

The Angel Enigma: Experienced boy singers' perceptual judgements of changing voices

Music Education Research

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Abstract

Between the approximate ages of ten and fifteen, boys undergo a protracted phase of staged voice change that coincides with other changes in secondary sexual characteristics associated with puberty. A number of researchers, particularly John Cooksey in the United States, have described this. Tensions, however, remain between the theoretical model described in the research and the singing practices boys encounter through choral work in the UK. The age of thirteen seems pivotal with regard to the singing range for boys. Cultural and social factors influence this and it is suggested that staged developmental models such as Cooksey's pay inadequate attention to these. This paper reports on the ability of young adolescent boys with good experience of singing to discern differences in vocal timbre and technique in age peers through perceptual tests. It concludes that such boys have surprisingly good discriminatory powers and that more attention should be paid to developing the listening skills of other boys as part of a programme to encourage better understanding of the young male voice.

Key words

Boys, cambiata, changing voices, choristers, Cooksey, role modelling, singing,