the necessary excursions upwards...it would be very natural to assume that she was a mezzo.

He finalizes his point with a comparison between Flagstad and Nilsson,

Birgit Nilsson...is another, and of quite a different sort. With her, there was never any question but that here was a soprano through and through:

the tone was not characterized by breadth or warmth but by purity and penetration, and the high notes were its glory.

Steane recognizes a middle ground between the mezzo-soprano and the soprano voice, one that can negotiate much of both repertoires quite well. These he calls soprano-mezzos who, in his words, are good examples of a “two-way street.”⁵⁸ The appeal of his argument is due to his historical context. He relies on the successes and failures of singers from the past two centuries as the evidence of his theories, rather than attempting to assign *Fachs* to pre-determined categories.

Compositional Thoughts Regarding Voice Types

Marek writes about the pride Mozart took in crafting his roles for particular singers and notes that Beethoven was one of the first composers to find the appropriate singer for his music rather than vice versa.⁵⁹ This evolution in part guided the selection of questions distributed to the directors, singers and arts administrators who participated in my study.⁶⁰ However, new vocal literature is premiered every year and the perspective of a working composer who is familiar with vocal literature is extremely valuable. DiDonato for example became a common name due to her active and successful participation in newer and contemporary operas.

⁵⁸ J. B. Steane, *Voices: Singers & Critics* (London: Duckworth, 1992), 45. Surely Steane is familiar with the term and concept of *zwischenfach*. As to why he avoids it in his argument is unclear.

⁵⁹ Marek, 17.

⁶⁰ Refer to Appendix C.

Ample evidence indicates that composers from previous eras tailored their music to suit a specific singer's voice. In the case of Grand Opera, there was an acknowledgement that, though composers may have not structured their music with regard to the singer, they were well aware of the vocal potential.⁶¹

The composer who participated in this study also noted the importance of finding a particular singer's "sweet spot," in regard to range and tessitura. More importantly, the composer empathized with a singer's struggle to align herself within the designations of music that often carries pre-determined stigmas. The composer wrote, "I think the main problem is that people do not fit into *Fachs*, roles do." In similar fashion to Bartoli's reworking of *Norma*'s orchestral and cast contexts, Subject H suggested a return to the number opera⁶² because it would offer much more freedom of repertoire when making casting decisions. Everyone involved in the process would benefit.

For one thing, it is fairly easy to transpose individual songs to suit a voice, less so to rework entire portions of operas. It would be interesting to see composers return to the "number" opera, rather than through-composed forms. I think if some new operas returned to that model, we would see an upsurge in *zwischenfach* roles because individual pieces could be tweaked, or there could be substitute pieces available for performers. Perhaps by increasing availability of the works to a wider range of singers, the composers, in turn, might see a greater number of performances.

⁶¹ Marek, 39.

⁶² A number opera designates an opera consisting of individual sections or 'numbers' that can readily be detached from the whole, as distinct from an opera consisting of continuous music. The term is best applied to the various forms of 18th-century opera, including *opera seria*, *opera buffa*, *opéra comique*, *ballad opera* and *Singspiel* as well as to some 19th-century grand operas. *Grove Music Online*. Accessed March 29 2012.

Today, new music is often composed for current singers and their voices. However, the archetype of voice classification has been – to a certain degree – predetermined based on a variety of aforementioned factors. The Bel Canto era is best defined by the composers who flourished during the era.

Conclusion – Evolution of *zwischenfach* Voice

This project evolved from a desire to determine the validity of the *zwischenfach* voice as a topic and a pedagogical study in the twenty-first century. The majority of this paper has considered that *Zwischenfach* can be defined not only by a particular voice type, but also might be associated with a particular, often flexible character and role, as well. Elements of this conversation that explain the elusiveness of this topic include changing compositional demands, growth within the vocal art form, and shifting tastes among both the audience and composers in regards to vocal classification.

However, several findings indicate that this topic is, to quote Malcolm Gladwell, a ‘sticky’ rubric that needs consistent attention in the vocal world.⁶³ The evolution of vocal growth and potential cannot be pinned down nor strictly bracketed. There is no way to know how far the voice will continue to mature; history has demonstrated only the tremendous potential of its growth. One unique way the *zwischenfach* voice excels is in its freedom to remain undefined.

The Wagnerian principle of continuous music put tremendous strain on vocalists and required a new technique. In turn, new categories of vocalists

⁶³ Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2000).

emerged. It is generally agreed upon in the current vocal world that a voice must grow into Wagner's compositions, if it is to sustain a healthy career. There is a parallel between the evolution of the Bel Canto era into Grand opera and its subsequent vocal demands, and the development of dramatic voices in general. Some voices successfully transitioned from the Bel Canto era into the heavily dramatic repertoire Wagner orchestrated, while some did not. A plethora of singers have tried both successfully and unsuccessfully to move from lyric to more dramatic repertoire. Often successes came down to whether or not the appropriate vocal classification and associated "ideal" repertoire was known. This discernment process is easy for some, but hazy and frustrating for others.

Those who believe they possess a *zwischenfach* voice must recognize that their voice type often evolves into a more dramatic *Fach* later in the vocal career. *Fachs* that may develop out of the *zwischenfach* voice, and composers of suitable repertoire or roles include:

Jugendlich-dramatischer Sopran (literally a young dramatic): roles include Tosca, Butterfly, and both Leonores.

Dramatischer Sopran (Dramatic): roles include Ariadne, Salome, Leonore, and Santuzza

Hochdramatischer sopran (High/full dramatic): roles include Turandot, Brünnhilde, Isolde, and

Dramatischer Mezzosopran: roles include Dalila, Amneris, Azucena, Ortrud, Fricka.

However, a singer may feel most comfortable remaining within the *zwischenfach* repertoire. Subject B finds the voice type quite valuable for many important roles, “I feel that *zwischenfach* singers are invaluable for many roles (Santuzza included). Other roles, especially *Jugendlich* Wagner and Strauss, need the weight and color these voices have to offer.”

Since the popularity of Bel Canto ideals have waned, we have ‘lost’ the legitimate contralto voice. The contralto, exemplified by Vittoria Tesi (1700-1775) was particularly provocative when contrasted with higher soprano voices. Cenerentola (*La Cenerentola*) and Rosina (in the original version of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*) are examples of leading female roles that were composed for the contralto voice.⁶⁴ The contralto voice did not evolve out of existence after the Bel Canto era; Wagner himself composed many roles for the contralto voice, as did other composers of Grand Opera, including Meyerbeer and Glinka. Rather, they simply became less fashionable and therefore, less useful in classical singing. The mezzo-soprano has now assumed much of what was once reserved for contralto voices – to provide vocal contrast to higher voices as well as add depth of character and emotional distinction when necessary.

Though sometimes disputed, the *zwischenfach* voice is not a new concept. French singer Emma Calvé (1858-1942), envied for her portrayal of Santuzza, was also considered the greatest Carmen of her day. Yet she was also hired throughout the world to sing many soprano roles such as Gounod’s Marguerite

⁶⁴ Stanley Sadie, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Operas* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002), 691.

(*Faust*).⁶⁵ Despite the stigma that may arise with the idea, the *zwischenfach* voice remains a healthy developmental stage in a young singer who feels confident in her technical vocal advancements, yet struggles to define herself within the confines to a specific *Fach*.

In his book, Titze brings up an important point regarding registers – they are perceived partially in relationship to categorical perception. This is a concept that allows the brain to perceive a discrete number of entities in a physical continuum, i.e. the number of items it needs to identify, store and understand.⁶⁶ In other words, registers differ from one voice classification to another but they still affect our perception of vocal identity. However, for the purposes of this paper, this somewhat esoteric idea can be simplified to ‘The Power of Context.’⁶⁷ Registers, timbre, flexibility, lyricism, dramaticism, expression, and *Fach* assignments are all important and worthwhile discussions for a singer. They become less helpful, though, when we lose sight of the larger art form. For example, a singer may go through a significant portion of her career considering herself (and working as) a dramatic mezzo-soprano until she appears onstage with three other women who possess larger and darker instruments than she. And while the mezzo would not change her *Fach* solely as a result of such an experience, it would be advantageous for her to weigh that performance context when she next classifies herself. No one would encourage her to manipulate or misuse her voice

⁶⁵ Scott, *The Record of Singing*, 11.

⁶⁶ Titze, 254.

⁶⁷ Gladwell.

to match or compete with the larger voices; however, in that scenario she is the more lyrical voice type. The same is true for *zwischenfach* voices. Though they can be difficult to understand, teach and market, they, more than most other *Fachs*, can execute a great many roles in a number of contexts. That flexibility summarizes their greatest appeal.

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APPENDIX A

INTERNAL REVIEW EXEMPT APPROVAL FORM

A Study of the *Zwischenfach* Voice and Voice Classifications

2011 June 13

Dear _____:

I am a doctoral student under the direction of Professor Kay Norton in the Department of Music at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study on the phenomenon of the *zwischenfach* voice and voice classifications.

I am inviting you to participate by answering, in your own words, a few relevant questions via email or postal mail via the enclosed SASE. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview or your participation in the project at any time.

Your participation in this research is extremely valuable and you would offer a unique perspective in the singing field. Your answers would bring realistic emphasis to prior research. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts involved with your participation.

Your responses will be confidential to the readers of this research. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used. Results will only be shared in the aggregate form.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at:

Dr. Kay Norton
Music W206
School of Music, Arizona State University
Kay.norton@asu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please let me know if you are willing to be part of the study.

I look forward to hearing about and documenting your experiences in the professional singing world!

Thank you for your time.
Sincerely,

Jennifer Allen

APPENDIX B
KEY TO SUBJECTS QUESTIONED

Subjects Questioned:

European Casting Director.....Subject A
American Casting DirectorSubject B
Emerging American Mezzo-SopranoSubject C
Mid-career European Mezzo-SopranoSubject D
American Stage Director.....Subject E
American Arts Administrator (opera).....Subject F
Emerging American Composer.....Subject G

APPENDIX C
QUESTION BANK AND SUBJECT RESPONSES

Questions for Interviewees

1. Have you always studied and trained as mezzo-soprano? Did you encounter any feedback from teachers, coaches or opera directors that you may not be a mezzo? If so, what was their reasoning?
2. How old were you when you determined your current voice type?
3. How would you identify where you currently are in your career (mid-career working mezzo-soprano, late-career coach & accompanist, mid-career casting director, emerging soprano, etc.)?
4. How important is it for a singer to distinguish herself as either a mezzo or soprano in an audition?
5. Do you often see *Fach* mislabeling occurring in your auditions?
6. How relevant is age - of both the singer you are considering and your own when you make your decisions?
7. Do you believe there is an appropriate age for the exploration of the *zwischenfach* voice or the designation of *zwischenfach* repertoire?
8. How willing are you to accept the idea of a *zwischen* voice as suitable for your purposes as a conductor or agent?
9. Is there any specific role(s) that come to mind when you think about the *zwischenfach* voice?
10. Please rank the following criteria in order of importance during your casting process:
 - Looks
 - Reputation
 - Quality of voice
 - Voice type
 - Acting skills
11. Do you feel that your ranking is consistent with what you have encountered in your travels both here in North American and abroad?
12. Do the characterizations in lyric repertoire (e.g., Zerlina, Despina) in your productions affect how you will cast voice types in specific roles?
13. Do you believe the role/composer determines the voice or do you feel free to take some liberty when casting, if the score/orchestration allows?

14. Grace Bumbry and Jessye Norman are two famous examples of successful *zwischen* voices. However, they were also quite dramatic voices. Women on the lyric side of the soprano spectrum, such as Cecilia Bartoli have experimented with switching voice types. Do you believe success as a *zwischen* depends on being more dramatic rather than lyric?
15. Please feel free to provide any additional insights you have on the topic. Your opinions are greatly appreciated and extremely valuable.

Questionnaire for Subject A, European Casting Director

1. How would you identify where you currently are in your career (mid-career working mezzo-soprano, late-career coach & accompanist, mid-career casting director, emerging soprano, etc.)?
Mid-/late career.
2. How important is it for a singer to distinguish herself as either a mezzo or soprano in an audition?
By choosing the 1st audition aria to sing and listing some more of her favorites, she can give a hint of what she thinks is best for her. My job is to listen with “big ears” and maybe “hear” her sing certain roles that she may never have thought she could sing.
3. Do you often see *Fach* mislabeling occurring in your auditions?
Yes. But these singers are mostly in the beginning with their carrier.
4. How relevant is age - of both the singer you are considering and your own when you make your decisions?
Depends...If the singer is to perform a young person, I think it would be great to find a person who is at least “bühnenjung”. Sometimes it is not possible and in that case I can only hope for good imagination understanding and good will from the audience...There is no way of finding a 15 year old Butterfly; they are all over 30. My “Ausgangspunkt” is always the voice. In my position age means a lot of experience ☺ (did I understand the question correctly, I wonder...)
5. Do you believe there is an appropriate age for the exploration of the *zwischenfach* voice or the designation of *zwischenfach* repertoire?
Zwischenfach –the way I think of it- often requires a fairly big voice together with a large ambitus, and these the very young singers don’t normally have. The roles that “Zs” sing are often accompanied by heavy orchestration, lots of middle range, so she needs a good technic, she has to be clever in dividing her energy and has to have experience enough not to “get carried away” while singing the role.
6. How willing are you to accept the idea of a *zwischen* voice as suitable for your purposes as a conductor, director or agent?
[Subject submitted no response]
7. Is there any specific role(s) that come to mind when you think about the *zwischenfach* voice?

Rusalka: Fremde Fürstin, Walküre: Sieglinde, Lohengrin: Ortrud, Carlos: Eboli, Ariadne: Komponist, La vida breve: Salud, Blaubart: Judith... This is very much also a matter of taste. Above I have listed only roles that I consider as "my Zwischenfach." As I said, I like to hear a high mezzo in the role of Zerlina, because that brings so much colour to the cast with only soprano voices. I could go on forever talking about casting, but my English sets limits... To explain all of my ideas I need lots of grammatical mistakes combined with lots of hand gestures ☺

8. Please rank the following criteria in order of importance during your casting process:
 - Voice type - 1
 - Quality of voice - 2
 - Acting skills - 3
 - Reputation - 4
 - Looks - 5

9. Do you feel that your ranking is consistent with what you have encountered in your travels both in your own country and abroad?

Abroad no, in my own house I try my utmost.

10. Do the characterizations in lyric repertoire (e.g., Zerlina, Despina) in your productions affect how you will cast voice types in specific roles?

Yes.

11. Do you believe the role/composer determines the voice or do you feel free to take some liberty when casting, if the score/orchestration allows?

I feel very free! There are not many composers who write well for voices. Wagner, Verdi and Puccini knew what they did, Mozart as well. Strauss must have hated singers, tenors in specific. When casting a role one also has to think of the acoustics of the house and the other singers in other roles. There are many "unwritten factors" and aspects in casting.

12. Grace Bumbry and Jessye Norman are two famous examples of successful *zwischen* voices. However, they were also quite dramatic voices. Women on the lyric side of the soprano spectrum, such as Cecilia Bartoli have experimented with switching voice types. Do you believe success as a *zwischen* depends on being more dramatic rather than lyric?

Yes. Often lyric mezzos are capable of doing soprano roles like for instance Zerlina and a dark voice type soprano with good middle range/chest voice can sing Carmen etc. But I don't think we are talking about z-fach in this case.

13. Please feel free to provide any additional insights you have on the topic.
Your opinions are greatly appreciated and extremely valuable.
[Subject submitted no response]

Questionnaire for Subject B, American Casting Director

1. How would you identify where you currently are in your career (mid-career working mezzo-soprano, late-career coach & accompanist, mid-career casting director, emerging soprano, etc.)?
I am in the prime of my career: chorusmaster and head of music staff for both Cincinnati and Arizona Opera. In addition, I play recitals throughout US and Europe, have just written some film music and have also conducted operas for various companies and universities.
2. How important is it for a singer to distinguish herself as either a mezzo or soprano in an audition?
The singer should identify herself by her repertoire. Some auditioners are confused by this, so list yourself as one or the other. The panel will see from your rep list that you are capable of both and will probably ask for a selection that represents this.
3. Do you often see *Fach* mislabeling occurring in your auditions?
Very often. People usually sing one FACH too heavy for their voice. In Germany the FACH system has become very subjective, varying from house to house, even from Intendant to Intendant.
4. How relevant is age - of both the singer you are considering and your own when you make your decisions?
Age is very relevant. As the body changes, usually so does the voice. Sing what suits your voice at a particular age, but be ready to adapt to another role if you need to.
5. Do you believe there is an appropriate age for the exploration of the *zwischenfach* voice or the designation of *zwischenfach* repertoire?
Zwischenfach rep is usually a stepping stone to higher more dramatic rep or a designation of a voice that has strength in the middle and upper-middle range. Usually the late 20's or early 30's are periods when this is most successfully explored.
6. How willing are you to accept the idea of a *zwischen* voice as suitable for your purposes as a conductor or agent?
I feel that Zwischenfach singers are invaluable for many roles (Santuzza included. Other roles especially Jungliche Wagner and Strauss need the weight and color these voices have to offer.
7. Is there any specific role(s) that come to mind when you think about the *zwischenfach* voice?

Santuzza, der Komponist, Maddalena, Dorabella, Amneris, some Valkuries, Stephano, Siebel, Eva, Elsa.

8. Please rank the following criteria in order of importance during your casting process:
 - Looks
 - Reputation
 - Quality of voice
 - Voice type
 - Acting skills

Quality of voice, reputation, looks, acting skills, voice type.
9. Do you feel that your ranking is consistent with what you have encountered in your travels both in your home country and abroad?

In Europe YES, in the US, looks have taken precedence at times over every other attribute a singer may have, a very MOVIE/TV driven approach.
10. Do you believe the role/composer determines the voice or do you feel free to take some liberty when casting, if the score/orchestration allows?

I feel that if the artist is excellent in the role, vocally and dramatically, he or she should be cast.
11. Grace Bumbry and Jessye Norman are two famous examples of successful *zwischen* voices. However, they were also quite dramatic voices. Women on the lyric side of the soprano spectrum, such as Cecilia Bartoli have experimented with switching voice types. Do you believe success as a *zwischen* depends on being more dramatic rather than lyric?

I feel that both lyric and dramatic voices can be successful in this repertoire, if the artist chooses the proper role. Bartoli, of course, is now becoming too dramatic, yielding to the pressure of her critics to prove that she does not have a small voice. Her recent attempt at NORMA is almost unbelievable to me.
12. Please feel free to provide any additional insights you have on the topic. Your opinions are greatly appreciated and extremely valuable.

The biggest problem facing artists, especially young singers, is the pressure that is put on them to roles that are beyond them at the beginning stages of their career. Agents, opera companies, and most voice teachers are guilty of this. Look at the careers of most artists that have stretched over decades. They started with more lyric roles then progressed in a careful fashion to bigger repertoire.

Questionnaire for Subject C, American Mid-Career Mezzo-soprano

1. Have you always studied and trained as mezzo-soprano? Did you encounter any feedback from teachers, coaches or opera directors that you may not be a mezzo? If so, what was their reasoning?

I have always trained as a mezzo. Only once has a colleague mentioned to me that I could be a soprano. They heard me warming up before a show once and commented on how “easy” my top sounded. I, of course, told them that was funny and said that I could never “hang out” up there like you have to when you’re a soprano.

2. How old were you when you determined your current voice type?

It was in undergrad, so maybe 20 years old.

3. How would you identify where you currently are in your career (mid-career working mezzo-soprano, late-career coach & accompanist, mid-career casting director, emerging soprano, etc.)?

I would say mid-career working mezzo-soprano.

4. How important is it for a singer to distinguish herself as either a mezzo or soprano in an audition?

I think it’s pretty important. Nowadays, the people we audition for don’t want to think too much when making decisions. They want to be told who you are and what roles you should sing FOR them. They are not too creative these days, so determining your voice type and what YOU want to sing is a huge part of auditioning.

5. Do you often see *Fach* mislabeling occurring in auditions?

*Sometimes. It’s tough for mezzos because we often feel like we have to be good at both the pants roles and the dramatic roles so we can be hired as much as possible. And that doesn’t always apply to everyone. I do believe these days singers are getting better, because we have more help from mentors, at picking a *Fach* and sticking with it for a while.*

6. How relevant is age - of both the singer and the casting director – when you audition, in your opinion?

It is relevant when it comes to audition repertoire in my opinion. You should not be singing things too big when your chords haven’t fully developed. I don’t care if you WILL be a dramatic soprano, stick to what is appropriate for right now. There is plenty of time to sing Wagner when you get older.

7. Do you believe there is an appropriate age for the exploration of the *zwischenfach* voice or the designation of *zwischenfach* repertoire?
I think it is a case-by-case thing. I just heard a 24 year old sing Carmen and it sounds pretty decent. Do I think she should've waited a few years? Yes, but everyone is different and it's a tricky thing. I wish I had more experience with it to give a definite answer.
8. How willing do you think agents or conductors are to accept the idea of a *zwischen* voice as suitable for their purposes?
I think they are probably pretty willing because if they have one person who can sing Carmen and then Cherubino or Rosina, it's cheaper than hiring three different people for each.
9. Is there any specific role(s) that come to mind when you think about the *zwischenfach* voice?
Definitely Carmen, and Dalila.
10. Based upon your experiences, please rank the following criteria in order of importance during the audition process:
 Looks: 2
 Reputation: 3
 Quality of voice: 1
 Voice type: 5
 Acting skills: 4
11. Grace Bumbry and Jessye Norman are two famous examples of successful *zwischen* voices. However, they were also quite dramatic voices. Women on the lyric side of the soprano spectrum, such as Cecilia Bartoli have experimented with switching voice types. Do you believe success as a *zwischen* depends on being more dramatic rather than lyric?
I really think it depends on the singer. There a lot of sopranos singing Rosina, which was meant for a mezzo, so I think it depends on the taste of whoever is hiring and what the singer can produce.
12. Please feel free to provide any additional insights you have on the topic. Your opinions are greatly appreciated and extremely valuable.
[Subject submitted no response]

Questionnaire for Subject D, European Mezzo-soprano, Teacher and Coach

1. Have you always studied and trained as mezzo-soprano?
No
2. Did you encounter any feedback from teachers, coaches or opera directors that you may not be a mezzo? If so, what was their reasoning?
Not enough focus in low range, too easy high notes (it was in fact a problem of vocal technique and maturity, years later, when my voice was ready, no one told me anymore that I was a soprano)
3. How old were you when you determined your current voice type?
I began studying singing at 19 in Paris and teachers told me that I was a mezzo. At 20 I went to Italy to enter in the Conservatorio G. Verdi of Milan, and there I studied as a soprano until I was 26!! When I fortunately met Maestro Arrigo Pola who told me that I was absolutely not a soprano but a “mezzosoprano di agilità” (means mezzo coloratura) with vocal technique to improve. I began to study with him and to fix my voice.
4. How would you identify where you currently are in your career (mid-career working mezzo-soprano, late-career coach & accompanist, mid-career casting director, emerging soprano, etc.)?
Mid-career working mezzo-soprano
5. How important is it for a singer to distinguish herself as either a mezzo or soprano in an audition?
It depends if the audition is for a precise role or if it is a general audition. If the audition is for a role, the main point is that the role suits to the singer. There are many roles that can be sung by both Fachs. If it is a general audition, it is better to distinguish herself as mezzo or as soprano in order to give securities to the jury. It is enough to write the mention “mezzo soprano” or “soprano” after his name and then to sing the best we can ☺
6. Do you often see *Fach* mislabeling occurring in your auditions?
Yes, but more wrong repertoire for the Fach than Fach mislabeling.
7. How relevant is age - of both the singer and the casting director – when you audition?
Not relevant. Especially now that many important conductors are babies. (enfants prodigues)

8. Do you believe there is an appropriate age for the exploration of the *zwischenfach* voice or the designation of *zwischenfach* repertoire?
The repertoire must always be in coherence with the maturity of the voice. The age is not relevant. Some singers can be ready at 25 others need much more time. Especially mezzo-sopranos...[it is] really different from one singer to another.
9. How willing do you think agents or conductors are to accept the idea of a *zwischen* voice as suitable for their purposes?
I think that what conductors and agents want is to have a singer that is credible in the role they propose [...credible in the role that they portray] him. Fach is not relevant. There are many mezzo-soprano who switch between the 2 Fachs. In fact the word mezzo-soprano says itself: In the word Mezzo-soprano, there is the word Soprano. There was a very interesting article in a French music magazine where Karine Deshayes explained very well this point of view.
10. Is there any specific role(s) that come to mind when you think about the *zwischenfach* voice?
Charlotte, Favorita, Santuzza, Cendrillon (Massenet), Marguerite of La Damnation de Faust. Voice are mutating. 50 years ago the Mezzo[s] were different. Today, the majority mezzo-sopranos have a lot of "Soprano" in their voice.
11. Based upon your experiences, please rank the following criteria in order of importance during the audition process:
 Looks 3
 Reputation 4
 Quality of voice 1 + singing technique. A talented voice is not enough
 Voice type 5
 Acting skills 2
12. Do you feel that your ranking is consistent with what you have encountered in your travels?
NO, Actually, I notice that the priority is to have a good-look, then, acting skills, then reputation then the rest.
13. Do you believe the role/composer determines the voice or do you feel free to take some liberty when casting, if the score/orchestration allows?
Cherubino is written as a Soprano on the score ☺
14. Grace Bumbry and Jessye Norman are two famous examples of successful *zwischen* voices. However, they were also quite dramatic voices. Women

on the lyric side of the soprano spectrum, such as Cecilia Bartoli have experimented with switching voice types. Do you believe success as a *zwischen* depends on being more dramatic rather than lyric?

I think that we have to sing the good [correct] repertoire for us. Could be some roles for mezzo, and some for soprano. See Veronique Gens or Anna Caterina Antonacci. There are a lot of actual examples.

15. Please feel free to provide any additional insights you have on the topic. Your opinions are greatly appreciated and extremely valuable.
[Subject submitted no response]

Questionnaire for Subject E, American Stage Director

Let me preface all my answers by saying that in the opera world, I am strictly a "stage director." As such, I generally have no casting authority whatsoever. Casting is done by the general manager of the opera company, sometimes (but not always) in conjunction with the musical director, who may or may not be the conductor. This is the model in most American mid-size to large opera companies. Stage directors are not given any voice in casting. We usually arrive at the first day of rehearsal without ever having met the singers.

I understand this is different in Europe, where the stage director wields a considerable amount of power. It is also different in small opera companies, where the stage director may in fact be the general manager or is at least invited into the casting process.

I am basing my answers on 1) my observations of what goes on in the opera world, 2) my experience as a theatre director, where I do have casting authority, and 3) my experience in small opera companies, where I am involved in the casting process.

1. How would you identify where you currently are in your career (mid-career working mezzo-soprano, late-career coach & accompanist, mid-career casting director, emerging soprano, etc.)?
I am a well-established theatre director with 30 years of experience. I entered the world of opera only 14 years ago, so I consider myself mid-career in this world.
2. How important is it for a singer to distinguish herself as either a mezzo or soprano in an audition?
In my experience in casting at larger opera companies, the line seems very rigid. A singer is one or the other. I have occasionally suggested someone for a role and been dismissed as a neophyte because the singer in question was the "wrong" Fach. That being said, I have witnessed many of my students in the last decade switching Fächer, so I myself doubt the lines are really that rigid.
3. Do you often see Fach mislabeling occurring in your auditions?
I accept the Fach designations that are handed to me.
4. How relevant is age - of both the singer you are considering and your own when you make your decisions?
Ability to act the role is far more important to me than the age of the singer. If a singer is very good for a role, I will direct around that singer. For instance, I was once given a young, handsome man as Dulcamara in L'elisir d'amore. Why try to make this stud

into the fat buffo Dulcamara usually is? Instead, I made him a Harold Hill-type romancer who ended up with Giannetta at the end. I just coached a 40-year old woman as Manon. Her acting was so good that I could see her as the 16-year old naïve with the wicked woman inside her waiting to get out. For me, acting will always trump age. As to my age – not sure what you mean by the question. Since, if you shook me awake in the middle of the night and asked me my age, I'd probably say, "Eight," I don't really think much about my own age in casting.

5. Do you believe there is an appropriate age for the exploration of the *zwischenfach* voice or the designation of *zwischenfach* repertoire?
I do not know the physiology of the voice well enough to answer that. I observe in my students that they often begin exploring switching Fächer in their late twenties.
6. Is there any specific role(s) that come to mind when you think about the *zwischenfach* voice?
Rosina in Il barbiere seems to me a prime example. I've done the opera with both a soprano and a mezzo, and I see the advantages of each.
7. Please rank the following criteria in order of importance during your casting process:
 - Looks
Second most important. But not just "good" looks. A face and body with presence and character are of primary importance to me. Bland catalogue good looks with bland personality are tedious.
 - Reputation
Third most important. But I don't mean reputation in terms of "fame" or the critics' opinion. I mean reputation in terms of feedback from people whom I trust who have worked with the singer.
 - Quality of voice
Fourth most important. And for me it's purely subjective – if I find the voice pleasing to listen to. I offer only my opinion in the casting process and then let the musical experts decide.
 - Voice type
I don't get involved here at all. That call is usually made long before I'm included.
 - Acting skills
The most important for me.

8. Do you feel that your ranking is consistent with what you have encountered in your travels both here in North American and abroad?
No. Acting is generally not considered at all by general managers and musical directors. I venture that most of them judge on voice type first, quality of voice second, and reputation third.
9. Do the characterizations in lyric repertoire (e.g., Zerlina, Despina) in your productions affect how you will cast voice types in specific roles?
Again, not a call I'm asked to make. But I definitely hear casting people talking about someone as being right for the "-netta and -nina" roles. So I know that plays a role in casting.
10. Do you believe the role/composer determines the voice or do you feel free to take some liberty when casting, if the score/orchestration allows?
Again, I'd leave that to the musical experts.
11. Grace Bumbry and Jessye Norman are two famous examples of successful *zwischen* voices. However, they were also quite dramatic voices. Women on the lyric side of the soprano spectrum, such as Cecilia Bartoli have experimented with switching voice types. Do you believe success as a *zwischen* depends on being more dramatic rather than lyric?
Totally unqualified to answer this question. Don't know enough about voice or the repertoire.
12. Please feel free to provide any additional insights you have on the topic. Your opinions are greatly appreciated and extremely valuable.
[Subject submitted no response]

Questionnaire for Subject F, Opera Administration

1. How would you identify where you currently are in your career (mid-career working mezzo-soprano, late-career coach & accompanist, mid-career casting director, emerging soprano, etc.)?
Mid-career arts administrator
2. How important is it for a singer to distinguish herself as either a mezzo or soprano in an audition?
Important. Often singers are chosen to be heard only for specific roles. For example, in our last round of auditions at Arizona Opera we did not hear any mezzos, as we had no roles to fill for that voice type. Also it's distracting if a singer is mislabeled.
3. Do you often see *Fach* mislabeling occurring in your auditions?
Not often, but it has occurred. More often the repertoire is inappropriate for the voice. Voice types are usually labeled very generally on a resume.
4. How relevant is age - of both the singer you are considering and your own when you make your decisions?
It depends. Obviously for a Young Artist Program or tour for children it's very important to be within the "emerging artist" age bracket. For main stage roles it doesn't seem to sway the decision- costumes and wigs do amazing things- unless the voice needs a quality that is age-reliant.
5. Do you believe there is an appropriate age for the exploration of the *zwischenfach* voice or the designation of *zwischenfach* repertoire?
I'm sure there is but I couldn't say when that would be.
6. How willing are you to accept the idea of a *zwischen* voice as suitable for your purposes as a conductor, director or agent?
I'm not at all willing to deal with that term. We often deal with non-musicians, and generic labeling of voice types is sufficient and uncomplicated.
7. Is there any specific role(s) that come to mind when you think about the *zwischenfach* voice?
No.
8. Please rank the following criteria in order of importance during your casting process:
Looks 4
Reputation 1

Quality of voice 2
Voice type 3
Acting skills 5

9. Do you feel that your ranking is consistent with what you have encountered in your travels both here in North American and abroad?
I haven't really auditioned anywhere except Arizona and New York City, but my colleagues were well traveled and more experience, and it was consistent between them.
10. Do the characterizations in lyric repertoire (e.g., Zerlina, Despina) in your productions affect how you will cast voice types in specific roles?
Not really applicable for me.
11. Do you believe the role/composer determines the voice or do you feel free to take some liberty when casting, if the score/orchestration allows?
I hired a man to play Giannetta in Elixir of Love... so yes, I'm willing to take liberties, but that's for student performances.
12. Grace Bumbry and Jessye Norman are two famous examples of successful *zwischen* voices. However, they were also quite dramatic voices. Women on the lyric side of the soprano spectrum, such as Cecilia Bartoli have experimented with switching voice types. Do you believe success as a *zwischen* depends on being more dramatic rather than lyric?
Sorry, I can't really comment on that.
13. Please feel free to provide any additional insights you have on the topic. Your opinions are greatly appreciated and extremely valuable.
I'm not a voice teacher or conductor, so some of these questions don't completely apply. However, for all practical purposes I was a part of the audition process for a major opera company, both for main stage and studio artist auditions. Throughout that process I've never seen an artist "pre-screened" due to their listed voice type. Sometimes the directors would disagree with a voice classification, but as far as I know it didn't have bearing on whether or not the artist was hired.

Questionnaire for Subject G, Composer

1. How would you identify where you currently are in your career (mid-career working mezzo-soprano, late-career coach & accompanist, mid-career composer, emerging soprano, etc.)?
I would say that I am an emerging composer.
2. How important is it for someone to distinguish herself as either a mezzo or soprano when you write for a specific singer?
I find it less important that she identify herself by specific Fach. When I am preparing to write, I ask what roles they love to sing, what song repertoire is most comfortable, and try to map out a tessitura that seems comfortable. Sometimes it lines up well with a specific voice type; other times it does not. Having teetered on voice type edges myself, I identify with the singer's struggle to find repertoire that suits her particular strengths.
3. How relevant is age - of both the singer you are considering and your own when you make your decisions?
I do believe that some younger singers aren't as well equipped to bring out the full expressiveness of a given text. I think this is a combination of technique still in development and a lack of life experience to truly relate to the text. Picking appropriate text is paramount. Age matters less as far as picking pitches; if I'm writing for a particular singer, I'm molding the contours of my melodies to the sweet spots in their voice, no matter what their age. Where age does matter, it seems, is in length; younger singers don't have quite the same stamina, so I try to keep that in mind when writing for a younger singer. Younger singers also may not have had as much experience with post-tonal and atonal melodies, so when writing for them, I tend to write a more straightforward, almost tonal melody over a more complicated or crunchy accompaniment.
4. Do you believe there is an appropriate age for the designation of *zwischenfach* repertoire?
*I think the main problem is that people do not fit into Fachs, roles do. I do not think there is an appropriate age for *zwischenfach* repertoire. Because many of the roles that can be sung by *zwischen* voice tend to be heavier roles, backed up by a larger orchestra, there is an impression that it is a designation for older singers. In fact, some roles like Rosina (*Barber of Seville*), the *Komponist* (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), and both *Fiordiligi* and *Dorabella* (*Così*) can be (and are) tackled by younger singers that*

teeter between soprano and mezzo designations. I think very few teachers would give Santuzza to a 19-year-old.

5. How willing are you to accept the idea of a *zwischen* voice as suitable for your purposes as a composer?

I am very willing to hear zwischen voices in my repertoire.

6. Is there any specific role(s) that come to mind when you think about the *zwischenfach* voice?

Rosina (Barber of Seville), the Komponist (Ariadne auf Naxos), and both Fiordiligi and Dorabella (Cosi) can be tackled by younger singers. Many of these “younger” roles get classified into the lyric mezzo repertoire. The Mother in Hansel and Gretel, are great zwischen roles. Santuzza (Cavalleria), Leonore (Fidelio), and Melisande, I think, are all roles that could go either way for experienced singers. From heavier rep, Ortrud (Lohengrin) would be a good zwischenfach role.

7. If applicable, please rank the following criteria in order of importance during your composition process:

Looks – 5

Reputation – 4

Quality of voice – 1

Voice type – 3

Acting skills – 2

8. Do you believe the role/song/composer determines the type of voice for the piece of music? Or rather, there is some liberty with regard to whomever may chose to sing your music in the future?

I think the choices the composer makes can certainly limit the number of people who could feasibly sing his/her music, but as long as the result is a good one, I think that composers are happy to have music performed. Whether the girlfriend’s role is sung by a “mezzo” or a “soprano” is less important than the role being sung, and sung convincingly, by a singer of any flavor.

9. Grace Bumbry and Jessye Norman are two famous examples of successful *zwischen* voices. However, they were also quite dramatic voices. Women on the lyric side of the soprano spectrum, such as Cecilia Bartoli have experimented with switching voice types. Do you believe success as a *zwischen* depends on being more dramatic rather than lyric?

I think success as a zwischen depends on having roles than can accommodate one’s voice, and the repertoire available today (both in terms of repertoire written and repertoire chosen for performance by major opera houses) is more accommodating to

switches in the dramatic realm. Perhaps with Bartoli's success, we will see more change in how operas are cast and how composers choose to write for singers.

10. Please feel free to provide any additional insights you have on the topic. Your opinions are greatly appreciated and extremely valuable.

Much of this conversation has focused on opera, rather than song repertoire, as we are discussing issues of Fach, an operatic invention. It is important to note, however, that the song recital is much more flexible and accommodating in this aspect. For one thing, it is fairly easy to transpose individual songs to suit a voice, less so to rework entire portions of operas. It would be interesting to see composers return to the "number" opera, rather than through-composed forms. I think if some new operas returned to that model, we would see an upsurge in zwischenfach roles because individual pieces could be tweaked, or there could be substitute pieces available for performers. Perhaps by increasing availability of the works to a wider range of singers, the composers, in turn, might see a greater number of performances.

APPENDIX D
SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Summary of Questions and Responses

Not Addressed in the Body of the Paper

Over a dozen questions were created for this research. Though every subject did not answer every question, the compilation of data received offered a beneficial and exclusive insight into modern opinions regarding casting decisions and operatic career choices. Below is a summary of the responses that were not directly addressed within the body of the paper.

The two mezzo-sopranos questioned were aware of the complex nature of their *Fach*, particularly in regard to presenting themselves to agents and conductors. When asked if they believed auditors are willing to hear their voices with any flexibility (regarding *Fach*), they both confirmed that, in general, most companies do not want to “think too much,” when making casting decisions. Despite the potential a voice may grow into or encompass different *Fachs*, the mezzo-sopranos confirmed that most people they for whom they auditioned want an excellent voice, as is, with no question to its current ability. Interestingly enough, they both hinted that, if a slightly less stellar voice is available that is capable of performing multiple roles, which would in turn save the company money, there is a good chance that second option will trump the quality of voice.

Both singers also address the issue of training as they were developing their careers. Experience is a consistent theme throughout their answers, in regards to a number of career choices: confidence, *Fach* decisions, and most notably, the recognition that repertoire and casting decisions are more of a case-by-case basis than one might think. Many factors led them to these decisions,

including numerous auditions, various mentors and coaches, their own experiences as teaching as teachers and coaches, and most importantly, exposure to a variety of performances and rehearsals.

Decisions from the administrative standpoint seem to be more rigid, guided more by the boundaries of budget and reputation. The two subjects who had no artistic influence in the casting process (i.e. the staging director was able to occasionally voice opinions, but not able to make any actual decisions) both recognized a pattern of exclusion based on *Fach* casting calls. But this exclusion was not necessarily intentional. Subject F states that she had never heard of an artist being “‘pre-screened’ due to their listed voice type.” Rather, it is often a casual dismissal of suggestions or potential singers for lead roles because they are not “‘known” as the corresponding voice type.