

“Nurturing the Voice: Techniques and Exercises that Guide the Voice through a Healthy Transition”

Lisa Butcher M.M.(voice), M.A. CCC-SLP

Lions Voice Clinic – M Health



&

Anita L. Kozan, Ph.D. CCC-SLP

Kozan Clinic for Voice Speech and Spirit, LLC

VOICE and SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT



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Mrs. Lucia Lucas

Tulsa Opera's 2018-2019 season will feature a bit of history, when the company will present Mozart's "Don Giovanni" with transgender baritone Lucia Lucas in the title role (5/2019).



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmdiCWIU5lc>

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Dr. Anita L. Kozan

- Specializing in care of transgender speaking and singing voice – 40+ years
- Author of chapter, The Singing Voice, in Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Transsexual Client, Singular Publishing, 2006, 2012, 3rd Ed. 2018 (in press – Kozan, Hammond)
- Accomplished singer, songwriter, alto sax, acoustic and electronic keyboards

Dr. Anita L. Kozan

- Diversity Champion Award - American Speech Language Hearing Assn.(2009)
- Lavender Magazine Pride Award (2009)
- Relax and Breathe: Vol. I: CD of Vocal Exercises for developing speaking and singing voice, and breath support
- Presentations at WPATH, USPATH, ASHA, and state and local associations

Ms. Lisa Butcher



We are dedicated to evaluating, treating, and researching all aspects of voice use and disorders, and educating individuals about the human voice.

We provide state of the art voice care, and specialize in treating singers, actors, other voice professionals, transgender and non-binary clients.

<http://www.lionsvoiceclinic.umn.edu/>



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Ms. Lisa Butcher



Lisa Butcher, M.M. (voice), M.A., CCC/SLP; Vocologist



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M Health: Comprehensive Gender Care

Using a coordinated approach, our team of providers have extensive training and experience in a variety of specialties including primary care, mental health, sexual health, plastic surgery, urology, gynecology, reproductive endocrinology, and speech-language pathology. We are also the only healthcare system in the metro area to offer genital surgeries to transgender and non-binary patients.

Our dedicated care coordinator understands the community and will be your point of contact and advocate throughout your transition. He has knowledge of transgender issues, sexuality, societal expectations and medical institutions to help your care team deliver a positive experience, tailored to your needs.



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Considerations when working with transgender (TG) & non-binary (NB) singers:

The singer leads the lesson; they are in charge.

- 1) Work with this population is *NOT* new, but what's exciting is that for the first time more transgender and non-binary singers feel able to live an authentic life, so we will likely encounter more TG and NB singers. Therefore, we should trust ourselves to use many of the same teaching techniques we already use. Go with your gut!!!
- 2) It's ok to be open with your transgender and non-binary singers about what you do and do not know. Encourage them to talk to you and educate you, as needed. A running dialogue is best.
- 3) You DO NOT have to be, and SHOULD NOT be the authority for all aspects of their transition.
 - “It takes a village”, and we should rely on that village.
 - Therefore, talk to the singer about connecting with (at a minimum) their therapist and speech-language pathologist. Defer to all of their health professionals, as needed (ie: primary care provider, endocrinologist, surgeon, etc).
- 4) Private information MUST stay private.
 - These singers need us fierce allies and supporters, as their transition is an especially delicate time in their lives.

More available on “Do’s and Don’t’s” handout.



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Optimal Respiratory Mechanics:

1. Our TG and NB singing students will have varying degrees of gender dysphoria. Some may have spent a lot of time disconnected from their body; some may have avoided looking or touching their bodies at all.

Exercise 1:

- Take time to explore breathing with them with a focus on the *ribcage, shoulders, throat, mouth, eyes, and brows*, rather than on their belly and chest movement.
- Using a body scan can help put the focus on areas of tension, rather than on the body.
 - Lying supine on the floor or massage table, direct the singer to allow gentle, low breaths and feel the ribcage expand. They can also note tension in different areas of the face, jaw, tongue, throat/ neck, shoulders, ribcage, stomach. (BTW: Anita has a great CD with this on it!)

Optimal Respiratory Mechanics:

Exercise 2:

- Bend forward with elbows on the knees. Feel low breath and expansion of the ribcage; exhale with an easy “Shhhh” out.

OR

- Feel breath while bending forward over a yoga ball, feeling back ribcage expansion

Optimal Respiratory Mechanics:

Things to keep in mind

2. Some trans men, genderfluid & non-binary singers may bind (a.k.a. chest bind):
 - It is NOT appropriate to request that they take it off while working on their singing voice. Consider it like any other undergarment; you would never ask a singer to take off their underwear before singing. Instead, we must work around the binder, and maybe request that when possible they wear a smaller one that does not involve the majority of the torso.
 - You could ask them to try some of the breathing exercises at home, if you truly feel that would be helpful to practice without a bind.
 - It may helpful to know how many hours it is worn, which will give you an idea of their overall respiratory mechanics during daily activities.

Upper Body Stretches for Trans Men Who Bind (*and good for all singers*)

Frances Reed, LMT – Freed Bodyworks

- Catch stretch
- Clavical massage/stretch
- Ribcage stretch
- Armpits

Information provided and modified by Christie Block at the *Transgender Voice and Communication Training for Voice Clinicians* (April 2018).

Oral-Facial Exercises for Trans Women who have Facial Feminization Surgery (FFS) (and good for all singers)

- Raise eyebrows
- Emotional faces – Shock, anger, delight
- Scrunch up nose
- Show upper teeth
- Smile then pucker
- Puff out cheeks
- Hold an exaggerated /o/ lip posture
- Hold an exaggerated /i/ lip posture
- Kissing sound
- Run tongue over teeth in a circular motion (then reverse)

Information provided and modified by Christie Block at the *Transgender Voice and Communication Training for Voice Clinicians* (April 2018).

Learn More (The Int'l Center for Transgender Care):
<http://thetranscenter.com/transwomen/facial-feminization-ffs/>

WARMING-UP & COOLING DOWN

Range:

As we pointed out with Lucia Lucas, not all transfeminine singers decide to modify their voices. However, others may experience vocal dysphoria if they are asked to use their lower range. So, find out what the singer is comfortable with. Be aware of vocal dysphoria, and be respectful if they prefer not to use portions of their range.

Remember: THE SINGER IS IN CHARGE.

1) Semi-occluded vocal tract (SOVT) exercises:

Most popular options:

- Straws, straw phonation with water, lip trills, raspberries, hum/hun, V, or Z (to name a few)

Why?

- Could be used “calibrate” the voice throughout the day.
- Gentle “warm-up”, and also “cool down” to reduce voice fatigue
- Excellent for all singers of any age
- They’re fun! And a fun way to explore the transitioning voice in a gentle way.

WARMING-UP & COOLING DOWN

SOVT exercises, cont:

What do I do? Anything really, but I like:

- 1) Sustained phonation
- 2) Gentle glides (1-2-1, 1-3-1, 1-2-3-2-1)
- 3) Messa di voce: sustained or “spooky ghost”

Can move up and down by $\frac{1}{2}$ steps, and also increase complexity when ready.

WARMING-UP & COOLING DOWN

What do SOVT exercises do?

- Described by Titze in 2006, an SOVT introduces some sort of narrowing somewhere along the vocal tract.
- This narrowing can occur at any supraglottic point along the vocal tract.
- The result is a neutralized level of adduction that is not too pressed, or breathy; balance is restored.
- SOVT's facilitate easy phonation, and are executed at low volumes, so they are an easy way to work with the transitioning voice.

Youtube: 1) Dr. Titze and Staws

2) Tom Burke “Straws will save your life”.

WARMING-UP & COOLING DOWN

- In her chapter on the singing voice, Dr. Kozan's first couple of vocalise techniques are not only good warm-ups, but also allow for easy onset phonation, which may be especially helpful for the the transmasculine or non-binary singers who tend to demonstrate hard glottic attacks, and an overly heavy, pressed voice as they work to find a more masculine quality.

Exercises:

1. YAWN-SIGH using /h/ +vowels:

- Descending 5-4-3-2-1, moving out from modal pitch
- “Ha, Hey, He, Ho, Who...”

2. SENTENCES WITH /h/ & /wh/ WORDS:

Working around modal range with 1-3-1, or maybe more complex 3-5-1:

- Hamburger helper
- Hunt on the hill
- Helga has horses
- Why oh why

Pitch Norms

- Currently, there is no research specifically for TG and NB singers' pitch norms/ singing range. For the singer, we can use what we know of classification of registers by vocal range from resources like Clifton Ware's "*Basics of Vocal Pedagogy*"(1997) adapted from Titze (1994), Large (1973), to guide us in our thinking of different voice types (ie: Bass, Baritone, Tenor, Alto, Mezzosoprano, and Soprano)
- For the transfeminine speaking voice, it may be helpful to know these comparative conversational ranges put together by Christie Block, SLP at the NY Speech & Voice Lab:
 - Cis women: F0 averages 185-224 Hz (approx. Gb3-Bb3)
 - Trans women: F0, recognized as female 155-187 Hz (approx. Eb3-Gb3)
 - Cis men: F0 ave 107-129 Hz (approx. Ab2-C3)
- Further, in their book "*The Voice Book for Trans and Non-Binary People*"(2017), Matthew Mills and Gillie Stoneham, note a gender-neutral starting pitches for the speaking voice to be between D3 and A3.
- Since I will be discussing the Transfeminine voice, I will also note that Mills and Stoneham also suggest the "typical female-identified range for speech as C3 to E4".

THE TRANSFEMININE SINGING VOICE:

Things to keep in mind

- It is important to regularly check-in about how the singer feels about her voice, progress and work.
- It is also very important to encourage open communication about their progress in speech-therapy (if they are in therapy for their speaking voice)
- Endocrinologists have long standing knowledge of how anti-androgens (ie: Spironolactone, or Cyproterone acetate) work to block testosterone, and the use of Estrogen (ie: estradiol, estriol and estrone) work to change the body.
- It is important to note that these hormone replacement therapies generally **do not** change the voice.

THE TRANSFEMININE SINGING VOICE:

Things to keep in mind

- Christie Block also noted that it is helpful to inquire about other medical/non-medical treatments that the singer may pursue (verbally at the Transgender Voice and Communication Training for Voice Clinicians, Chicago 4/2018).
 - For example: electrolysis of the face may not be a good idea right before a voice lesson where you will be asking the singer to drop her jaw.
- In his blog “*Creating Gender Liberatory Singing Spaces: A Transgender Voice Teacher’s Recommendations for working with transgender singers*” (10/9/2017), Eli Conley suggests some great questions that should be added to your new student intake. (See “Do’s and Don’ts Handout”)

THE TRANSFEMININE SINGING VOICE

In her dissertation, *“Teaching Transgender Singers”*(2017), Emerald Lessley mentions that one of her mentors, Dr. Kari Ragan of the U of Washington, approaches voice teaching by addressing the “Five systems of the Voice: Respiration, Phonation, Registration, Articulation, and Resonance. I like this idea, because is similar to what I have learned from Clifton Ware’s pedagogy book, on the vocal processes (Ch. 3), and how I will sometimes organize by thoughts regarding voice disorder patients.

With that in mind...

PHONATION

- SOVTs
- Easy onsets with aspirates, glides or voiceless consonants + vowel combinations are useful for connecting optimal breath flow with phonation.
- (ex: hay 1-3-1, moving up and down by ½ steps)

RESONATION (Enhancing the Tone)

- Chiaroscuro (light /i/ and dark /u/) can be helpful
- Combinations of /i-u-i-u/ can be used sustained or with small intervals
- Combine with registration isolation by identifying the passaggio, then working above, below, and then through the passaggio.

Exercise: Glissando moving up and down by ½ steps:

- “ni-i—ahhhhhhh” 1-2-3-2-1
- More advanced: 1-3-5; 5-4-3-2-1
- Don’t prolong notes; Keep it gliding and easy
- If there is any vocal fatigue, go back down to closer to modal range.
- “twang” can be helpful to reduce a focus that is too far back. Sometimes just even modeling, and tip of the tongue.

THE TRANSFEMININE SINGING VOICE

- ARTICULATION and RESONANCE
 - Resonant phonemes + vowels are again useful for the singing voice and also lend themselves to a more feminine sound and enhance forward focus.
 - Clear articulation with a forward tongue is also thought to be commonly associated with a more feminine sound.

THE TRANSMASCULINE VOICE

Dr. Anita L. Kozan



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THE TRANSMASCULINE VOICE

- *“Some T-men really want to have a beard. Others want the change in the shape of their body. Some men really want a deep voice. You take testosterone and then see what happens. Sometimes you get what you want but sometimes you don’t.”*
- (Participant in the Transgender Voices Festival, St. Paul, MN, 24 April 2004).
- Kozan, A. The Singing Voice (chapter) in *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Transsexual Client*, (2006, 2012), Adler, Hirsch & Mordaunt (Ed.), Plural Publishing, San Diego, Oxford, Sydney

THE TRANSMASCULINE SINGING VOICE

- Trans men have been seen for speaking and/or singing voice therapy because of overdriving the voice, due to
 - Speaking or singing at too low a pitch
 - Speaking at too loud a volume
 - Using increased vocal tension (pushing) to produce a more clear voice

THE TRANSMASCULINE SINGING VOICE

Dr. Alexandros N. Constansis

- Constansis, Alexandros N., (2009). Hybrid Vocal Personae. Doctoral Dissertation. U. of York, UK.(2009).
- Constansis, Alexandros N. (2008) *The Changing Female to Male (FTM) Voice – Radical Musicology* (Vol.3).
- Constansis, A.N. in Adler, Hirsch & Mordaunt, (Ed.). Chapter - The Female to Male Voice (Adler, Constansis & Van Borsel) in *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Transsexual Client*, 2nd Edition (2012), Plural Publishing, San Diego, Oxford, Sydney.
- Constansis, a classically trained singer and teacher of singing, designed research that investigated the effects of low doses of testosterone gradually increased over a period of months vs. sustained higher doses in transitioning transmasculine singers. Constansis was the pilot subject, using a low dosage in hopes of preserving his singing voice across transition. Constansis' research involved a careful regimen of breathing, speech and singing exercises that he carried out with each research singer subject.
- Constansis' research results indicated that using the gradual, lower dosage resulted in the establishment of a larger vocal range when subjects were compared with those who used an initial higher dosage. Age was also a factor. Younger singers had the widest ranges. The vocal ranges gradually decreased with increased age. This pattern was seen in both the singers who used a low dosage and in those who started at a high dosage. The singers using the lower dosage gained more vocal range than did their matched subjects who used a higher dosage, in all age ranges.

Effects of Testosterone on Male Singing Voice

- Singers and speakers describe:
- A “full” sensation, like something is in their throat and is too big
- A “covered” sensation, like something is stuck in or covering their throat, which equates to creating a “covered” singing voice or speaking voice quality

Best Practices for Trans Men

- Constansis: Patients who choose to use testosterone should be encouraged to gradually increase their dosage to allow the body to transition more gradually, closer to what a cis male experiences in puberty, rather than a high dosage, which causes a fast transition and will have a faster, possibly less desirable change in vocal range and quality.
- Constansis: Do **not** use the testosterone products used in his research study. Better products are now available. Consult your doctor and determine the best product and schedule for you.
- The long term use of testosterone can lead to early ossification of laryngeal cartilage, which usually occurs by early 30's.
- Testosterone does change soft tissue, but not cartilage, so transmasculine singers may have a different timbre because the larynx is shorter than that of a cisgender male singer.

SANDI HAMMOND: BOSTON BUTTERFLY TRANSGENDER CHORUS

- Sandi Hammond founded the Butterfly Music Transgender Chorus of Boston and served as Artistic Director from 2014 to 2016. Her observations and recommendations are detailed in the 3rd Edition of *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Transsexual Client A Therapy Guide* edited by Adler, Hirsch & Pickering, in the chapter, The Singing Voice by Anita L. Kozan and Sandi Hammond. Publication: Fall, 2018.
- Trans male singers can vocalize to A2, an octave and two steps below C4 (Middle C). Of 25 singers in the chorus, only two singers were able to vocalize lower.
- All singers reported that they had to learn pitch-matching and sight-singing all over again.

SANDI HAMMOND

TRANS CHORUS FINDINGS

- Highest pitch produced by most of the 36 trans female singers in chorus was A4 (A above Middle C).
- A few women developed a strong and clear falsetto.
- Gender non-binary singers sang across their vocal ranges.
- Choral arrangements were best kept within A2 to A4, a two-octave range, with parts labeled: Trans Upper or T1, Trans Middle or T2, and Trans Lower or T3.
- World premier of first commissioned choral piece: T1, T2, T3.
- Chorus best served by a transgender director or trans assistant director, whenever possible.
- Recommend singing lessons and voice therapy as needed.
- *Voice and Communication Therapy for the Transgender/Transsexual Client A Therapy Guide* edited by Adler, Hirsch & Pickering, in the chapter, The Singing Voice by Anita L. Kozan and Sandi Hammond. Publication: Fall, 2018.

CONDITIONING THE TRANS MASCULINE SINGING VOICE

- We are training or conditioning newly enlarged muscles encased within a cisgender larynx.
- Best practice involves soft legato phonation on easy vocalises across two or three steps, up and down, up and down. Then decrease the pitch by a half step.
- Start in mid chest/modal/speaking voice range. Gradually go down the scale by a half step, doing exercise described above. Work to add breath while keeping the voice soft. Use relaxed vowels (as in “hot” and “cool”) or go from tense vowel (as in “eat”) to relaxed vowels.
- When singer reaches a note where there is decreased quality or report of physical tension, reverse exercise and begin going up the scale by a half step.

CONDITIONING THE TRANS MASCULINE SINGING VOICE

- Tongue Tension Release Exercises are helpful in reducing tongue, jaw and neck tension to create a more relaxed and open sound
- Warm-up and Cool down Exercises are valuable for the singing voice and for the speaking voice
- Easy onset on vowels reduces hard glottal attack

CONDITIONING THE TRANS MASCULINE SINGING VOICE

- The use of Interval Training Schedules
- Ex. Sing – Rest – Sing – Rest - etc. can reduce potential vocal strain for vocal exercises for singing and speaking
- Intervals of voice usage and of rest can vary from 5 seconds to one or more minutes
- Return to mid-range for cool downs

CONDITIONING THE TRANS MASCULINE SINGING VOICE

- Remember that the vocal folds can only shorten so much for lower and lowest pitches.
- Both transgender and cisgender men will have a less clear voice quality which will approach “glottal fry,” the rumbling quality created because the vocal folds are so short that their inside (medial) edges cannot meet cleanly and completely when the vocal folds are brought together (adducted). There is air escaping because of the incomplete closure and lax vocal folds. Phonation can only be produced at a soft level.
- Men are more vulnerable to vocal fold strain when trying to push their pitch too low or too loud.
- Increase nasality, use sounds m,n,ng,v,z and bigger mouth opening to help improve vocal clarity and audibility.

GENDER NON-BINARY and GENDER FLUID SINGERS

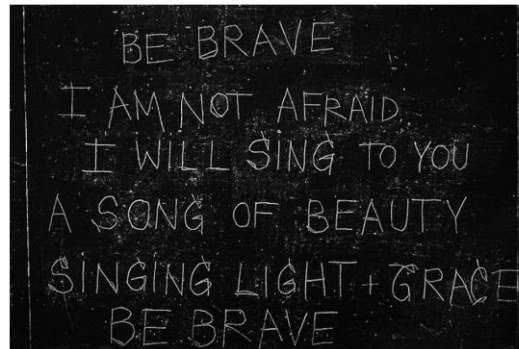
- All individual singers have the right to choose how they want to speak and sing. There are no rights or wrongs. Preferences can evolve.
- The singer might desire a more feminine, androgynous or masculine voice, with their preferences changing in different situations within the same time frame.
- The primary goal for the teacher of singing and speech-language pathologist is to help the singer move toward their goals in a healthy manner with safe vocal techniques and reasonable expectations.
- Stage performers will be subject to all the challenges that transmasculine and transfeminine singers, as well as cisgender singers, must confront. Microphones, monitors, stage sound levels, musical keys of songs, set lists and arrangements can each present their own challenges. (See The Singing Voice chapter in *Voice and Communication Therapy for Transgender/Transsexual Clients*, Adler et al.)
- Ask the singer for specific qualities that they want to emulate. Recordings of favorite artists or spoken word performers, and DVD's of actors or actresses can help with goal setting and with determining what is a reasonable or unreasonable goal for the singer.
- Ask all singers about any concerns that might affect their performance, such as binding, favorite clothes or shoes that they wear, physical activities, or job related stressors.
- Encourage all singers to share observations, no matter how incidental they seem.

THE ROLE OF SELF-TALK FOR ALL SINGERS

- The singer's confidence can be enhanced by their work on listening to their inner thoughts, noting when they are talking negatively to themselves, gently letting go of critical comments, and finding what is good about their voice usage and practice. Using positive feedback will enhance their progress and self-satisfaction in their journey.

“Listen. *Listen.* I HEAR THE BLOOM WITHIN THE SEED.”

Catherine L. Johnson, Interdisciplinary Artist,
LIBRETTO, 1994.



Catherine L. Johnson
HERHYMNS:BE BRAVE (2013)

THANK YOU!!!



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“What the World Needs Now is Love” – Burt Bacharach

Chorus:

What the world needs now, is love, sweet love. It's the only thing that there's just too little of. What the world needs now is love, sweet love. No, not just for some, but for everyone. (2nd time: No, not just for some, Oh, but just for everyone.)

Verse:

Lord, we don't need another mountain. There are mountains and hillsides enough to climb; There are oceans and rivers enough to cross, enough to last, till the end of time..."(return to chorus)