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*Zwischenfach: Paradox or Paradigm?*

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## ABSTRACT

Singers within the operatic world are expected to conform to the strict limits and dictates of the *Fachsystem*. Casting directors and opera companies prefer to be informed of which particular ‘*Fach*-box’ you tick when auditioning and it is becoming increasingly important for career advancement and name recognition to remain within that box. Yet what happens when your voice does not operate strictly within the predetermined requirements of a particular box? Or if the vocal category you supposedly assume is already ambiguous and contentious? Jennifer Allen’s DMA thesis, *An Analysis and Discussion of Zwischenfach Voices*, provides invaluable critical insight surrounding this enigmatic concept of voice categorisation. Allen argues that despite advances within vocal pedagogy, there remains a ‘gray area’ within the discussion. This elusiveness, to which Allen refers, pertains directly to the *Zwischenfach* voice type. Translated literally from German, the word *Zwischen* means ‘between’ and ‘*Fach*’ refers specifically to vocal specialisation as a way of categorising singers according to the weight, range and colour of their voices. Thus, in its most basic form, a *Zwischenfach* voice denotes a voice that lies between the vocal categories of soprano and mezzo-soprano. However, whilst Dr Rudolf Kloiber’s *Handbuch der Oper* (a staple for the operatic world) provides a definitive guide to vocal categorisation and continues to influence casting throughout Germany and Europe, the corresponding American *Boldrey Guide* acknowledges *Zwischenfach* as a voice that cannot be classified precisely in one particular *Fach* or another. This lack of uniform approach highlights not only the potential flexibility of this voice, but also the paradoxical nature of attempting to define a voice that defies standard classification. Indeed, as a young singer currently singing high mezzo-soprano repertoire, I have found the *Zwischenfach* labelling to be a paradox, for the upper extension of my voice also enables me

potentially to sing some soprano roles. Therefore, is it conceivable to postulate that this term is a misnomer and merely highlights the issues associated with being constrained within the *Fachsystem*?

In order to come to terms with these issues, then, my analysis of *Zwischenfach* labelling requires a separation of voice categorisation and the *Fachsystem* and an ongoing critique of these systems throughout my exegesis. In an attempt to determine its practicalities, the limits that it can impose, and how its boundaries have not always functioned so neatly, my critique focuses on elements such as convenience, marketability and professional development and life. An exploration of the relevance of aspects such as range, tessitura, *passaggi*, timbre, agility, physical characteristics, pitch of the speaking voice, and scientific tests is also necessary. Once a definition of *Zwischenfach* is established, I consider the “in between” nature of this vocal category as I investigate roles that develop out of this into the realm of the heavier, more dramatic voice. Finally, I explore the implications of switching between *Fächer* and divulge how I incorporate the contradictions within this category with the successful management of the label. The piecing together of existing scholarship surrounding this field of research and the practical application to my own expanding repertoire is invaluable in facilitating the expansion of my knowledge in regard to my own progression through *Zwischenfach* repertoire and roles.

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**“People do not fit into *Fachs*, roles do.”<sup>1</sup>**

## INTRODUCTION

In January 2013, I attended the New Zealand Opera School in Wanganui, and this two-week intensive marked the beginning of my journey into the realm of the ‘*Zwischenfach*.’ Prior to Opera School, I had been training as a mezzo-soprano, and before that I had spent many years singing soprano repertoire and roles.<sup>2</sup> It seemed that whenever I opened my mouth to sing, a series of different and often contradictory opinions about my voice would be aired. When I won the Nelson Vocal Recital in 2010, senior adjudicator Luisa Shannahan said that I had “a fantastic contralto voice that in some places made me think of the great ones like Kathleen Ferrier.” Similarly, every time I sing the alto solo in Handel’s *Messiah*, I receive many comments about my ‘contralto sound.’ Whilst I may have the facility for singing in this lower part of my voice, I also have an ability to access my upper register with relative ease, enabling me to have sung operatic roles such as Rusalka (adapted version of Dvořák’s *Rusalka*), Orlofsky (Johann Strauss II’s *Die Fledermaus*) and Medora (Verdi’s *Il corsaro*). Hence, the dilemma of attempting to put a particular ‘label’ on my voice has been an issue, and in hindsight it is apparent to me that teachers and coaches had their own need to define my voice, when in reality it would have been better to focus on solidifying technique and keeping the voice as open and free as possible. For in an attempt to create a ‘soprano’ or a ‘mezzo’ sound (depending on the particular preference of my teacher at the time), I would manipulate my vocal mechanism which was not conducive

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Allen, *An Analysis and Discussion of Zwischenfach Voices* (United States: ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2012). 36.

<sup>2</sup> Soprano: Derived from the Latin ‘superius,’ this term refers to the voice with the highest musical range. The soprano’s range normally lies between c’ and a’’, but can be extended at either end, particularly in solo writing. Mezzo-soprano: This voice type is intermediate in pitch between a contralto and soprano. Often written for the range between an a to an f sharp’’, it may also be extended at either end, particularly in solo writing. Owen Jander, Elizabeth Forbes, Stanley Sadie, J.B. Steane/Ellen T. Harris (with Gerald Waldman), ‘Soprano and Mezzo-soprano,’ in *Grove Music Online* <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/public/>> (20 March 2013).

to healthy singing.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, in many ways it was a relief to discover the existence of this “in-between” vocal category; my interest in its practical application and relevance for my particular, “hard-to-categorise” voice was piqued. Although I had heard this term used, albeit infrequently, during the course of my study to date, I was not really aware of its meaning or repercussions and if I had been asked to name a ‘*Zwischenfach*’ singer, I would not have been able to do so. Consequently, under the tutelage of my singing teacher and supervisor, Margaret Medlyn, I have spent the better part of the year researching this area of vocal specialisation and focussing upon learning repertoire which straddles both sides of the soprano / mezzo equation. It has been my intention to discover whether or not the term of *Zwischenfach* is inclusive enough; to determine what it means for a singer to be thus classified; and ultimately, to discern how it can best serve my voice and future operatic career.

My research begins by examining the issue of vocal classification and the leading sources surrounding the *Fachsystem*. Accordingly, in the Prologue: *Shades of Grey*, I explore Sandra Cotton’s idea of separating the systems of voice categorisation and *Fach*, which Cotton proposes each have different meanings and ought to be considered separately to avoid confusion and misclassification. This brief summary will also explore historical factors that have facilitated the evolution of vocal classification and the *Fachsystem* as we know it today. Chapter One, entitled ‘Overview of Voice Classification,’ encompasses the specific nature of voice classification itself and the foundation upon which a voice category is constructed. The main characteristics involved in this process will be the aspects of: range, tessitura, *passaggi* and timbre. An

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<sup>3</sup> Ways in which I would manipulate the vocal mechanism include: falsely manufacturing the sound by depressing or holding the larynx and having my tongue too far back in my throat. I would also engage the jaw and sternocleidomastoid muscles in an attempt to ‘support’ the voice and this would create further problems. Additionally the lack of a forward placement and my misconception of what a mezzo ought to sound like resulted in a manufactured / manipulated sound.

array of scholars, including Meribeth Bunch, Richard Boldrey, Richard Miller, Barbara Doscher and James McKinney provide valuable critical insight into the pieces that form the puzzle of vocal classification. A complementary section on the *Fachsystem* is necessary, and in chapter Two I will be discussing the meaning of associated terms, whilst paying particular attention to Jennifer Allen and Sandra Cotton's interpretation and translation of Rudolf Kloiber's *Handbuch der Oper*, and the primary source of The Boldrey Guide. My investigation of a number of perspectives on the *Fachsystem* suggests that it can be understood as a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it is a necessity - for casting in the operatic world is often based upon the criteria inherent within the *Fachsystem*; yet, on the other hand, a conundrum is revealed, for it can be very hard to 'fit' individual voices to a set of pre-established boundaries and it appears 'topsy-turvy' to be tailoring one's voice to a 'one-size-fits-all' requirement. In this chapter the *Zwischenfachsängerin* will make her debut, as I will be analysing aspects such as the term's meaning and position within the system as a whole, and the critical response it has received among vocal pedagogues. To further substantiate a critical perspective, it will be necessary to compare and contrast this voice type with the lyric mezzo-soprano. In chapter Three, I will then reference certain roles that, like the *Zwischenfach* voice-type, appear to defy categorisation – the 'Un-fachable.' Here I will question whether or not '*Zwischenfach*' is too narrow and restrictive to encompass the full range of voices that otherwise do not fit into the traditional soprano or mezzo-soprano mold – that is, those voices for which the term itself was invented to describe. The particular roles that I will be referencing have been ones I have studied in the course of the year, with further information supplied from Sandra Cotton's translation of the *Handbuch der Oper* and The Boldrey Guide: Cherubino (Mozart, *Le nozze di Figaro*), Idamante (Mozart, *Idomeneo*) and Der Komponist (R. Strauss, *Ariadne auf*

*Naxos*). The fourth chapter – ‘I’ll sing them all!’ is a reference from Ben Moore’s song ‘Sexy Lady’ (2004).<sup>4</sup> Moore composed this piece for the American mezzo-soprano Susan Graham, and it specifically references the huge array of roles that a *Zwischenfach* voice can sing. Within this section I will be taking a closer look at singers who have sung a variety of roles and negotiated the *Zwischenfach* label both successfully and not so successfully. The case studies of Christa Ludwig and Dame Gwyneth Jones will further illustrate relevant issues. Finally, to conclude, in addition to providing a summary of the facts and issues associated with a *Zwischenfach* categorisation, I reflect on the relevance of this term and how it affects my voice in particular.

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<sup>4</sup> Ben Moore, *Sexy Lady* (United States of America: Benjamin C Moore Publishing, 2004).

Prologue: SHADES OF GREY

Whilst *Fach* continues to remain synonymous with voice type, a distinction between these systems must be established from the outset. Failure to do so may not only jeopardise a singer's success in an audition, their career and the longevity of their voice, but it will also add confusion to a topic that is already highly contentious and elusive. Therefore, voice classification must be acknowledged as a description of the "capabilities and limitations of an instrument" and the *Fachsystem* as a group of labels with specific definitions.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, a singer must train in an efficient and healthy manner whilst being promoted within a *Fach* that holds appropriate roles in relation to the timbre, tessitura, agility and physiology of their voice.<sup>6</sup> When exactly a singer ought to be encouraged into a particular category remains highly disputed, and it ought to depend upon the individual singer's ability, rather than a 'set' age or stage in the vocal process. Indeed, it is a commonly understood fact that voices will develop at different paces, depending upon a myriad of factors; for some women it is not until their 30s or 40s that their 'true' *Fach* is discerned. In her Doctor of Musical Arts thesis, *Voice classification and Fach: Recent, historical and conflicting systems of voice categorization*, Sandra Cotton deconstructs this "inextricable conflagration of *Fach* and voice type," and illuminates the importance of paying close attention to casting trends and market expectations.<sup>7</sup> Throughout her research, Cotton seeks to provide a pedagogically sound rationale that will aid singers and their teachers to negotiate this obligatory aspect to launching a career in the operatic world.<sup>8</sup> She argues that although the *Fachsystem* was structured according to voice type, its fluidity requires a separation

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<sup>5</sup> Sandra Cotton, *Voice Classification and Fach: Recent, Historical and Conflicting Systems of Voice Categorization* (Greensboro: ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2007). 3 & 54.

<sup>6</sup> Cotton. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Cotton. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Cotton. 2.

of the two, for to consider them one and the same would be allowing for the possibility that “voice classification, like *Fach*, is dependent upon market trends.”<sup>9</sup>

### **The evolution of Voice Classification and the *Fachsystem***

Prior to the age of modern orchestral requirements, around the second third of the nineteenth century, singers were trained and implicitly expected to sing in “either idyllic or dramatic fashion, and...produce both fast florid passages and expressive sustained long lines, full of color and dynamic nuances, throughout their range.”<sup>10</sup> In contrast with twenty-first century singers, who adopt a single vocal timbre (for example, lyric mezzo-soprano), the *bel canto* schools trained their singers to have facility in a variety of vocal timbres, and so they learnt to shift effectively between high or low repertoire and light or dramatic roles.<sup>11</sup> Reliance on classification was considerably less important than we believe it to be today. Thus the three basic voice types of soprano, mezzo-soprano and contralto, in common use today, were categories that the earlier pedagogues did not reference, and the category of mezzo-soprano appears to have been non-existent.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, due to the increasing diversity of music being performed, the existing status quo needed to be altered in order to protect both singers’ vocal health and career.<sup>13</sup> Previously, and arguably well into the nineteenth century, composers wrote their music in accordance with the technical ability and vocal prowess of the singer. Consequently the composers were constrained by the limits of the singers’ range or sound; but with the growing practice of requiring a set of singers to sing a range of already composed works, the voice categories which emerged from this practice in turn

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<sup>9</sup> Cotton. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Boldrey. *Guide to Operatic Roles and Arias* (United States of America: Pst...Inc., 1994). Chapter: Voice Categories.

<sup>11</sup> Lucie Manén. *Bel canto: The teaching of the Classical Italian Song-Schools, its Decline and Restoration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). 69.

<sup>12</sup> Cotton. 34.

<sup>13</sup> Allen. 8.

became the archetypes for dramatic characters.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the introduction of heavier orchestration, merging with the developing and varying operatic styles, served to necessitate the emergence of these new vocal categories.<sup>15</sup> Hence by the twentieth century, when opera houses were staging Wagner, Mozart, Strauss and Verdi all in the same season, it became increasingly apparent that the existing three female voice categories were no longer sufficient for the categorisation of the roles for the singers who performed them.<sup>16</sup> As a result, this precipitated the need for operatic roles to be sub-categorised and served to facilitate the development of the *Fachsystem* itself.<sup>17</sup> This evolution of new categories and the subsequent interest in the specific characteristics which would ultimately determine the secondary classification, as well as the development of technique to deal with the extension of the demands of the composers, splintered the *modus operandi* as the need to *define* a voice took precedence.

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<sup>14</sup> Allen. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Boldrey. Chapter: Voice Categories.

<sup>16</sup> Cotton. 53.

<sup>17</sup> Cotton. 53.

## Chapter One: OVERVIEW OF VOICE CLASSIFICATION

Voices do not exist in isolation; rather they are contained within a physique that largely determines the construction and nature of the instrument itself. However, voices are dynamic – meaning they are subject to the fluctuating elements of change, and progress - and within each individual singer, there exist a series of vocal variations.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, classification is undeniably influenced by the general vocal environment and the specific training that the singer undertakes. A singer will often transition into another voice category during the course of their career because of the particular way in which her voice has developed.<sup>19</sup> As cited by Allen in her DMA thesis, Deborah Baxter states in her dissertation *Seven Massenet Operas*:

At no time in history...have vocal authorities met on a substantial amount of common ground...Even within the same generation, one singer may be labelled as a contralto, mezzo-soprano and soprano by different authors, or by the singer herself. Add to this that there have always been national tonal ideas, and we begin to sense the elusiveness of the issue of categorising voices.<sup>20</sup>

Whilst there is a growing body of evidence pointing toward the fact that vocal classification may eventually be able to be measured objectively (determined by the both the “size and density of vocal folds and the size and shape of the vocal tract”), it still remains a controversial subject.<sup>21</sup> This controversy stems from the fact that the vocal instrument does not solely rely upon laryngeal structure or function for definition, but rather a number of factors including: range, tessitura, *passaggi*, timbre, agility, vocal weight and physiology.<sup>22</sup> Yet the extent to which these criteria determine the classification and affect repertoire choices remains disputed by the pedagogues, and

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<sup>18</sup> Boldrey. Chapter: Voice Categories.

<sup>19</sup> Boldrey. Chapter: Voice Categories.

<sup>20</sup> Allen. 18.

<sup>21</sup> Cotton. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Cotton. 4.

their role will differ depending upon the teacher.<sup>23</sup> For just as two voices are not the same, each teacher will have a different method and approach based largely upon what they are listening for and deem most important. Cotton does argue that “today’s voice teacher must learn to listen for and assess each criterion...and understand the hierarchy of the various criteria for voice classification in order to determine the nature of the instrument at hand.”<sup>24</sup> Whilst this may sound good in theory, from my personal experience, not all singing teachers are equipped to do this. Furthermore, the accessibility of vocal and operatic recordings has adversely perpetuated particular sounds that we think we ought to hear from the various voice types.

Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that the basic premise for voice classification is derived from the idea that vocal instruments can be divided into groups. Sandra Cotton argues that within these groups “the voices will share vocal traits and characteristics and that the groups will differ from one another according also to vocal traits and characteristics.”<sup>25</sup> This classification is comprised of primary groupings, which for the female voice are soprano, mezzo-soprano and contralto; and secondary groupings, which are sub-categories of the primary and provide a definition based upon more subjective qualities such as timbre or agility.<sup>26</sup> These secondary groupings include the labels of *lyric*, *dramatic* and *coloratura*, and often generate considerable confusion and dispute for they can be particularly subjective.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Cotton. 11.

<sup>24</sup> Cotton. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Cotton. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Cotton. 12-13.

<sup>27</sup> Within the Boldrey Guide, one role listing will have multiple secondary grouping possibilities. For example, the listing regarding the character of Orlofsky from J Strauss II’s opera *Die Fledermaus*, states that it can reside in the following categories: light lyric soprano, light lyric mezzo-soprano, dramatic mezzo-soprano, contralto, countertenor, comic tenor, light lyric baritone and bass-baritone. 156.

## Range

Range refers to the upper and lower limits of frequency within which the voice can perform with ease of production and sound.<sup>28</sup> According to Meribeth Bunch, most singers will have a range between two to two-and-a-half octaves, thus enabling them to sing most of the literature written within their vocal classification. Whilst singers will also be able to produce notes of a higher and lower pitch, they will not necessarily be expected to sing these pitches in a public setting.<sup>29</sup> Most pedagogues will agree that range ought to play a role in determining voice classification, yet the degree to which it *should* be influential remains hotly disputed.<sup>30</sup> This dispute stems from the unreliable nature of range as a determinant: on the one hand, incorrect technique can inhibit the ability to realise one's potential range; on the other hand, a well trained female singer will be able potentially to sing repertoire from neighbouring voice categories of soprano, mezzo-soprano and contralto.<sup>31</sup>

Additionally, it has been observed that good singers will usually have large ranges.<sup>32</sup> Within these categories, although the singers will possess almost identical ranges, it is crucial to note that the quality of the notes at either end of the vocal spectrum will vary considerably. Therefore, Bunch argues that classification based upon range is decided "according to where the best quality of tone is located in the voice, and where the depth and ease of sound are located within the range of pitches."<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, a major influence upon a singers' vocal range is the quality of their speaking voice: basic mechanism and physical process are inextricably linked as they

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<sup>28</sup> Barbara M. Doscher. *The functional unity of the Singing Voice* (London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1988). 155.

<sup>29</sup> Meribeth Bunch. *Dynamics of the Singing Voice* (New York: Springer-Verlag/Wien, 1995). 74.

<sup>30</sup> Cotton. 13.

<sup>31</sup> Cotton. 13 -14.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Boldrey: "Sopranos are all expected to have a high-C, unless they are large dramatic voices;" "Mezzo-sopranos all have a good high a-flat, many sing easily up to a b-flat, and lightest mezzo-sopranos even have a high-C;" *Contraltos* can sing up to f', some even going as high as g" or a-flat". Chapter: Voice Categories.

<sup>33</sup> Bunch. 74.

share the same breathing apparatus, larynx, resonators and articulators.<sup>34</sup> Therefore if there is either an issue or limitation within the speaking voice, it will directly affect any subsequent singing. There is also a physiological influence in which the extreme range of pitch can be “determined by the length and shape of the singer’s vocal folds and ability to coordinate the vocal muscles with the rest of the body.”<sup>35</sup> However, range continues to be regarded as “probably the least reliable and the most dangerous way in which a voice ‘can’ be classified.”<sup>36</sup> This is particularly true for young voices which have not yet vocally settled or technically stabilised: there are many instances in which mezzo-soprano repertoire has been assigned to young sopranos who have not yet found their head voice or freedom in the upper register.<sup>37</sup> Thus the intangible nature of range as the primary criteria for vocal classification necessitates a shift toward appropriating tessitura as a more accurate gauge.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Andrea M. Price, *The effects of the speaking voice on the singing voice* (United States: Proquest UMI Publishing, 2006). 2.

<sup>35</sup> Bunch. 74.

<sup>36</sup> Doscher. 155.

<sup>37</sup> Cotton. 16. ‘Head voice’ is a term used to denote the higher end of the singing voice and is called this because singing in the upper register can often cause a vibratory sensation to be felt in the head.

<sup>38</sup> Cotton. 17.

## Tessitura

Derived from the Latin *textūra*, tessitura denotes the general range of pitches found within a melody or a vocal line.<sup>39</sup> It does not refer to the extreme ranges within the aria itself, but is determined by the overall way in which the vocal line is arranged - focussing particularly upon the part of the range that is used consistently throughout the piece.<sup>40</sup> This small section of the range of the voice, which according to Richard Boldrey can be anywhere from a fourth to an octave, is where the singer can enjoy a secure and effortless vocal production.<sup>41</sup> Significantly, tessitura also concerns the general range of notes sung during the course of an operatic role: again this ought not to be confused with range, for a singer could have a wide vocal range, while their comfortable tessitura could be relatively low.<sup>42</sup> Tessitura can be a particularly useful guideline when dealing with singers who have extensive ranges, because it focuses attention on the area of the voice in which it is less vocally fatiguing to sing for extended periods.<sup>43</sup> An important role in the classification process, it too can be a controversial method: for although each role and aria has a measurable tessitura, deciding upon the tessitura that each individual singer should be singing is considerably more problematic and complex.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Tessitura,' in <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/588644/tessitura> > (7 November 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Tessitura,' in <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/588644/tessitura> > (7 November 2013).

<sup>41</sup> Boldrey. Chapter: Voice Categories.

<sup>42</sup> Cotton. 18.

<sup>43</sup> Cotton. 23.

<sup>44</sup> Cotton. 19.

### *Passaggi*

Given the issues in other areas of the voice, the *passaggi* are crucial in facilitating a more accurate measurement of primary and secondary classification. Significantly, they facilitate a greater understanding regarding the singer's exact tessitura, because the "group of contiguous frequencies in which a singer is most comfortable is often contingent on the exact location of the *passaggi*."<sup>45</sup> As stated by Sandra Cotton:

These *passaggi*, in turn, are determined by the physiognomy of the given singer; in particular, by the acoustical relationship between fundamental pitch produced at the folds, the natural acoustical tendencies of the vocal tract, and the vowel in need of articulation.<sup>46</sup>

Although appropriated in various countries with differing ideas on the exact interpretation, it is generally accepted that *passaggi* refers to the transition from one register to another.<sup>47</sup> The female voice is comprised of three registers which include the 'chest' register, the 'middle' register and the 'head' register and it is the singer's responsibility to achieve a smooth vocal transition between these 'breaks.'<sup>48</sup> Cotton argues that there is a direct correlation between the *passaggi* and the physiognomy of the singer, and that the 'breaks' will exist in predictable zones according to voice type.<sup>49</sup> In spite of the differences which exist between vocal instruments, Richard Miller similarly argues that in relation to the location of these register transitions, there is a strong component of predictability, and he does qualify this by explaining that the actual composition of individual larynxes will result in variations between the voice

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<sup>45</sup> Cotton. 19.

<sup>46</sup> Cotton. 19.

<sup>47</sup> Boldrey. Chapter: Voice Categories.

<sup>48</sup> Miller.

<sup>49</sup> Cotton. 20.

types.<sup>50</sup> Therefore it appears that the *passaggi* as determining factors do serve to provide an element of accuracy within voice classification during the early stages of development.

The approximate *passaggi* in female voices most useful in determining vocal category are those of the upper middle and upper, which feature in Miller's *passaggi* chart as being C sharp<sup>2</sup> and F sharp<sup>2</sup> for the soprano, B<sup>1</sup> and E<sup>2</sup> for the mezzo, and the noteworthy *passaggi* points for the contralto are: A<sup>1</sup> and D.<sup>2</sup><sup>51</sup> Miller promotes these transitional points as better contenders in the process of achieving *Fach* designation, for "categorisation of the female voice is in large measure determined by the location of registration events within the vocal scale."<sup>52</sup> This evidence also provides insight into the *Zwischenfach* voice, for the chart shows the potential overlap between the *passaggi* points of the heavier voiced soprano and mezzo-soprano.<sup>53</sup> This information serves to reveal the close and potentially fluid relationship between these respective voice-types. Particular care needs to be taken in the training of this "in-between" voice, the '*Zwischenfach*,' and only vocal maturation will establish the final result. These quantifiable registration events do appear to be better indicators of vocal classification than the unpredictable factors of range or timbre which can be "disguised in an individual voice through compensatory methods of singing."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Richard Miller. *National Schools of Singing: English, French, German, and Italian Techniques of Singing Revisted* (United States of America: Scarecrow Press Inc., 1977). 125.

<sup>51</sup> Miller. 127 – 128.

<sup>52</sup> Allen. 6.

<sup>53</sup> Miller. 128.

<sup>54</sup> Miller. 126. An example of a compensatory method of singing is evident in the artificial colouring of the sound by either retracting the tongue into the throat or lowering the larynx too much.

## Timbre

Often heavily relied upon by voice teachers, timbre refers to what Richard Boldrey describes as: the “voice colour, the quality of sound, which ranges from light to dark, from slender to lush, from mellow to metallic, from clear to rich, from smooth to brilliant.”<sup>55</sup> According to Barbara Doscher, timbre is the third major property of a musical sound (following frequency and amplitude) and is definitely the most distinguishing one.<sup>56</sup> I agree that timbre is indeed a way in which a voice can be differentiated from another. Yet I think it is dangerous to begin either approaching it with an established ‘ideal,’ or to align a young singer’s timbre with that of a singer of renown, for a voice should be ‘constructed’ upon a more substantial and objective basis. However, in today’s age of ‘You-Tube,’ this can be easier said than done. Timbre can sometimes also be hard to ascertain as “manipulations of the vocal tract can mask or hinder the natural timbre of the voice.”<sup>57</sup> This manipulation of one’s timbre can be detrimental not only to healthy singing, but also the eventual outcome, because the quality of tone will be diminished. Manipulation can occur in a variety of ways, namely in terms of constriction – which involves ‘holding’ or pushing the larynx, pushing too much air through hard vocal folds or tightening of the jaw or tongue, and the singer may not always be aware that they are altering the mechanism.

Within the available literature there is a substantial discrepancy as to the extent to which timbre should be considered in the classification process. Doscher states that whilst timbre is a better estimator of one’s vocal category than that of range, due its close relationship to formant frequencies – thus giving an indication of the size and dimension of the vocal tract - it also has a deceiving aural nature which can lead to

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<sup>55</sup> Boldrey. Chapter: Voice Categories.

<sup>56</sup> Doscher. 75.

<sup>57</sup> Cotton. 24.

misclassification.<sup>58</sup> In *The functional unity of the singing voice*, she further expands upon timbre's problematic nature when giving the example of a young female singer who, due to her darker-toned voice, is classified as a mezzo-soprano when in reality her musculature may just not have yet developed to carry the full weight of her voice.<sup>59</sup> In a similar vein, within his chapter on voice classification in *The Diagnosis & Correction of Vocal Faults*, James McKinney highlights the illusory nature of timbre and believes it to be the most intangible criterion used.<sup>60</sup> Likewise Cotton states that when using timbre to classify a young voice or a singer with poor technique, it is tenuous at best; for although the fundamental colour of the voice is influenced by the physiological structure, "one is still left with an aural perception that is extremely difficult to describe in words."<sup>61</sup> However, it is interesting that within the Boldrey Guide, timbre is noted as "one of the most important voice qualities used to categorise a voice" and an example is provided in which "darkness or richness of voice is often the main indicator that a voice is a *mezzo-soprano* rather than a *soprano*."<sup>62</sup> Additionally, Richard Miller supports this observation when he advocates timbre over range and tessitura capabilities, as he believes that individual voice colour and dramatic portrayal requirements are far more important to professional *Fach* designation.<sup>63</sup> Without a doubt, timbre continues to remain more elusive than most of the vocal criteria for classification as it is subjective, depending upon the listener and consequently intangible. Whilst it may be useful in eliciting a secondary vocal classification, it should be approached carefully, for it is all too easy to misclassify a voice due to the inaccuracy inherent within the idea that a

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<sup>58</sup> Doscher. 156.

<sup>59</sup> Doscher. 156.

<sup>60</sup> James C. McKinney. *The diagnosis & correction of vocal faults* (United States of America: Broadman Press, 1982). 115-116.

<sup>61</sup> Doscher. 105.

<sup>62</sup> Boldrey. Chapter: Voice Categories.

<sup>63</sup> Allen. 2.

‘bright’ timbre is always associated with a soprano sound and a ‘dark’ timbre ought always to be aligned with the mezzo-soprano.

### **Other considerations**

Other factors that affect voice classification to varying degrees include agility, physical characteristics, speech level and scientific tests.<sup>64</sup> Agility - the ability to sing turns, trills, scales and arpeggios in quick succession and with clear articulation - is often used as a secondary criterion, and assists in determining exactly what sort of soprano, mezzo-soprano or contralto the singer is.<sup>65</sup> In terms of the relationship between physical appearance and classification, McKinney writes that “It has been observed by several writers that as a general rule, persons with high voices tend to have round faces, short necks, large chests, and short statures, while those with low voices tend to have long faces, long necks, flat chests, and tall stature.”<sup>66</sup> However McKinney does stipulate that caution must be applied to generic statements such as these for they do not provide relevance and veracity for all singers. Recently the issue of speech level and its relationship to healthy singing has also received more attention. Whether or not it can be used as a determinant in the classification process remains to be substantiated, yet it must be acknowledged that establishing good habits in relation to pitch, timbre, volume, resonance, and phonation in the speaking voice can essentially be translated to the singing voice.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, McKinney reveals that “some efforts have been made to correlate the optimum pitch level of a person’s speech with his or her voice classification, but the results are not, as yet, conclusive.”<sup>68</sup> Finally, both McKinney and

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<sup>64</sup> James McKinney and Sandra Cotton argue that future developments in vocal science may facilitate for a more accurate assessment of the current subjectivism within vocal categorisation.

<sup>65</sup> Boldrey. Chapter: Voice Categories.

<sup>66</sup> McKinney. 117-118.

<sup>67</sup> McKinney. 118.

<sup>68</sup> McKinney. 118.

Cotton stress the importance of vocal science developments in simplifying and eliminating the ‘guess work’ from current voice classification practice. Being able to obtain a more thorough and less-controversial assessment of a voice will be possible through increased understanding of the key role in which the physiological dimensions of the instrument play. This development may also facilitate in pre-determining both the potential and limitations of the instrument.<sup>69</sup> McKinney reveals that there is a direct parallel between laryngeal dimensions and voice categories, and he believes that it is only a matter of time before “someone will develop portable equipment of modest cost which can be used in a voice studio to aid classifying voices.”<sup>70</sup> However, in the meantime, it appears that voices will be evaluated and classified subjectively, mainly using the traditional criteria of range, tessitura, *passaggi* and timbre.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Cotton. Abstract.

<sup>70</sup> McKinney. 118.

<sup>71</sup> McKinney. 118.

## Chapter Two: OVERVIEW OF THE *FACHSYSTEM*

Before embarking upon any detailed discussion of the *Fachsystem*, it is necessary to focus upon the terminology which has become so entrenched in the process of determining voice categorisation. To summarise, Sandra Cotton details the *Fachsystem* as “essentially a group of expressions (dramatic soprano, lyric tenor, etc.) with specific definitions (range, timbre, appropriate roles, etc.).”<sup>72</sup> Again, however, the main term requiring exploration is that of *Fach*. Translated literally from the German, *Fach* means ‘compartment’ or ‘subject (of study).’ It refers specifically to vocal specialisation, and is a way of categorising singers according to the range, weight and colour of their voices.<sup>73</sup> Importantly, Cotton highlights the fact that not only does *Fach* denote ‘category,’ but it also implies restrictions and boundaries.<sup>74</sup>

In the world of opera, but particularly in Germany, *Fach* has become associated with standardised voice definition, and thus serves not only to describe the character of the voice, but specifically to prescribe roles that the singer will perform.<sup>75</sup> Initially codified during the twentieth century as a way of protecting singers from an assortment of orchestration, tessitura and range demands, it provided a system of lists that were compiled in groups of roles with similar vocal demands.<sup>76</sup> Each of these groups specified a certain *Fach*, meaning that singers became required only to sign contracts for their particular grouping.<sup>77</sup> While this has the effect of preparing singers in advance for potential role assignment, “some of the choices of roles associated with certain voice

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<sup>72</sup> Cotton. 54.

<sup>73</sup> Cotton.

<sup>74</sup> Cotton. 55.

<sup>75</sup> Anthony Legge, *The Art of Auditioning: A Handbook for Singers, Accompanists and Coaches* (London: Peters Edition Limited, 2001). 13.

<sup>76</sup> Cotton. 55.

<sup>77</sup> Cotton. 55.

types can be quite surprising and this creates an element of intransigence when needing to adhere to a system which is not as conclusive as it pretends to be.”<sup>78</sup>

This issue of role and voice type alignment, which Anthony Legge discusses in *The Art of Auditioning: A Handbook for Singers, Accompanists and Coaches*, became particularly apparent during my research into the *Handbuch der Oper* and the Boldrey Guide, and shall be explored in greater depth during the course of the chapter. It is also important to note that even though the terminology connected to voice classification and *Fach* is very similar, as Sandra Cotton states: “*Fach* is primarily concerned with role assignation while voice classification seeks to describe the physiological nature of a particular instrument.”<sup>79</sup> Therefore, as discussed earlier, it is essential to delineate between the two.

### **Rudolf Kloiber’s *Handbuch der Oper***

Arguably one of the most important guides for the *Fachsystem*, and a staple for the operatic world, is Rudolf Kloiber’s *Handbuch der Oper* (2002). It provides a definitive guide to vocal categorisation, from the works of Monteverdi through to Richard Strauss, and continues to influence casting throughout German and Europe.<sup>80</sup> First published in 1951, Kloiber was a multi-talented musician and musicologist attempting to acknowledge the “question of pragmatic instrumentation (or matching the proper voice to each role).”<sup>81</sup> The subsequent *Fachpartien* (Fach role) directory that he compiled was created predominantly in response to the changing nature of voice training and classification.<sup>82</sup> According to Jennifer Allen, the commentary that accompanies his

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<sup>78</sup> Legge. 13.

<sup>79</sup> Cotton. 58.

<sup>80</sup> Allen. 16.

<sup>81</sup> Allen 16.

<sup>82</sup> Allen. 15-16.

listing choices is both clear and concise and Kloiber's impartial view of voice assignments is highly regarded for its insight and clarity.<sup>83</sup>

It is apparent that historical context and stylistic development also factor into Kloiber's determination of *Fach* criteria, while the guide's continual editing and re-releasing serves to recognise changes in casting and repertoire.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, as Allen explains, the *Handbuch der Oper* concedes the "basic vocabulary of voice categorising begins with characterising 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."<sup>85</sup> In addition, when unique features are taken into consideration, the voice becomes categorised by other means such as quality (colour), size (large versus small) and volume.<sup>86</sup> These factors add far more to the general picture than merely considering the range of the voice when adopting a niche within the *Fachsystem*. Allen also reveals that Kloiber crucially recognises the need to acknowledge a specific *Fach* for the "in-between-voice" – the *Zwischenfach*.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Allen 16.

<sup>84</sup> Allen. 17.

<sup>85</sup> Allen. 17.

<sup>86</sup> Allen. 17. Vocal 'size' note: It is a common mistake for people to refer to large / small when talking about the volume of a voice. In reality, 'large or small' has nothing to do with the singer's ability to be able to be heard in a large opera house, due to the technical aspects of placement and projection.

Therefore, these terms denote timbre and vocal colouring.

<sup>87</sup> Allen. 17.

### The Boldrey Guide

The corresponding American guide to the *Fachsystem* is Richard Boldrey's *Guide to Operatic Roles & Arias*. In recent years this guide has been heavily relied upon: it has the distinct advantage (for those of us in English speaking countries) of being written in English; more importantly though, it incorporates a greater number of voice-type subdivisions than Kloiber's *Handbuch der Oper*.<sup>88</sup> The extensive lists which Boldrey has assembled are based upon pedagogical concerns, rather than the ever-changing nature of casting trends. Cotton explains that this is "the only way to fulfil the theoretical premise of *Fach*," as well as providing healthy vocal durability.<sup>89</sup>

Boldrey also stresses the importance of acknowledging additional aspects such as historical performance practice, the composer's inconsistencies, the size of theatres and national preferences and differences. The definitions throughout the book are extensive and it is interesting to observe the considerable overlap between various voice types and the operatic roles. However it is disconcerting that the only acknowledgement of the *Zwischenfach* voice type remains in the introduction. Whilst Boldrey absolves himself in the opening pages from not including every single vocal category, the fact that he provides a definition, then fails to list *any* of the roles as *Zwischenfach* (which are listed mostly as *light lyric mezzo-soprano* or *full lyric mezzo-soprano*), calls into question his judgement and the book's general validity and general conclusiveness. This oversight is particularly dubious in light of the increasing prominence and need for further understanding of the *Zwischenfach* voice-type in today's operatic market.

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<sup>88</sup> Cotton. 63.

<sup>89</sup> Cotton. 65.

### Necessity of the *Fachsystem*

When auditioning for an overseas opera company it is crucial to take into account and understand the nuanced thinking of potential employers - the agents, administration, casting directors and the opera companies. It is not enough simply to present oneself as a ‘voice-type,’ for in the operatic market of the twenty-first century, the thinking and the casting is grounded firmly upon the foundation of the *Fachsystem*. In his book *What the Fach?!*, Phillip Shepard, although not a blind devotee of the *Fachsystem*, suggests that it is advantageous for both singers and opera companies. He states that if *Fach* classification did not exist it would be “one hell of a first and last season for you,” because the theatre could theoretically make you sing “Despina, Brünnhilde, Salome, Violetta, Rosina and Blonde – all in the same season and all in repertoire.”<sup>90</sup> He also emphasises the importance of deciding your *Fach* and in which *Fach* the bulk of your repertoire lies before contacting theatres or travelling to Europe for auditions.<sup>91</sup> Consequently, Shepard asks singers and potential auditionees a series of relevant questions such as:

Are you able to sell yourself to agents and theatres in this repertoire...can you maintain stamina and grow while singing this repertoire over many seasons...Do you think someone will pay £60 to watch you perform roles in your *Fach*?<sup>92</sup>

These questions serve to save the singer from unnecessary struggle and anguish, because during the audition process for a salaried role in an opera house the panel will not only be assessing which roles suit a voice, stature and ability, they will also be deciding on which *Fach* the voice in question resides.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Phillip Shepard. *What the Fach?!* (Juneau, Alaska: Philip Shepard Press, 2008). 34.

<sup>91</sup> Shepard. 34.

<sup>92</sup> Shepard. 34.

<sup>93</sup> Legge. 13.

This compartmentalisation of the voice, whilst highly controversial, does have the effect of aiding the opera companies in the arduous task of casting the relatively small array of roles for the vast number of singers which audition.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, if you do not present your voice within the correct *Fach* or sing the appropriate repertoire, you are immediately discounted because the panel will instantly recognise whether or not the quality and timbre of your voice and your vocal and dynamic range can match your chosen aria.<sup>95</sup> They will also doubt your training and judgement. This method of reducing the applicant pool is a necessity for companies to save both time and money.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, Legge argues that in countries such as Germany, where opera has become “so much more a business than a vocation, the audition panel tends to assume that, if you present an aria, you can sing the entire role.”<sup>97</sup> As a result, it is imperative that opera singers are fully aware of the entire operatic role, *and* their ability to meet its vocal demands before presenting an aria from it to the audition panel.<sup>98</sup>

Whilst the *Fachsystem* was originally designed to protect a singer from embarking upon repertoire outside the realm of their particular *Fach*, it can prove problematic because what happens when a voice does not perform precisely according to its predetermined criteria? And so to whose advantage does the *Fachsystem* then work?

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<sup>94</sup> Legge. 5.

<sup>95</sup> Legge. 11.

<sup>96</sup> Cotton. 1.

<sup>97</sup> Legge. 13.

<sup>98</sup> Legge. 8.

### ***Fachsystem* conundrum**

Clearly, the *Fachsystem*, whilst promoted as being beneficial for the singer, works mostly to the advantage of the opera companies. Whilst originally devised to facilitate casting and manage the performance of set ensembles every evening in German-speaking opera houses, Bard Suverkrop reveals that often singers are still asked to cover roles that do not specifically belong to their *Fach*, essentially rendering the system null and void.<sup>99</sup> It is obvious that the *Fachsystem* is a subjective framework, and ought to be treated as more of a guideline rather than definitive structure – especially where the *Zwischenfach* voice is concerned. For, as highlighted by Richard Boldrey:

Like books, voices and roles do not always fit comfortably into just one category. Consequently, some pedagogues and singers dispute the value of voice categories. They argue that voice categories keep them from “crossing the line” and singing whatever their voices are capable of singing. But voice categories are not meant to constrain singers (most singers easily fit into two or even three neighbouring categories). On the contrary, they are meant to guide a voice toward appropriate repertoire, to help guard it going off in several directions at once.<sup>100</sup>

Similarly within her research, Allen reveals Kloiber’s declaration that: ““Fach” boundaries are certainly not fixed...Sometimes they can even take over a large part of the adjacent “Fach.””<sup>101</sup> I find it very revealing that the two leading resources for current casting and voice categorisation acknowledge the fact that their guides are not all inclusive, and I wonder at what point they became appropriated as such. For in today’s operatic world, it is an irrefutable fact that in reality, singers do not like to promote themselves in multiple vocal categories for fear that casting directors may

<sup>99</sup> Bard Suverkrop, ‘The Fach System,’ in < <http://www.ipasource.com/>> ( 1 December 2013).

<sup>100</sup> Boldrey. Chapter: Voice Categories.

<sup>101</sup> Allen. 26.

presuppose they are confused about their voices.<sup>102</sup> This fact has been authenticated in Allen's research by the singers who were interviewed:

When asked about the importance of establishing one's voice type for auditions...an emerging artist...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.<sup>103</sup>

Additionally, there is the issue of a singer's *Fach* designation not always being apparent; in the case of the *Zwischenfach* voice Allen hypothesises "the development of her instrument will be slower, in pedagogical terms, than that of her coloratura or lyric colleagues."<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, Allen highlights Kloiber's recognition of this difficulty, particularly when needing to fit into a box for an audition: "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."<sup>105</sup> Thus the question remains - why is the operatic world intent on appropriating a system, which seeks to standardise classification of an instrument that is perceived subjectively and is subject to constant growth and change?

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<sup>102</sup> Cotton. 65.

<sup>103</sup> Allen. 25.

<sup>104</sup> Allen. 25.

<sup>105</sup> Allen. 26.

### *Die Zwischenfachsängerin*

Despite the increasing prominence of the *Zwischenfach* voice within the operatic world, its definition continues to remain relatively vague and the following responses reveal an inability to pin-point precisely what it means to be labelled as a *Zwischenfach* singer. In its most basic form, a *Zwischenfach* voice describes a voice that lies between vocal categories. Cotton reveals that in America this term refers specifically to a singer who straddles the border of both soprano and mezzo-soprano.<sup>106</sup> Boldrey's description of *Zwischenfach* supports this particular view when he reflects upon the literal meaning of a voice that is a "category between categories" and "cannot be classified precisely in one *Fach* or another."<sup>107</sup> Boldrey does attempt to provide further clarification, though, stating that "it is commonly understood to refer to that shadowland between soprano and mezzo-soprano."<sup>108</sup> Interestingly, Cotton reveals that Kloiber uses the term to "specifically denote a type of dramatic voice" and she explains that in his writing (with the aid of a diagram), he describes the *Zwischenfach* voice-type as merely the dramatic category."<sup>109</sup> Jennifer Allen endeavours to provide further meaning when she describes this voice as unique in its way to remain undefined.<sup>110</sup> She further states that although this ambiguous definition does have inherent disadvantages when attempting to promote oneself within a definitive *Fach*, it does create the opportunity 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."<sup>111</sup> Whilst in theory this may appear to be a logical solution to the problem of fitting the *Zwischen* into the '*Fach*,' in practice it does not bode particularly well for the singer who needs to provide

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<sup>106</sup> Cotton. 62.

<sup>107</sup> Boldrey. Chapter: A Close Look at Each Voice Category.

<sup>108</sup> Boldrey. Chapter: A Close Look at Each Voice Category.

<sup>109</sup> Cotton. 62.

<sup>110</sup> Allen. 22.

<sup>111</sup> Allen. 22.

an audition panel with a tangible category. So what *exactly* does it mean to be labelled as a *Zwischenfach* singer and audition accordingly?

Whilst organising my recital repertoire and endeavouring to think further afield in terms of arias for future auditions, I have pondered this question for much of the year. I have subsequently come to the conclusion that a '*Zwischenfach*' label will mean something different for every singer who is categorised as such, and I think that the singer needs to approach it both creatively and realistically. For the paradox of the *Zwischenfach* singer is that it is vocally viable for them to sing both soprano and mezzo-soprano roles, thus generating the dilemma of choice for both the singer and managements.<sup>112</sup> There is also the additional problem for the singer entering into the post-graduate/young-artist phase of their education or career who considers herself to be a *Zwischenfach*, yet suspects that her voice will not emerge fully into its *Fach* until later in her life. How does she present herself to the artistic community?<sup>113</sup> Whilst established singers may have more freedom in deciding how to market themselves, in the choosing of roles and within the *Fachsystem* as a whole, it is considerably more difficult for the *Zwischenfach* embarking upon an operatic career and it does not help that this voice currently remains elusive within the classical music society.<sup>114</sup> However, if approached intelligently and carefully, it is possible to use this label to one's advantage, for this is a voice whose point of difference is its defining feature.

Unfortunately, extensive research pertaining to the *Zwischenfach* voice-type, their potential roles and music, is difficult to find. Yet there is a certain amount of basic pedagogy surrounding the topic. Richard Miller describes the *Zwischenfachsängerin* as someone who "has a large voice with good command of low range and is most comfortable in dramatic roles that, while requiring relatively high tessitura, evade

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<sup>112</sup> Allen. 25.

<sup>113</sup> Allen. 24.

<sup>114</sup> Allen. 22.

exposure of the very top of the voice for extended periods of time.”<sup>115</sup> From my own experience of singing *Zwischenfach* repertoire and studying roles that closely align to this definition, I can attest that this appears to be a very accurate assessment. Interestingly though, in reference to the German school of thought, in *National Schools of Singing: English, French, German, and Italian Techniques of Singing Revisited*, Miller describes the *Zwischenfach* voice as a “type of soprano” who in the German lyric theatre requires dramatic power, yet retains a quality of lyricism.<sup>116</sup> While the latter part of his description rings true, it is surprising that he has chosen to align this voice-type with that of the soprano – especially considering that the bulk of the *Zwischenfach* repertoire lies within the mezzo-soprano’s tessitura and facility. Further illumination is provided by a European casting director interviewed in Allen’s research, who believes that the criteria for a *Zwischenfach* labelling are a “fairly big voice together with a large ambitus.”<sup>117</sup> He adds that the roles that *Zwischenfach* sings “are often accompanied by heavy orchestration, lots of middle range, so she needs a good technique.”<sup>118</sup> This requirement of dramatic facility is one of the key features belonging to the *Zwischenfach* voice.

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<sup>115</sup> Richard Miller. *Training Soprano Voices* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). 11.

<sup>116</sup> Richard Miller. *National Schools of Singing: English, French, German, and Italian Techniques of Singing Revisited* (United States of America: Scarecrow Press Inc., 1977). 141.

<sup>117</sup> Allen. 52.

<sup>118</sup> Allen. 52.

### Chapter Three: UN-FACHABLE?

As discussed in the previous chapter, the issue of categorisation continues to engender and perpetuate changeable and often contradictory ideas. Additionally, factors such as the variable nature of casting trends and global marketing shifts do not make the process of role assignment any easier. The diversity of opinion that exists really serves to highlight the controversy surrounding a voice-type which by its very definition attempts to reside outside the '*Fach*' and calls into question the viability of whether or not '*Zwischenfach*' as a category is broad enough to encompass the wide range of voices that do not fit the traditional soprano and mezzo-soprano mould. It must be noted that '*Zwischenfach*' is often used as a "stepping stone to higher more dramatic rep or a designation of a voice," and the American casting director interviewed in Allen's research believes that the best time to explore this transition can be during the late 20s or early 30s.<sup>119</sup> The *Fachs* which most commonly develop out of the *Zwischenfach* voice are noted by Jennifer Allen as being the: *Jugendlich-dramatischer Sopran*, the *Dramatischer Sopran*, the *Hochdramatischer Sopran*, and the *Dramatischer Mezzosopran*.<sup>120</sup> Due to the inherent dramatic capacity of the *Zwischenfach* voice-type, it is unsurprising that these *Fächer* reside predominantly on the heavier side of the vocal spectrum.

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<sup>119</sup> Allen. 55.

<sup>120</sup> Allen. 38.

### ***Zwischenfach* versus Lyric Mezzo-soprano**

At this juncture it is imperative to provide a brief statement acknowledging the difference between the *Zwischenfach* voice and that of the lyric mezzo soprano. This delineation will highlight several noteworthy features between vocal categories which have the potential to overlap. On the one hand, according to Richard Boldrey, the light lyric mezzo-soprano is the “lower equivalent to any of the light sopranos” and “usually has a slender, bright voice, one that is able to move quickly and flexibly through coloratura passages.”<sup>121</sup> On the other hand, the full lyric mezzo soprano is the lower equivalent of the full lyric soprano, and whilst she may not have the facility for considerable agility, she will have fullness and warmth.<sup>122</sup> Roles for the former include: Siébel (Gounod, *Faust*), Urbain (Meyerbeer, *Les Huguenots*), Orlofsky (J. Strauss II, *Die Fledermaus*) and Cherubino (Mozart, *Le Nozze di Figaro*); and for the latter: Charlotte (Massenet, *Werther*), Sapho (Gounod, *Sapho*), Romeo (Bellini, *I Capuleti e I Montecchi*) and Sesto (Mozart, *La clemenza di Tito*).<sup>123</sup> Although it is apparent that the lines between particular roles and *Fach* categorisation can possess a certain element of flexibility, the fact remains that the lyric mezzo soprano will not necessarily have the facility or capacity for being able to sing an assortment of repertoire and roles. Neither will they be able to straddle the boundary between the *Fächer* to the extent that the *Zwischenfach* voice is able because their voice will not possess the timbre or vocal weight and fullness to sing the more dramatic repertoire.<sup>124</sup> In contrast to the standard lyric mezzo soprano, the *Zwischenfach*'s point of difference lies in the fact that her voice is able to portray both dramatic soprano roles and some roles which are found

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<sup>121</sup> Boldrey. Chapter: A Close Look at Each Voice Category.

<sup>122</sup> Boldrey. Chapter: A Close Look at Each Voice Category.

<sup>123</sup> Boldrey. Chapter: A Close Look at Each Voice Category.

<sup>124</sup> Boldrey. Chapter: A Close Look at Each Voice Category.

within the domain of the dramatic mezzo-soprano.<sup>125</sup> Whilst I will elaborate upon potential *Zwischenfach* roles later in the chapter, from my experience of singing many of the above listed mezzo-soprano arias, I feel allowances ought to be made for a lyric voice, which, due to the tessitura demands of these roles, is not always going to be enough to both meet *and* sustain their requirements.

Richard Miller importantly highlights that the *Zwischenfach* voice will possess the weight and colour of the dramatic soprano, but will be most comfortable performing within the range of the mezzo-soprano.<sup>126</sup> The subsequent roles which Miller reveals as being most appropriate for the *Zwischenfach* voice include: Amneris (Verdi, *Aïda*), Lady Macbeth (Verdi, *Macbeth*), Kundry (Wagner, *Parsifal*), Ortrud (Wagner, *Lohengrin*), Santuzza (Mascagni, *Cavalleria rusticana*) and, if physically appropriate, Bizet's *Carmen*.<sup>127</sup> However, Miller's list of roles is far from conclusive and a few obvious choices such as Leonore (Beethoven, *Fidelio*) and Der Komponist (R. Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos*) strangely do not feature.

A list provided by Bard Suverkrop on the 'International Phonetic Alphabet Source' website perhaps offers greater insight and clarity into potential roles for the *Zwischenfach* voice type. According to Suverkrop, these roles include: Eboli (Verdi, *Don Carlos*), Dorabella (Mozart, *Così fan tutte*), Leonora (Donizetti, *La Favorita*), Waltraute (Wagner, *Götterdämmerung*), Ortrud (Wagner, *Lohengrin*), Octavian (R. Strauss, *Der Rosenkavalier*), Dalila (Saint-Saëns, *Samson und Dalila*), Fricka (Wagner, *Die Walküre*), Carmen (Bizet, *Carmen*), and Venus (Wagner, *Tannhäuser*).<sup>128</sup> The diversity of the above listed roles exemplifies the '*Zwischenfach*' as a voice that does not fit directly into any vocal category. However it must be noted that not all

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<sup>125</sup> Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). 11.

<sup>126</sup> Miller. 11.

<sup>127</sup> Miller. 11.

<sup>128</sup> Bard Suverkrop, 'The Fach System,' in <<http://www.ipasource.com/>> (1 December 2013).

*Zwischenfach* voice-types will be able to sing every one of these roles – again, it will depend on the individual ability of the singer in question.

Likewise Sandra Cotton attempts to provide delineation between the category of the ‘mezzo-soprano’ and the ‘*Zwischenfach*.’ According to her, apart from “Cherubino and the Strauss roles, the bulk of the trouser roles (composed for female singers) that make up today’s lyric mezzo-soprano’s repertoire are from nineteenth-century France.”<sup>129</sup> This observation appears to be somewhat inconclusive though: we should also include the Mozart roles of Idamante and Sesto, rather than just Cherubino. Additionally, Cotton’s use of the ‘mezzo-soprano’ category ought to be questioned, for considering the tessitura demands of these trouser roles; the fact that Cotton reveals many of these roles as initially premiered by a soprano; and that during the last century they have been aligned to varying soprano *Fächer*, it seems logical for the *Zwischenfach* voice to now sing these roles.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, there is a questionable statement within the Boldrey Guide, evident in the description of pants roles:

Pants or breeches or trouser roles...are associated with lighter voice types, because most pants roles are younger characters. So most pants roles are sung by light lyric sopranos or light lyric mezzo-sopranos, though they can be found among all the female voice categories – except the dramatic soprano.<sup>131</sup>

Whilst on the surface this comment appears to be valid, there is an element of superficiality evident in the striking fact that Boldrey neglects to acknowledge the title role in Beethoven’s *Fidelio*. This role of Leonore (*Fidelio*, Beethoven) is indeed played by a woman disguised as a man, and *is* required to be sung by a dramatic soprano! Obviously, the *Zwischenfach* voice-type does not have the prerogative on exclusively performing the operatic trouser roles, but Boldrey neglects to mention the need for a

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<sup>129</sup> Cotton. 42.

<sup>130</sup> Cotton. 42.

<sup>131</sup> Boldrey. Chapter: A Close Look at Each Voice Category.

more dramatic voice to perform roles such as der Komponist (Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos*) or Octavian (Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*), because a light voice will clearly not have the capacity to meet the demands of Strauss's dense orchestration, as the voice needs projection, and an ability to carry long soaring phrases over a dense orchestration. Furthermore, he appears to contradict himself by revealing that: "In the eighteenth-century *opera seria*, most heroic male roles were written for high voices and were sung normally by male *castrati* and sometimes by women (pants roles)."<sup>132</sup> Surely this acknowledgement of the high tessitura demands reveals the need for a voice type that straddles the boundary of mezzo and soprano to sing these roles? It must also be mentioned that factors such as physical appearance and acting ability in trouser roles are often deemed a pre-requisite for these roles. For the most part these skills are not required by the soprano singer and there are mezzo-sopranos who "do not have the body type or acting/movement skills to portray the trouser roles."<sup>133</sup> Thus there is clearly a niche for the *Zwischenfach* voice and body type.

Intrinsic to the *Zwischenfach* voice, due to its vocal weight, dramatic colour and tessitura capacity, is the potential for singing a substantial portion of the traditional mezzo-soprano or soprano repertoire. Whether or not the casting directors or opera companies desire this remains to be seen.<sup>134</sup> Yet it is necessary to recognise a dearth of standardised *Zwischenfach* repertoire, because the ability, limits and variations of each individual voice means that it is very difficult to pinpoint precise roles or arias that ought to fall in the '*Zwischenfach*' category. Jennifer Allen interviewed a range of subjects (including a European casting director, an American casting director, an

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<sup>132</sup> Boldrey. Chapter: A Close Look at Each Voice Category.

<sup>133</sup> Cotton. 67.

<sup>134</sup> Whilst there are a number of famous *Zwischenfach* singers who are successfully performing in the international operatic arena, it is apparent that it is difficult for a young singer auditioning in countries where the *Fachsystem* continues to be strictly adhered to and who's voice does not directly reside in a particular vocal category.

emerging American mezzo-soprano, a mid-career European mezzo-soprano, an American stage director, an American arts administrator (opera) and an emerging American composer) in her DMA thesis, in an attempt to ascertain which roles and characters they associated with the *Zwischenfach* voice. In the end, her subjects named over twenty potential *Zwischenfach* roles.<sup>135</sup> Examples which were provided include: Stephano (Gounod, *Romeo et Juliet*), Dorabella (Mozart, *Così fan Tutte*), Der Komponist (R. Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos*), Rusalka (Dvorak, *Rusalka*), and Eboli (Verdi, *Don Carlos*).<sup>136</sup>

In order briefly to illustrate just a few examples of the complexities inherent in the *Zwischenfach* voice type, I would like to look at three roles: two of the most often cited *Zwischenfach* roles, one less often referenced. My perspective on all three is based on my own vocal work this year. Sandra Cotton's 'Comparison of *Fach* Listings' chart will prove invaluable in the referencing of Cherubino (Mozart, *Le Nozze di Figaro*), Idamante (Mozart, *Idomeneo*) and Der Komponist (R. Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos*) against the pre-established boundaries which exist in Kloiber's *Handbuch der Oper* and Richard Boldrey's Guide.

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<sup>135</sup> Allen. 27.

<sup>136</sup> Allen. 27, 53& 56.

## **Cherubino**

It is important to begin by looking at the role of Cherubino from Mozart's opera *Le Nozze di Figaro* (1786) because many of the subsequent canonical trouser roles were composed from this prototype.<sup>137</sup> Whilst it is generally sung today by the mezzo-soprano voice, in the original score the role of Cherubino was listed as a soprano. It must be noted that many other female roles written during this time were also listed as 'soprano,' but I will be specifically focusing on Cherubino as an example of the complexities associated with role designation.<sup>138</sup> Currently, the role resides in a few different *Fach* categories. Cotton has devised a chart which details and compares the 1973 and 2003/4 Kloiber listings and the Boldrey Guide, further illustrating the murkiness that can surround certain role assignment. Cotton shows that in the 1973 Kloiber edition, Cherubino was listed a lyric soprano. Following from this, the 2003/4 Kloiber edition added it as not only a lyric soprano role but also as a lyric mezzo role. Within the Boldrey Guide, Cotton explains that an attempt to merge both these voice-type considerations, and factors such as the tessitura sitting around a high F, result in a definition of Cherubino as a light lyric mezzo.<sup>139</sup>

After learning Cherubino's 'Non so più,' I agree with this classification for I have found it a challenge to refrain from singing the aria with the full weight and power of my voice. So although it is a definite possibility for the *Zwischenfach* voice to sing this role, it is not a requirement because the nature of Mozart's writing and orchestration (light strings and wind) and the role itself does not demand a dramatic voice. However I do think it ought to be acknowledged that the tessitura of this role means that it *could* be beneficial for the *Zwischenfach* singer. Indeed, it was a particularly useful exercise, for I learnt to take the pressure off my voice and adopt a different vocal colour from

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<sup>137</sup> Cotton. 32.

<sup>138</sup> Allen. 40.

<sup>139</sup> Cotton. 70.

what I was used to. Therefore it is feasible that the aria (and role) can be valuable for the young voice as yet unable to be fully classified – this is especially true in light of the fact that often a Mozart aria is often required in an audition situation to contrast with the other repertoire that has been provided. Although it may appear ironic for a young, undefined voice to dramatically cross boundaries, I think the most important factor in the equation of an unclassified voice, is to keep it open and free throughout the singer's entire vocal range and refrain from artificially darkening the sound.

### **Idamante**

A Mozart role perhaps more suitable and appropriate for the *Zwischenfach* singer - due to the sustained tessitura demands - is found within *Idomeneo*. It is that of Idamante: yet another trouser role of the eighteenth-century. In accordance with Mozart's tendency to write the tessitura of female roles in the upper *passaggio*, Idamante's main aria: 'Non ho colpa' provides the perfect example. Originally sung by a lyric tenor, Cotton's comparison of *Fach* listings reveals that Kloiber's 2003/4 edition categorises this role as either lyric mezzo or lyric tenor, whilst the Boldrey Guide states that its *Fach* designation belongs to the light lyric mezzo or the full lyric mezzo.<sup>140</sup> Again, there is noticeable discrepancy between the main sources of information pertaining to the *Fachsystem*. However, it is an irrefutable fact that this is a role that requires a voice that can not only sustain singing for a considerable period in the upper *passaggio*, but also possess enough weight and cut to carry over relatively full, string-heavy orchestration. Moreover, this orchestration doubles the vocal part at times during the aria. In many ways, this is a role that defies normal categorisation for it requires a vocal stamina beyond the bounds of the mere *lyric mezzo*.

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<sup>140</sup> Cotton. 71.

As a singer who has been learning ‘Non ho colpa’ for the better part of six months, I have found it to be a challenge and it has taken me considerably longer than expected to work this aria into my voice and onto my body. This challenge is primarily rooted in the above mentioned fact that the tessitura of the aria sits predominantly around a high E to an F. Thus, Margaret and I have spent many lessons devising strategies to eliminate the tension and constriction mainly present in the neck area. Indeed, at one point it became such an issue for me that I would get half-way through the aria and my sternocleidomastoid muscles (SCMs) and jaw would seize up and I would not be able to create any sound at all. This problem was occurring because I was not using my body effectively to support the nature of singing through the upper *passaggio*. Whilst I have found it easy to use the body as a support in considerably more dramatic arias such as Eboli’s ‘O don fatale’ (Verdi, *Don Carlos*) and ‘Sein wir wieder gut,’ (R. Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos*), when I sing Mozart repertoire I do not release the air-flow properly which causes a number of vocal problems. These problems can result in a controlled, manufactured sound and an ineffective recoil breath, and they occurred severely in ‘Non ho colpa,’ because it does not possess the visceral quality inherent in the Verdi or the Strauss. Therefore, I felt the need to ‘hold’ and ‘control’ the sound.

However, I persevered with the aria because ultimately the piece is within my vocal capability and the learning has proved invaluable. Hence, I spent many lessons on a wobble board in an attempt to connect more with my body. This process helped to release off the SCMs and enabled me to ‘anchor’ from the lower back. Additionally, working on aspects such as checking my dynamic level at the end of phrases; breathing in correctly; releasing my throat; engaging the back of my neck and flaring the ribs; and energetically coming off notes have all greatly facilitated in my ability to now sing this

seemingly relentless aria with considerably less constriction. Yet it is important to maintain a distinction between the technical problems that I encountered (consequently inhibiting smooth and easy vocal production), and the fact that a singer may be struggling because the aria is actually unsuitable for the voice. This aria has revealed to me the necessity of correct technique and also the dangerous nature of unilateral categorisation. For whilst a role may be classified in one particular *Fach*, this fact does not necessarily mean that every singer of that category will be able to sing the aria, or ultimately, the role.

### **Der Komponist**

I feel there should be no argument concerning the fact that Strauss' role of Der Komponist, from *Ariadne auf Naxos*, is clearly a *Zwischenfach* role. As it happens, many of the interviewees in Allen's research verify the *Zwischenfach* voice being best suited for Strauss or even *Jugendliche* Wagner roles, because it will possess the weight and colour required for this type of repertoire.<sup>141</sup> Nevertheless, within the two central guides to the *Fachsystem* there is still a considerable amount of variation as to where exactly this role ought to be situated. According to Kloiber 1973 the role was initially classified as a character soprano or a young dramatic soprano; but the 2003/4 version changes the *Fach* designation to dramatic mezzo or young dramatic soprano.<sup>142</sup> In contrast, the Boldrey Guide lists the role as full lyric soprano, spinto soprano or dramatic mezzo.<sup>143</sup> This role is demanding for the singer; in particular, the aria 'Sein wir wieder gut' requires a command of the whole vocal range from a low B flat to a high B flat. Additionally, there are many sustained passages in either the higher or

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<sup>141</sup> Allen. 55.

<sup>142</sup> Cotton. 71.

<sup>143</sup> Cotton. 71.

lower tessitura and the orchestration is heavy (with brass) in all parts of the range.<sup>144</sup> Thus it seems logical to assign it to the *Zwischenfach*.

I have found this aria much easier to learn and ‘put into the voice’ than Mozart’s Idamante or even Cherubino, which is interesting because at first glance Strauss’ notation and orchestration is a little frightening! Whilst it is important to acknowledge that the work Margaret and I have done on my voice since ‘Non ho colpa’ will have made a difference to the way in which I have vocally approached this piece, it is slightly ironic that it has not taken half as many hours to be able to sing this more demanding piece with greater ease. Whether or not this fact has to do with the nature of Mozart’s composing for female voices, or that Strauss has written in such a way so that there *are* brief rest spots, or that I may be a ‘*Zwischenfach*’ - remains to be seen. Yet it is important to note the way in which singing this aria has helped to ‘free’ my voice. In contrast to ‘Non ho colpa,’ I have not really struggled with constriction, SCM tightness or jaw tension in this aria; however I do need to be mindful of this potential issue, especially at points in the aria where the phrasing ascends to an A flat / B flat. In order to sing ‘Sein wir wieder gut,’ I cannot disconnect from my body, for the sound *must* be supported and connected, and if I do not create a well-placed, free moving sound, I will not be heard over the orchestration. Hence in many ways it has forced me to put these necessary elements speedily into effect and practise.

Often the more dramatic arias and roles require a vocal prowess and maturity not yet present in my voice: for example, whilst I may be able to sing ‘O don fatale’ (Verdi, *Don Carlos*), it would be a mistake to sing this in an audition setting for I would not yet be able to sustain the entire role. Hence, it has been refreshing to learn and sing ‘Sein wir wieder gut’ - which is not only appropriate for my current vocal state and age - but

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<sup>144</sup> Cotton. 74.

which, more importantly, serves to reveal the dramatic potential inherent within my voice.

Chapter Four: “I’LL SING THEM ALL!”<sup>145</sup>

For the young singer with dramatic potential who is struggling to situate themselves within the confines of a singular *Fach* category, the possibility of a *Zwischenfach* classification can in many ways provide much needed resolution. Whilst there are distinct advantages to residing within a flexible vocal category, the physiological and psychological implications of switching between the *Fächer* must be explored: it can require a considerable ‘gear change.’ Hence, it is surprising that within the available literature, the impact of this transition upon the singers’ psyche remains largely unarticulated. I experienced the full impact ‘switching between the *Fachs*’ earlier in the year when I played the role of Medora in Verdi’s opera *Il corsaro*. Prior to Medora, the last operatic role I had performed was Orlofsky in J Strauss II’s *Die Fledermaus*. Thus I found it a challenge to go from playing this trouser role to the persona of the ‘damsel in distress.’ In contrast, the *Zwischenfach* singer, Christa Ludwig, had the opposite dilemma: she hated the trouser roles, and preferred to sing and perform roles such as Dorabella (Mozart, *Così fan Tutte*).<sup>146</sup> Although the range and tessitura of Medora were well within my capabilities, the role itself required a completely different mindset. Given how central the issue was for my own preparation and performance of the role, I think it striking that this sort of issue has been ignored in the literature: I believe that this ought to be an important consideration when analysing the implications of *Zwischenfach* voice labelling. Whilst these physiological and psychological issues may remain largely unsubstantiated within the wider field of research, it is apparent – particularly in the case study of Christa Ludwig - that there can sometimes be a limit to a singer’s ability to sustain and continue singing *Zwischenfach* repertoire throughout the course of their career.

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<sup>145</sup> Moore.

<sup>146</sup> Helena Matheopoulos, *Diva: Great Sopranos and Mezzos Discuss their Art* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1991). 282.

### ***Zwischenfach* singers**

In her work on the *Zwischenfach* voice, Jennifer Allen lists a number of prominent opera singers who have had distinguished careers singing both mezzo and soprano roles, and this confirms the necessity of including this label within the *Fachsystem*. These singers, such as Maria Malibran, Waltraud Meier, Grace Bumbry, Joyce DiDonato and Cecilia Bartoli, provide examples of the *Zwischenfach* voice as they move between the traditional and established boundaries of soprano and mezzo.<sup>147</sup> Similarly, in the opening chapter of her recent book, Naomi André details an array of singers including Marilyn Horne, Cecilia Bartoli, Frederica von Stade, Vesselina Kasarova, Jennifer Larmore and Susan Graham, who have sung in both trousers and skirts and straddled the fine line between voice-types.<sup>148</sup> These singers have influenced popular perception of particular roles and akin to the way in which voice classification and the *Fachsystem* have become synonymous, so too has the notion of *Fach* and particular roles and singers.<sup>149</sup>

From listening to recordings, it is apparent that a couple of prominent examples within today's operatic culture are those of Swedish born mezzo-soprano: Anne Sophie von Otter (b.1955) and American mezzo-soprano: Susan Graham (b.1960). Whilst these singers reside in the 'mezzo' category, their physical appearance (both are quite tall), agility and acting skills mean that they have successfully negotiated both male and female operatic roles in a lyric, coloratura, and *Zwischenfach* capacity.<sup>150</sup> Similarly, another American mezzo soprano – Joyce DiDonato (b.1969) - is extremely comfortable in her higher register and having played roles such as Angelina (Rossini, *La Cenerentola*), Dorabella (Mozart, *Così fan tutte*), Elvira (Mozart, *Don Giovanni*) and

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<sup>147</sup> Allen, 28-33.

<sup>148</sup> Naomi André. *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early Nineteenth Century Opera* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2006). 1-15.

<sup>149</sup> Allen. 78.

<sup>150</sup> Allen. 78.

Stephano (Gounod, *Romeo and Juliet*), she provides an excellent example the a lyric *Zwischenfach* voice-type.<sup>151</sup> However, not all singers have negotiated this change so effectively and it is necessary to provide the following case studies detailing Christa Ludwig and Gwyneth Jones' respective navigation of *Zwischenfach* roles. These studies will serve to highlight the very individual way in certain roles work for different *Zwischenfach* voices and illustrate the subsequent failure and success of such an undertaking.

### **Case Study: Christa Ludwig**

A classic case in point of a singer who has successfully managed *Zwischenfach* repertoire and roles *to a certain level* is that of the German-born Christa Ludwig. As a second-generation singer, she was intent on avoiding the same mistake her mother had made by ruining her voice prematurely with the mixing of low mezzo and high soprano parts.<sup>152</sup> Thus in 1946, she made her debut with the Frankfurt State Opera house in the role of Prince Orlofsky from *Die Fledermaus*.<sup>153</sup> By 1952, her mother thought it would be useful for her to master the art of stagecraft, and this led to Ludwig studying the 'bigger' roles under the guidance of conductor Johannes Schüller, from the Berlin State Opera. These roles included: Eboli (Verdi, *Don Carlos*), Carmen, Ortrud (Wagner, *Lohengrin*), Kundry (Wagner, *Parsifal*) and Amneris (Verdi, *Aida*).<sup>154</sup> However, a few years later she was invited to join the Vienna State Opera and the music director, Karl Böhm, anxious about protecting her voice, decided that instead of these demanding Verdian and Wagnerian roles, she would sing the likes of Cherubino, Dorabella and the

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<sup>151</sup> Cotton. 32.

<sup>152</sup> Matheopoulos. 280.

<sup>153</sup> Matheopoulos. 281.

<sup>154</sup> Matheopoulos. 282.

Composer.<sup>155</sup> Throughout the course of the sixties, Ludwig was in great demand and was “asked to sing ‘anything from Octavian to the Marschallin’” (R. Strauss, *Der Rosenkavalier*).<sup>156</sup> Regardless of Ludwig’s other vocal accomplishments, the fact that she had the facility to perform the mezzo-soprano trouser role *and* the true soprano role of the Marschallin from Strauss’ opera reveals the *Zwischenfach* nature of her voice. Furthermore, she went on to sing the soprano title role of Leonore from Beethoven’s *Fidelio*, and this became one of the defining roles of her career. However, Helena Matheopoulos argues in her book: *Diva: Great Sopranos and Mezzos Discuss their Art* that “vocally, it was far from ideal for her.”<sup>157</sup> Interestingly, after a performance of *Fidelio*, a laryngologist examined her chords and found them to be red and swollen, and Ludwig herself acknowledged having to “*construct* the kind of voice that was needed,” which was not her natural voice.<sup>158</sup> Therefore, when observing Ludwig’s career and vocal progression, it becomes apparent that the term of *Zwischenfach* is not as open-ended as it may appear to be. For within its classification, there *can* be a point that the singer, despite their vocal facility for mezzo or soprano repertoire, is unable to go beyond. Thus it is unsurprising that when Ludwig reached this ‘borderline,’ she retreated to the safety of mezzo soprano repertoire and subsequently turned down Wagner’s Brunnhilde and Isolde.

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<sup>155</sup> Matheopoulos. 282.

<sup>156</sup> Matheopoulos. 282.

<sup>157</sup> Matheopoulos. 285.

<sup>158</sup> Matheopoulos. 285.

### Case Study: Dame Gwyneth Jones

This second case study is a particularly unique example not only of a *Zwischenfach* voice, but also of a voice that retained its “vocal power after a twenty-five year career of singing mainly the heavy dramatic repertoire.”<sup>159</sup> British diva, Dame Gwyneth Jones began her career as a mezzo-soprano. Indeed, she was accepted into the Royal College of Music in 1956 as a mezzo and made her operatic debut in Zurich in roles such as Orfeo from Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice* and the Third Lady in Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*.<sup>160</sup> But her voice continued to move upwards and during 1962, after hearing Jones sing some high soprano music, the Music Director of the Zurich Opera declared that she would never sing in the opera house again as a mezzo because she was a soprano.<sup>161</sup> Thus began her transition into soprano repertoire, and Jones subsequently turned down the offer of the roles of Eboli and Amneris (Verdi). However it is interesting to note that during this period she did sing, whilst on tour, the roles of Octavian (R. Strauss) and Lady Macbeth (Verdi). This pairing is glossed over in Matheopoulos’s book, yet it demands recognition, for the ability to execute both these roles in a vocally successful manner is not a small feat, and is particularly characteristic of the *Zwischenfach* voice to be able to do so. In the following years, Jones went on to sing Leonore in *Fidelio* – however in contrast to the vocal manufacturing which Ludwig required for the role, it appears to have been well within the vocal capabilities of Jones’ instrument. She also sang Santuzza in *Cavalleria rusticana* (Mascagni), Puccini’s Turandot, Salome, the Dyer’s Wife in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (R. Strauss), the title role in *Elektra* (R. Strauss), Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier* (R. Strauss) and Wagner’s Brünnhilde and Isolde.

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<sup>159</sup> Matheopoulos. 109.

<sup>160</sup> Matheopoulos. 113.

<sup>161</sup> Matheopoulos. 113.

In many ways, Jones' voice defies standard categorisation. Upon analysis, it is also apparent that she managed the mezzo to soprano transition more successfully than the likes of Christa Ludwig. However I would like to suggest that Jones is the exception rather than the rule, for most singers will not have all three female roles in *Elektra* credited to their name! Finally, it is important to notice that the progression of Jones' voice exemplifies '*Zwischenfach*' as a temporary categorisation. Whilst this is not always the case, and clearly did not work so successfully for Ludwig, this *Fach* can denote a voice that will eventually develop into more dramatic and heavier repertoire. Jones credits this gradual development and secure vocal foundation to her ability to sustain a long career singing demanding repertoire and avoid vocal crisis and argues that "for a dramatic soprano, starting off as a mezzo is not as unusual as it may seem."<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup>Matheopoulos. 113.

**“Singing is not about timbres or category labels, singing is about fascinating acoustical properties like the colors of the human voice which derive from thought and emotion.”<sup>163</sup>**

## CONCLUSION

In undertaking this research I have gained significant critical insight into the *Zwischenfach* voice-type that has, and will continue to have, a powerful impact on my current and future singing. Firstly, I have found it particularly surprising that no accommodation for the *Zwischenfach* voice-type has been made in either the *Handbuch der Oper* or the Boldrey Guide. Its absence really serves to highlight the inconsistencies within classification and a lack of acceptance of the *Zwischenfach* within mainstream categorisation. Secondly, I have discovered that the real issue at stake is not whether the singer in question possesses a *Zwischenfach* voice and how it ‘fits’ within the *Fachsystem* as a whole, but rather that casting directors, opera companies, agents, administration and management need to be willing and prepared to work with a voice that refuses to be constrained and does not reside easily within the existing categories. However, in order for this to eventuate, there needs to be a conscious separation of voice classification and the *Fachsystem*; a higher degree of critical writing examining the *Fachsystem*; circulating awareness pertaining to the limitations of the *Fachsystem*; and the emergence of secondary literature concerning the *Fachsystem*. Until this happens, it appears that analysis and discussion are impeded and will continue to be relegated to the realm of the anecdotal, for proposed arguments cannot properly be verified or substantiated.<sup>164</sup>

Within the operatic world, there will continue to be voices that do not perform precisely according to the guidelines of the *Fachsystem*. However, I think it is apparent

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<sup>163</sup> Thomas Hampson, ‘Voice Categories,’ in <<http://www.cantabile-subito.de/index.html>>, ed. Andrea Suhm-Binder (29 November 2013).

<sup>164</sup> Cotton. 7.

from growing number of internationally acclaimed *Zwischenfach* singers - in particular the likes of Christa Ludwig, Dame Gwyneth Jones, and Jessye Norman (who refused to be classified as either a soprano or a mezzo!), Anne Sophie von Otter, Joyce DiDonato and Susan Graham - that it *is* possible to negotiate a system which does not cater for voices which do not fit within the ‘traditional’ mould. It must be noted though, that whilst *Zwischenfach* is a term which denotes the possibility of the voice developing into a more dramatic *Fach* later in one’s career, as evidenced by Ludwig and Jones, there are many singers who will remain most comfortable spending the duration of the careers within the realm of *Zwischenfach* repertoire.<sup>165</sup> Whilst this voice type does not signify a ‘free-for-all’ regarding role designation, the ultimate choice ought to be made by the individual singer and this will be influenced not only by vocal factors, but also personality, temperament and practical considerations such as marketability and circumstance.<sup>166</sup> Additionally it is inferred within this *Fach* designation that the singer will possess the ability to alter vocal colour, and the aptitude to switch gender where necessary for the successful execution of the assortment of associated roles. *Zwischenfach* is a paradox within a paradigm. However it is a paradigm that if negotiated effectively with the correct guidance and technique, can be one of possibility and success. The distinctive quality of the *Zwischenfach* voice lies in its ability to freely move between soprano and mezzo and as long as there are roles which require this fluidity – there *will* need to be inclusion of this voice within the operatic world. For the inclusion of the *Zwischenfach* voice will undoubtedly provide a company with an infusion of vocal colours and possibility not present in any other vocal category or *Fach* grouping.

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<sup>165</sup> Allen. 38.

<sup>166</sup> Allen. 1.

Throughout the process of inquiry and analysis, it has become apparent to me that the term of ‘*Zwischenfach*’ is not a misnomer, for the broadness of its meaning facilitates the encompassing of a variety of different voices. Thus I have come to the conclusion that to be labelled as a potential *Zwischenfach* voice is indeed exciting. Whilst it may involve chartering relatively undocumented territory, there are very few voice-types that will be able to sing such a diversity of roles, with the added potential of being able to develop into a more dramatic *Fach* later in their career. Thus I intend to continue determining how this ‘label’ can best serve my voice. This process may involve an element of ‘trial and error,’ and it will definitely mean learning a variety of repertoire - whilst keeping the voice as open and free as possible. But eventually the voice will go where it wants to and I plan to follow it and be flexible. Whilst the mixture of soprano and mezzo-soprano roles on my vocal curriculum vitae may be confusing to an audition panel, at the end of the day I do not really think this matters, because fitting within the *Fachsystem* is *not* what singing is essentially about. Instead, to quote Benjamin Britten, one ought to “sing something that really personalises the colour of your voice.”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Benjamin Britten. Taken from: Joan Dornemann with Maria Ciaccia. *Complete Preparation: A Guide to Auditioning for Opera* (New York: Excalibur Publishing, 1992).

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